



European View

The changing realities of EU defence cooperation

EDITORIAL

- The changing realities of European defence cooperation** 3
Mikuláš Dzurinda

THE CHANGING REALITIES OF EU DEFENCE COOPERATION

- Where does the Compass point? The European Commission's role in the development of EU security and defence policy** 5
Calle Håkansson

- Defence cooperation in artificial intelligence: Bridging the transatlantic gap for a stronger Europe** 13
Edward Hunter Christie

- The EU's mutual defence clause? Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union** 22
Henna Virkkunen

- The EU's chair was missing at the Ukraine table** 27
Jolyon Howorth

- Matching risk assessment and capabilities: Challenges to Central and Eastern European member states** 36
Yordan Bozhilov

- The EU to the rescue? Assessing the geopolitics of the EU's medical stockpile** 48
Andrew Glencross

- The Coordinated Maritime Presences concept and the EU's naval ambitions in the Indo-Pacific** 56
Niklas Nováky

CURRENT AFFAIRS

- European gas price crisis: Is Gazprom responsible?** 66
Vladimir Milov

- European solutions for shadow oligarchic rule in Europe's East: Do they work? The case of Georgia** 74
Salome Samadashvili

- Including grand corruption in the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime: Why it matters** 82
Massimo Gordini, Katarzyna Szczypka and Aslinur İnalcı

The state of American democracy after Trump Constantine Arvanitopoulos	91
Peace in the ground: How land degradation in the Sahel impacts Europe and what the EU can do about it Eero Wahlstedt and Joonas Mikkola	100
SATIRICAL REVIEW	
The <i>Last Supper</i> by Vladimir Putin George Pepios	110
EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES	
Democratisation in EU Foreign Policy: The Cases of Belarus, Turkey and Ukraine Lucie Tungul, Petr Hlaváček, Tereza Soušková and Marek Ženíšek	112
The Transatlantic Perspective on Migration: Attuning Migration Policy to National Politics Henrik Larsen	114
Ambitions Dashed: Why Sino-Russian Economic Cooperation Is Not Working Vladimir Milov	116
Climate Litigation vs. Legislation: Avoiding Excessive Judicial Activism in the EU Anastas Punev	117



The changing realities of European defence cooperation

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 3–4
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221089859
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Mikuláš Dzurinda

At the time of writing, Russia is waging war against Ukraine. This follows weeks of speculation about what Moscow was hoping to achieve with its massive military build-up along the border. The masks have come off, the Kremlin has shown its true colours and people are dying in Ukraine as a result. Europe, the West and the entire international community must support Ukraine and its people in their time of need.

The Kremlin's war in Ukraine has reminded Europeans that peace on the European continent cannot be taken for granted. This is not something that we are discovering now for the first time: the wars of Yugoslav secession in the 1990s, the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 and Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region in 2014 all taught us that war and conflict, regrettably, continue to shape the course of history in Europe.

When the process of European integration first began in the 1950s with the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, it was in response to people's desire to make future wars between European countries impossible. European integration and the EU have been overwhelmingly successful in this—the Union has developed into a community of like-minded countries that share, to a large extent, the same values and principles, and that believe that Europe is far more prosperous and secure if they work together as a Union than individually.

Although European countries considered forming a European Defence Community with a common European army as early as the 1950s, security and defence issues were kept outside the process of European integration for decades due to their sensitivity. It was only in the late 1990s that EU countries began to cooperate on these issues in the framework of the Union, through the EU's European (now Common) Security and Defence Policy. The focus of this policy was initially out-of-area crisis management in regions

Corresponding author:

M. Dzurinda, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 20 Rue du Commerce, 1st floor, B-1000 Brussels.

Email: ev@martenscentre.eu



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

such as the Western Balkans and sub-Saharan Africa, where NATO did not wish to become involved. In more recent years, the focus of EU security and defence cooperation has shifted to joint capability development and research, and to enhancing the Union's own crisis resilience to phenomena such as cyber- and hybrid attacks.

Despite these achievements, the EU has a long way to go before it can call itself a genuine defence union. Russia's war in Ukraine has shown that the EU needs to step up its efforts in the field of security and defence to enhance its resilience to sudden shocks, to become a more credible partner to its closest friends, and to contribute more to transatlantic burden sharing in Europe and elsewhere. We need a Union that is able to protect its citizens and member states, a Union that defends its partners when they are threatened by hostile states and non-state actors, and a Union that is able to act when it is time to do so. The EU must therefore become a true defence union.

This issue of the *European View* focuses on the future of European defence cooperation. The topic of this issue was decided before Russia launched all-out war against Ukraine in February 2022. It was chosen with the aim of providing ideas for and inputs to the various ongoing security- and defence-related reflection processes in both Brussels and other European capitals. Although the EU was already in the process of boosting its security and defence dimension before the war in Ukraine, the hostilities have made doing so even more necessary.

The authors who have contributed to this issue cover different aspects of EU (and European) security and defence cooperation. These include topics such as the growing role of the European Commission in the field of EU security and defence cooperation, the EU's ability to act vis-à-vis the great powers on the world stage, the Union's plans to establish a permanent naval presence in the Indo-Pacific region, and the significance of Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union—the EU's mutual aid and assistance clause. The current affairs section includes articles on other important topics such as Russia's role in the 2021 European gas crisis and the implications of climate change in the Sahel region.

I hope that you enjoy reading this new issue of the *European View* and that it will provide you with some food for thought on how European defence cooperation could and should be developed further in the months and years ahead.

Author biography



Mikuláš Dzurinda is President of the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and former Prime Minister of Slovakia (1998–2006).



Where does the Compass point? The European Commission's role in the development of EU security and defence policy

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 5–12
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221086425
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Calle Håkansson

Abstract

This article outlines some of the major EU security and defence policy initiatives and the role of the European Commission within these. The article focuses especially on those initiatives outlined in the draft document for the EU Strategic Compass that have a bearing both on the Commission's role and on other defence-related initiatives in 2022. The article also discusses the role of technological development and geo-economics in this new era of great-power competition. It concludes by discussing some of the implications of these developments for the political role of the European Commission and for the democratic and political accountability of the Union.

Keywords

EU Strategic Compass, European Commission, EU security and defence, Democratic accountability

Introduction

European Council President Charles Michel has called 2022 'the year of European defence' (Herszenhorn 2021). This is not surprising as the EU is expected to adopt the new (and hopefully ambitious) Strategic Compass for Security and Defence to enhance and make concrete the Union's ambition within the security and defence policy domain. Similarly, the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which takes

Corresponding author:

Calle Håkansson, Department of Global Political Studies, Malmö University & The Swedish Institute of International Affairs (UI), PO Box 27035, Stockholm, SE-102 51, Sweden.
Email: calle.hakansson@mau.se



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

place in the first half of 2022, has put security, defence and ‘European sovereignty’ high on its political agenda (France, EU Presidency 2022). In the spring, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron will also co-chair a European summit on defence to create further impetus for more EU defence integration.

Studies on EU security and defence policy have traditionally revolved around the intergovernmental characteristics of the policy field (see e.g. Bergmann and Müller 2021). However, in the last couple of years the role of the European Commission has been both enhanced and transformed. This article hence argues that the work of the EU’s Strategic Compass and other new initiatives could further strengthen the Commission’s role in EU defence-policy cooperation. However, this development also raises questions about the political role of the Commission, the democratic and political accountability of the Union, and the overall role of the EU in foreign affairs. The article thus concludes that more research and debate is needed on this development.

The European Commission’s new role in defence

The Commission has long nurtured an ambition to become a stronger security and defence-policy actor within the European project (for a longer discussion, see e.g. Håkansson 2021; Csernatori 2021a; Oliveira Martins and Mawdsley 2021; Haroche 2020). And since 2016, the EU—and especially the Commission—has taken a qualitative and quantitative leap in terms of its security and defence-policy cooperation. Under the leadership of the Commission, the EU has, among other things, rolled out a €7.9 billion European Defence Fund (EDF) to incentivise cross-border defence–industrial collaboration, launched a scheme to fund infrastructure projects to enhance military mobility in Europe, strengthened cooperation with NATO (a new EU–NATO declaration is expected in 2022), and established a new Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space (DG DEFIS) within the Commission. Nevertheless, the Commission’s new role in the defence-policy field initially created some intra-institutional tensions with actors such as the European Defence Agency and the European External Action Service (EEAS) (Fiott 2015; Haroche 2020). However, cooperation now seems to have been both improved and enhanced.¹

The EU’s Strategic Compass and new security and defence initiatives in 2022

The draft of the EU Strategic Compass outlines several proposals that have a bearing on the Commission’s role. The overall document gives a bleak picture of the state of affairs in world politics and highlights the unstable neighbourhood on Europe’s doorstep, as well as the increasing geopolitical tensions globally (EEAS 2021). While the draft Strategic Compass outlines a range of divergent and rather ambitious proposals, this article will only focus on the initiatives that have a bearing on the Commission’s competences² (for an analysis of the Compass and other proposals, see e.g. Koenig 2021; Fiott and Lindstrom 2021; Kaim and Kampin 2022). With regard to the defence–industrial

domain, the draft tries to commit the member states to increasing funding for the EDF in the budget period after 2027. This should also be seen in the light of the decreased funding for the EDF at present, as the member states reduced the Commission's proposed €13 billion in the current budget to €7.9 billion (Håkansson 2021, 602).

Moreover, the draft Compass focuses on increasing the coherence between supranational initiatives, such as the EDF, and intergovernmental defence projects, such as Permanent Structured Cooperation and the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence. In 2022 we will also see a new defence package and a roadmap from the Commission on security and defence technologies to enhance research, technological development and innovation (European Commission 2021b). With this defence package we should expect an ambitious outlook from the Commission's side which could strengthen its role in EU security and defence policy. Kaim and Kempin (2022, 5) have noted that over the last couple of years, the Commission has sought 'to shift the focus of European security and defense policy from a policy field dominated by member states to a supranational one.' Likewise, in 2021 the Commission also presented its action plan to create synergies between the civilian, defence and space industries in order to create a more joined-up approach and enhance the EU's innovation power within the field (European Commission 2021a). Consequently, the Commission is seeking both to develop its own role and to create a more coherent and joined-up approach to defence-industrial cooperation. In her 2021 State of the Union address, the Commission president also outlined the idea of a waiver on value-added tax for all European-made military and defence equipment (von der Leyen 2021).

Another strong focus in the Compass is on the EU's ability to respond to different types of hybrid threats. Among others, Hindrén has emphasised that the 'new threat environment puts a lot more pressure on the Union and its decision-making as it encompasses both the Council and the Commission competencies' (2021, 15). He goes on to underline how the Commission has developed a range of 'critically important resilience-building initiatives', and argues that the Strategic Compass process also creates an opportunity to improve the Union's response to hybrid threats (Hindrén 2021, 16).³ The draft Compass consequently outlines a range of proposals connected to ensuring protection against hybrid threats. These include, among others, creating EU Rapid Hybrid Response Teams, strengthening the EU Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox and further developing the EU's Cyber Defence Policy Framework (EEAS 2021).

In 2022 the Commission will also propose a new European Cyber Resilience Act to strengthen the Union's response to cyber-threats (European Commission 2021b). Some authors have suggested that the Commission has used the cybersecurity policy field to strategically enhance its authority in a field that is traditionally an intergovernmental domain (Brandão and Camisão 2021). They argue moreover that more research is needed into how the Commission has 'graduated from being a negligible actor to an influential player' in EU security and defence policy (Brandão and Camisão 2021, 16). Others have suggested that the EU, and especially the Commission, is now moving towards the concept of 'total defence', encompassing areas from societal security to crisis management and defence proper (Engberg 2021).

Another proposal in the Compass is to launch, by 2023, a new EU Space Strategy for security and defence, in which we can expect the Commission's DG DEFIS to take the lead. Furthermore, in regard to intelligence cooperation, the Compass outlines the importance of 'reinforc[ing] the role of the EU Intelligence Centre as [a] single entry point for Member States' Intelligence and Security Services' (EEAS 2021, 13). This was also strongly stressed in von der Leyen's 2021 State of the Union address (von der Leyen 2021).

Geo-economics, trade and technologies

Another new development is the increased usage of geo-economic⁴ tools in today's great-power competition and rivalry (see e.g. discussions in Fjäder et al. 2021; Christiansen 2020). As China is using powerful economic coercion tactics against Lithuania, some member states want to address this dimension of power more clearly in the final version of the Strategic Compass (Brzozowski 2022). In late 2021, the Commission also proposed a new tool to increase the EU's protection from economic coercion by third countries. The tool aims to address the threat of the weaponisation of trade and investment against the EU and its member states (European Commission 2021c). Negotiations on this proposal will now take place among the member states and in the European Parliament, as opinions are still somewhat divided on the subject (Hanke Vela 2021). Nevertheless, this could be seen as a step towards utilising the Union's economic power and providing a more geo-economic European Commission (see also discussions in Hackenbroich and Zerka 2021).

Trade issues and technological development have consequently become deeply embedded in today's geopolitical rivalry (Franke and Torreblanca 2021; Csernatonì 2021b; European Commission 2021d). This is also made clear in the Compass document, which stresses that 'reducing strategic dependencies and enhancing our technological sovereignty is critical if we are to meet the challenges of a more dangerous world' (EEAS 2021, 18). Similarly, the European Commission's work programme for 2022 also outlines vulnerabilities in the supply of semiconductors 'due to high dependency on a very limited number of non-EU suppliers'. Hence, during 2022 the Commission will propose a new European chips act to 'promote a state-of-the-art European chip ecosystem' (European Commission 2021b, 4–5). And we can expect that the Commission will continue to follow this path, as Csernatonì describes: 'the EU, and especially the European Commission, seems to be adopting a hands-on style and a more centralised rationality in governing the innovation and funding of [emerging and disruptive technologies] at the supranational level' (2021b, 161).

Thus, this new era of great-power competition is increasing the overlap between the field of security and defence and other policy areas, such as trade, economics and technological development.

Conclusion

These developments pose the question of whether the European Commission is moving towards becoming a more geopolitical (or geo-economic) actor. And overall, this could

be seen as the Union shifting towards becoming a more interest-based foreign-policy actor. The EU's foreign and security policy can hence be seen as adapting to the new reality in world politics (see also discussions in Rieker and Riddervold 2021). Nevertheless, there is a risk of over-emphasising this development, as the Union (and the Commission) now needs to 'walk the talk'. There is also a risk that the Compass and the security and defence ambitions of the EU and the Commission could expand the classic 'capability–expectations gap' (Hill 1993; for a critical view of the Compass process, see Tallis 2022).

The greater role of the Commission within these fields also gives rise to questions about the democratic and political accountability of the Union. Moreover, it calls into question the role of both the European and national parliaments in the oversight of these new initiatives and competences (Csernaton and Laci 2020; Rosén and Raube 2018; Herranz-Surrallés 2019; Csernaton and Reykers 2021). Furthermore, scholarly debate on the Commission's political role has also expanded in recent years. While some have argued that the political role of the European Commission is in decline (e.g. Bickerton et al. 2015), others have argued that the Commission has both become more presidential (Kassim et al. 2017; Bürgin 2018) and expanded its political role in other ways (Nugent and Rhinard 2016; 2019; Peterson 2017; Becker et al. 2016). Others have also suggested that the 'new European Council–dominated crisis governance paradoxically [has] strengthened the role of EU institutions' (Beach and Smeets 2020; see also discussions in Bauer and Becker 2014; Niemann and Ioannou 2015). The research agenda should hence continue to focus on what these new developments will mean for the democratic and political accountability of the Union, the political role of the European Commission and the overall (geopolitical) role of the EU.

Notes

1. Interviews conducted with officials from the European Commission, the EEAS and the European Defence Agency in 2020 and 2021.
2. The Commission's competences are mainly connected to defence–industrial cooperation due to the EU treaties. However, the Commission has also, over time, expanded its role, for instance to cover cybersecurity issues. See Håkansson (2021), especially p. 593 for a discussion of the Commission's competences.
3. Several European Commission officials have also underlined how the Commission could and might want to be more involved in the process of responding to hybrid threats (interviews conducted with officials from DG DEFIS/the European Commission in Brussels in 2020).
4. Geo-economics can be defined as 'the use of economic instruments to promote and defend national interests, and to produce beneficial geopolitical results; and the effects of other nations' economic actions on a country's geopolitical goals' (Blackwill and Harris 2016, 20).

References

- Bauer, M. W., & Becker, S. (2014). The unexpected winner of the crisis: The European Commission's strengthened role in economic governance. *Journal of European Integration*, 36(3), 213–29.
- Beach, D., & Smeets, S. (2020). New institutionalist leadership – How the new European Council–dominated crisis governance paradoxically strengthened the role of EU institutions. *Journal of European Integration*, 42(6), 837–54.

- Becker, S., Bauer, M. W., Connolly, S., & Kassim, H. (2016). The Commission: Boxed in and constrained, but still an engine of integration. *West European Politics*, 39(5), 1011–31.
- Bergmann, J., & Müller, P. (2021). Failing forward in the EU's common security and defense policy: The integration of EU crisis management. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(10), 1669–87.
- Bickerton, C., Hodson, D., & Puetter, U. (2015). *The new intergovernmentalism: States and supranational actors in the post-Maastricht era*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blackwill, R. D., & Harris, J. (2016). *War by other means: Geoeconomics and statecraft* (1st edn.). Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- Brandão, A.-P., & Camisão, I. (2021). Playing the market card: The Commission's strategy to shape EU cybersecurity policy. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*. doi:10.1111/jcms.13158.
- Brzozowski, A. (2022). Stronger support for Eastern partners finds way into amended EU military strategy proposal. *Euractiv*, 13 January. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/stronger-support-for-eastern-partners-finds-way-into-amended-eu-military-strategy-proposal/>. Accessed 13 January 2022.
- Bürgin, A. (2018). Intra- and inter-institutional leadership of the European Commission president: An assessment of Juncker's organizational reforms. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 56(4), 837–53.
- Christiansen, T. (2020). The EU's new normal: Consolidating European integration in an era of populism and geo-economics. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 58(S1), 13–27.
- Csernaton, R. (2021a). *The EU's defense ambitions: Understanding the emergence of a European defense technological and industrial complex*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Brussels.
- Csernaton, R. (2021b). The technology challenge in the transatlantic relationship. *European View*, 20(2), 157–65.
- Csernaton, R., & Lațici, T. (2020). Empowering the European Parliament: Toward more accountability on security and defense. *Carnegie Europe*, 20 July. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/07/20/empowering-european-parliament-toward-more-accountability-on-security-and-defense-pub-82309>. Accessed 3 February 2022.
- Csernaton, R., & Reykers, Y. (2021). The role of national parliaments in EU defense. *Carnegie Europe*, 20 December. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2021/12/20/role-of-national-parliaments-in-eu-defense-pub-85996>. Accessed 3 February 2022.
- EEAS. (2021). *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security*. EEAS (2021) 1169, 9 November.
- Engberg, K. (2021). *A European defence union by 2025? Work in progress*. Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies. Stockholm.
- European Commission. (2021a). *Action plan on synergies between civil, defence, and space industries*. Communication, COM (2021) 70 final, 22 February. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/action_plan_on_synergies_en.pdf. Accessed 13 January 2022.
- European Commission. (2021b). *Commission work programme 2022 – Making Europe stronger together*. Communication, COM (2021) 645 final, 19 November. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/cwp2022_en.pdf. Accessed 13 January 2022.
- European Commission. (2021c). Proposal for a Regulation on the protection of the Union and its Member States from economic coercion by third countries. COM (2021) 775 final, 8 December. https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2021/december/tradoc_159958.pdf. Accessed 24 January 2022.

- European Commission. (2021d). *Trade policy review – An open, sustainable and assertive trade policy*. Communication, COM (2021) 66 final, 18 February. https://trade.ec.europa.eu/doclib/docs/2021/february/tradoc_159438.pdf. Accessed 16 January 2022.
- Fiott, D. (2015). The European Commission and the European Defence Agency: A case of rivalry? *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 53(3), 542–57.
- Fiott, D., & Lindstrom, G. (2021). *Strategic Compass: New bearings for EU security and defence?* EU Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper no. 171. Paris.
- Fjäder, C., Helwig, N., & Wigell, M. (2021). *Recognizing ‘geoeconomic risk’: Rethinking corporate risk management for the era of great-power competition*. Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Briefing Paper no. 314. Helsinki.
- France, & EU Presidency. (2022). *Recovery, strength and a sense of belonging: Programme for the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union*. https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/media/qh4cg0qg/en_programme-pfue-v1-2.pdf. Accessed 12 January 2022.
- Franke, U., & Torreblanca, J. (2021). Geo-tech politics: Why technology shapes European power. *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 15 July. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/geo-tech-politics-why-technology-shapes-european-power/>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- Hackenbroich, J., & Zerka, P. (2021). Measured response: How to design a European instrument against economic coercion. *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 23 June. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/measured-response-how-to-design-a-european-instrument-against-economic-coercion/>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- Håkansson, C. (2021). The European Commission’s new role in EU security and defence cooperation: The case of the European Defence Fund. *European Security*, 30(4), 589–608.
- Hanke Vela, J. (2021). Brussels playbook: Scoop: Europe forges sanctions hammer — Weber on Parliament presidency — Pope slams EU wall. *Politico*, 6 December. <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/brussels-playbook/scoop-europe-forges-sanctions-hammer-weber-on-parliament-presidency-pope-slams-eu-wall/>. Accessed 17 January 2022.
- Haroche, P. (2020). Supranationalism strikes back: A neofunctionalist account of the European Defence Fund. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 27(6), 853–72.
- Herranz-Surrallés, A. (2019). Paradoxes of parliamentarization in European security and defence: When politicization and integration undercut parliamentary capital. *Journal of European Integration*, 41(1), 29–45.
- Herszenhorn, D. (2021). Charles Michel declares 2022 ‘year of European defense’. *Politico*, 2 October. <https://www.politico.eu/article/charles-michel-declares-2022-year-of-european-defense/>. Accessed 12 January 2022.
- Hill, C. (1993). The capability–expectations gap or conceptualising Europe’s international role. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 31(3), 305–28.
- Hindrén, R. (2021). *Calibrating the compass: Hybrid threats and the EU’s Strategic Compass*. Hybrid CoE, Working Paper no. 12. Helsinki.
- Kaim, M., & Kempin, R. (2022). Compass or wind chime? An analysis of the draft ‘Strategic Compass’ of the EU. *SWP Comment* no. 3. Berlin.
- Kassim, H., Connolly, S., Dehousse, R., Rozenberg, O., & Bendjaballah, S. (2017). Managing the house: The presidency, agenda control and policy activism in the European Commission. *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(5), 653–74.
- Koenig, N. (2021). *From Strategic Compass to common course: Key deliverables and implementation paths*. Jacques Delors Centre. Berlin.
- Martins, B. O., & Mawdsley, J. (2021). Sociotechnical imaginaries of EU defence: The past and the future in the European Defence Fund. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 59(6), 1458–74.

- Niemann, A., & Ioannou, D. (2015). European economic integration in times of crisis: A case of neofunctionalism? *Journal of European Public Policy*, 22(2), 196–218.
- Nugent, N., & Rhinard, M. (2016). Is the European Commission *really* in decline? *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 54(4), 1199–1215.
- Nugent, N., & Rhinard, M. (2019). The ‘political’ roles of the European Commission. *Journal of European Integration*, 41(2), 203–20.
- Peterson, J. (2017). Juncker’s political European Commission and an EU in crisis. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 55(2), 349–67.
- Rieker, P., & Riddervold, M. (2021). Not so unique after all? Urgency and norms in EU foreign and security policy. *Journal of European Integration*. doi:10.1080/07036337.2021.1977293.
- Rosén, G., & Raube, K. (2018). Influence beyond formal powers: The parliamentarisation of European Union security policy. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 20(1), 69–83.
- Tallis, B. (2022). Why Europe’s Strategic Compass points to trouble. *Internationale politik quarterly*, 14 January. <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/why-europes-strategic-compass-points-trouble>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- von der Leyen, U. (2021). 2021 State of the Union address by President von der Leyen. Strasbourg, 15 September 2021.

Author biography



Calle Håkansson is an associate fellow at the Swedish Institute of International Affairs’ Europe Programme and a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Global Political Studies, Malmö University. Calle’s research has previously been published by, among others, *European Security*, the European Council on Foreign Relations, the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies and the European Leadership Network.



Defence cooperation in artificial intelligence: Bridging the transatlantic gap for a stronger Europe

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 13–21
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221089372
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Edward Hunter Christie

Abstract

This article provides a brief overview of European and transatlantic defence cooperation in the area of artificial intelligence. As states race forward to achieve superiority in artificial intelligence, including its military applications, NATO allies and partner nations on both sides of the Atlantic have a strong incentive to cooperate closely and ensure the collective West can maintain its technological edge. However, large gaps remain between the US and the EU on certain key indicators. To ensure greater European performance and relevance, it is desirable to focus on two strategic priorities: investment volumes, both public and private, which need to be significantly increased; and the full use of collaborative mechanisms involving the US.

Keywords

Transatlantic relationship, Defence cooperation, Artificial intelligence, NATO, EU

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI) is the ability of machines to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence—for example, recognising patterns, learning from experience, drawing conclusions, making predictions or taking action—whether digitally or as the smart software behind autonomous physical systems (Reding and Eaton 2020, 14).

The range of potential military applications is at least as vast as the range of tasks that require human cognition, for example analysing and classifying visual data, organising logistics, operating support vehicles, or tracking and engaging hostile targets (Christie

Corresponding author:

E. H. Christie, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Arkadiankatu 23 B, Helsinki 00100, Finland.
Emails: edward.hunter.christie@fiiafellow.fi; edward.hunter.christie@gmail.com



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

2021b, 84). States are racing to achieve superiority in the AI domain (Lin-Greenberg 2020). Furthermore, like other digital technologies, AI diffuses rapidly and cheaply across areas of human activity and across borders. Nevertheless, as with other technological transformations, states with greater resources and levels of effort, and better policies, will reap the benefits of technology adoption more rapidly than others.

In an alliance context, matters pertaining to cooperation and interoperability take centre stage. The good news is that Europeans are not starting from scratch. European states that are members of NATO can rely on decades of experience with the Alliance's mechanisms of consultation and collaboration. In addition, European states that are members of the EU can pursue collaborative activities through the European Defence Agency (EDA). Furthermore, EU funding is available through the European Defence Fund for defence research and capability-development activities.

At NATO the key processes address, most notably, the areas of defence research, military transformation, capability development, military–technical standardisation, and defence planning and capability targets. For these areas of work, formal consultative mechanisms—committees in which each Ally has a voice—include the Science and Technology Board, the Military Committee, the Conference of National Armaments Directors, the NATO Standardisation Board, and the Defence Policy and Planning Committee. Each of these committees relies on support staffs and structures. Of particular interest when considering AI are the Science and Technology Organisation, which has several facilities and is led by the Office of the Chief Scientist at NATO Headquarters; and, Allied Command Transformation. The latter, including its Innovation Hub, plays a particularly central role in driving innovation and force transformation for the Alliance. In addition, two staff units created in 2019 are of particular importance, namely the Innovation Unit and the Data Policy Unit, both of which are within the Emerging Security Challenges Division of the NATO International Staff. The Innovation Unit provides thought leadership and initiatives to accelerate technology adoption, while the Data Policy Unit provides policy thought leadership on how to treat data as a strategic resource. The Innovation Unit designs new initiatives for the promotion and financing of defence-related innovation. A notable achievement in this area was the creation of the NATO Innovation Fund (*NATO* 2021).

In the EU context, the EDA plays a central role in several areas of work. Among other activities, the EDA supports defence research cooperation, defence standardisation and pooled procurement programmes, while also contributing to the EU's Capability Development Plan and Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (Fiott 2018, 287). Most of the EDA's functions are broadly analogous to ones that exist at NATO. Of particular interest is the intention to create a new Defence Innovation Hub within the EDA, as announced in the EU's November 2021 draft Strategic Compass (European External Action Service 2021, 23).

Before proceeding, it is worth spelling out the extent to which European security is dependent on NATO and in particular on the US. Of the EU's 27 member states, 21 are members of NATO. These countries account for about 93% of the population¹ of the EU.

Within NATO, those Allies that are also EU members only account for about 20% of total defence expenditure across the Alliance, while the US alone accounts for about 70% of the same total.² Beyond these aggregate indicators, it is furthermore the case that the US is considerably ahead of the EU in terms of practical adoption of AI. For illustration, in 2020 US private-sector investment in AI was around \$23.6 billion, but was only \$2 billion in the EU, implying a ratio of 12 to 1 in favour of the US (Zhang et al. 2021, 96). Scientific output indicators offer a more nuanced picture. In 2019, the EU accounted for 16.4% of the world's peer-reviewed AI publications, ahead of the US with 14.6%, while China occupied the top spot with 22.4% (Zhang et al. 2021, 20). On the other hand, if one measures research output in terms of publications on the Arxiv database, the US is ahead of the EU (Zhang et al. 2021, 33) by a ratio of almost two to one, which is nonetheless much less than the large gap in private investment mentioned above. That the EU performs similarly to the US in terms of scientific research, but far less well in terms of investment and commercialisation of new digital technologies, is an old problem which has proven very difficult to address, whether at national or EU level (Baroudy et al. 2020).

In the following sections, I offer reflections on three challenge areas for European and Allied defence institutions: interoperability challenges, international security challenges and investment challenges. These three challenges are effectively interdependent. While interoperability is a permanent goal in an alliance context, be it NATO or the EU, it is particularly salient in cases of rapid technological change, such as with AI, as there is a need for a higher tempo across areas of activity. Heightened international security challenges likewise increase the need for urgency to ensure that Western nations do not fall behind potential adversaries. Investment, in turn, is the engine for rapid change, enabling the dynamic adoption of new technologies, relevant capability-development activities and other adaptations along the value chain of military activities. Overall, my central argument is that the confluence of rapid technological change and heightened international security challenges requires a higher pace of change and adaptation that can only succeed if serious investments are made on both sides of the Atlantic.

Interoperability challenges

Interoperability can be defined as ‘the ability of systems, units or forces to provide services to, and accept services from other systems, units or forces and the use the services so exchanged to enable them to operate effectively together’ (Dufour 2018, 1).

The first general challenge to interoperability is the overall gap between the US and Europe in terms of total defence investment, as well as in terms of civilian technological attainment with respect to AI and related technologies. There is no single solution to this problem, which is much broader in scope than traditional military-technical standards, such as those pursued in the NATO context through existing mechanisms. For this broad challenge, overall policy decisions relating to national investment choices and technology policy coordination between the two sides of the Atlantic are of particular importance. Further discussion of this follows in the sections on investment challenges and international security challenges.

A second challenge to interoperability is that, as far as digital technologies are concerned, the civilian sector of the economy, on both sides of the Atlantic, is more advanced, more dynamic and also not especially oriented towards meeting military needs. For decades, the military sector has represented only a very small share of the total sales volume of the computing and semiconductor industries. The same pattern is repeating itself currently with AI. This stands in great contrast to narrower dual-use technologies, for example aerospace, where the military sector remains inherently important. With digital technologies, defence institutions are under much more pressure to either adapt to civilian industry products and standards or to pay a significant premium to suppliers to secure military-grade equipment and software.

A third challenge to interoperability lies in how AI is implemented in practice. To set up a bespoke machine-learning algorithm in a given data environment, best practice in the software industry is to pursue some variant of ‘agile’ development. This involves a very different product-development cycle, essentially proceeding with multiple rapid iterations of an imperfect product that is released in preliminary versions and later revised—like software products released in various ‘beta versions’—with upgrades developed over time. This contrasts greatly with the traditional production of major military platforms, which puts a premium on strict quality control and compliance with requirements at every development step—an approach referred to in the software industry as ‘waterfall’ development (Christie 2021b, 87). Agile product development may pose challenges to interoperability. Unless very tight standards are applied, there is a considerable risk of divergences in how different national institutions go about solving a particular AI or data analytics problem.

With large traditional military platforms there are long time frames during which states can take coordination steps, either by purchasing the same platforms, or by building consensus in terms of requirements and standards. However, when a comparatively small team works dynamically to generate an algorithmic solution to a particular problem in a matter of weeks or months, traditional coordination through existing consultation mechanisms may pose risks to the speed advantage inherent to agile development. Conversely, once a solution has been developed, its adoption in somewhat different environments may be challenging for a range of technical reasons. None of these issues is insurmountable, but they do pose, in a new light, classical trade-offs between the benefits of inventiveness and dynamism, on the one hand, and those of imposing constraints through standards and other harmonising measures to ensure that new products can be broadly used and shared on the other. In the case of AI, a typical observation is that there are many excellent prototypes and pilot projects in numerous defence institutions, but there are also serious outstanding challenges in terms of scaling up to enterprise-wide solutions, let alone Alliance-wide solutions.

Finally, the question of ethical AI—or responsible AI—generates considerable attention on the part of governments and civil society. In response, NATO sought to establish a consensus on certain essential principles, referred to as Principles of Responsible Use, which build on emerging national commitments. These principles were endorsed by Allied governments in October 2021 (Stanley-Lockman and Christie 2021).

International security challenges

Both EU nations and the US are exposed to the same global environment and to similar strategic concerns, at the confluence of rapid technological change and global power shifts. Starting from around 2018, policy discourse in the US became particularly focused on fears of being overtaken by China technologically and militarily. A good illustration of these fears is a 2020 statement by the Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, who accused the Chinese government of ‘fighting a generational fight to surpass our country in economic and technological leadership’ and of ‘taking an all-tools and all-sectors approach . . . that demands our own all-tools and all-sectors approach in response’ (Wray 2020).

For military AI, China poses the greatest challenge to Western nations (Kania 2019). However, Russia is also actively pursuing such capabilities (Zysk 2021; Engvall 2021), including through espionage, for example against the Netherlands (AIVD 2020) and France (Follorou 2021).

Nations on both sides of the Atlantic have recognised the rising challenge of Chinese and Russian government-sponsored industrial espionage aimed at the illegitimate acquisition of cutting-edge Western technologies. And both the US and the EU have adopted strengthened legislation in several key areas, including on the protection of trade secrets, on export controls for dual-use items and on the screening of foreign direct investment (Christie 2021a). Another relevant area of work is measures to better protect the university and research sector from espionage. A new toolkit of recommendations now exists at EU level (European Commission 2022).

Investment challenges

As noted in the introduction, there is a significant gap between overall US and European defence spending levels. This general pattern also holds for defence research and development spending. In 2020, EU spending in this area amounted to €8 billion (EDA 2021). For the US, with caveats as to comparability, expenditure for ‘research, development, test and evaluation’ totalled approximately €90 billion³ in the 2021 fiscal year (from October 2020 to September 2021), or about 10 times more.

Investment challenges go beyond issues of scale. The US also has greater experience in the setting up and operation of structures to promote both military and dual-use innovation. While the best-known institution is the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, other US government structures are also relevant in discussions on fostering innovation in AI for military applications. A much-discussed example is In-Q-Tel, which was originally set up as the state venture-capital arm of the Central Intelligence Agency. To illustrate the influence of the In-Q-Tel example, one may note that both its current Chief Executive Officer, Chris Darby, and one of its former Chief Executive Officers, Gilman Louie, served among the 15 commissioners of the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence.⁴ This was a temporarily created expert commission mandated

by the US Congress to provide policy recommendations for a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach for US AI policy.⁵

With In-Q-Tel, the idea is to learn from private-sector practices in the area of venture-capital investment and repurpose them for state needs and more patient time horizons. A supported company should pursue product development strategies aimed at serving both civilian markets and government needs. In this way, rather than effectively taking over a commercial company and limiting its growth potential to future government contracts alone, the government body encourages an intermediate trajectory made up of mixed revenue streams, in the hope that this will generate greater returns to scale and higher efficiency thanks to the disciplining effect of private-sector competition. Conversely, the advantage of this approach as compared to not intervening at all is that the commercial company will integrate current and likely future government needs into its product and business-development strategy, rather than ignoring them and finding itself, at a later date, unable to supply the government sector according to the latter's requirements.

A related issue which falls between what can be achieved with new investment instruments and new protections that can be assured through the screening of foreign direct investment is the provision of investment from trusted private investors to the technology sector. Certain technology companies that are not part of the traditional defence industry may be developing dual-use products that are of potential interest to the defence sector while having limited awareness of national security concerns. This may make them vulnerable targets for both licit and illicit attempts to acquire their technologies on the part of foreign state actors. At the same time, their business development needs may lead them to seek investment from any potential source, thus exposing them to potential risks. To respond to this challenge, the US Department of Defense has launched a scheme called the Trusted Capital Marketplace (US Department of Defense 2021a).

Building on these considerations, the NATO Innovation Unit has developed two new instruments for Allied use which were announced to the public in October 2021 (NATO 2021a; 2021b). Both instruments aim to foster technological innovation with a deliberate focus on dual-use applications and on enterprises with mixed (potential) revenue streams. The first instrument is the Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA), which is a NATO instrument, that is, it involves the participation of all 30 NATO Allies. The second instrument is the NATO Innovation Fund, which in NATO terminology is a 'multinational' instrument, namely one that Allies freely opt into.

DIANA will aim to accelerate the adoption of dual-use technological solutions through several interlocking components.⁶ First, it will develop a network of national organisations, in particular test centres and innovation accelerators. Second, it will competitively select private-sector innovators and allow them to use national organisations in the network to interface with military end users and military capability-development specialists. Third, it is envisaged that DIANA will provide mentorship and education services for private innovators to familiarise them with the opportunities and responsibilities inherent to the defence and security sector. Fourth, DIANA will develop a database of trusted financial investors from Allied nations and support matchmaking between investors and innovators. Fifth and

finally, DIANA will also provide expert advice on defence and security innovation to all relevant stakeholders, including private-sector and academic entities.

Regarding the NATO Innovation Fund, 17 Allies had opted into the Fund as of the date of its announcement in October 2021. The participating Allies will inject up to €1 billion into Allied innovation ecosystems over the next 15 years. The Fund aims to attract additional private investments due to the de-risking effect, both financial and technological, thanks to state co-funding and diligence and screening efforts. The funds are intended to be used for long-term support of ‘deep tech’ innovative companies, that is, for advanced research into AI, quantum and related technologies that may have both military and civilian applications. Due diligence and security screening practices will aim to ensure that both private investors and fund recipients are trusted entities.

Conclusions

Much has already been achieved in terms of new structures, new initiatives and new policy developments to support the collaborative adoption of AI among NATO Allies and EU member states. In addition to pre-existing structures and mechanisms at both the NATO and EU levels, which have ensured that nations are not starting from scratch, national defence institutions are already able to refer to common policy commitments and to options, whether through NATO or the EDA, for research or capability-development activities. At the same time, ensuring a competitive edge in AI is a truly whole-of-government effort which requires considerable cross-over between the military and civilian realms.

Large gaps remain between the US and the EU on certain key indicators. At the same time, the gaps pertaining to research are far smaller. To ensure greater European performance and relevance in AI in general, and its defence applications in particular, it seems desirable to focus on two strategic priorities: investment volumes, both public and private, which need to be significantly increased; and the full use of collaborative mechanisms involving the US.

To that end, it would be beneficial for nations on both sides of the Atlantic to ensure that a clear and common vision is set out in forthcoming strategic documents, most notably the EU’s Strategic Compass and NATO’s new Strategic Concept. This should include clear political commitments to increasing investment, both in general and in instruments for promoting collaborative innovation. There are opportunities for ‘more Europe’ through the EDA and the European Defence Fund. But while pursuing those avenues, European capitals should prioritise efforts that complement and enhance transatlantic approaches, in recognition of the reality that the US remains the indispensable ally for Europe’s security.

Notes

1. Own calculations based on Eurostat population data.
2. Own calculations based on NATO defence expenditure data.
3. As reported in May 2021, the request for the 2022 US fiscal year was ‘\$112 billion, which is a 5.1% increase over fiscal 2021’ (US Department of Defense 2021b). This implies a level of

\$106.5 billion for the 2021 fiscal year. Applying the average exchange rate for 2021, which was 1.1827, yields €90.1 billion.

4. See National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence (n. d.).
5. The author of the present article served as the liaison between the NATO Innovation Unit and the Commission's staff in 2020.
6. The description of the intended characteristics of DIANA is based on interviews with serving NATO Innovation Unit staff.

References

- AIVD. (2020). AIVD rolt spionagenetwerk op in Nederland; twee Russische inlichtingenofficieren moeten het land verlaten [AIVD rolls up spy network in the Netherlands General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD)]. 10 December. <https://www.aivd.nl/actueel/nieuws/2020/12/10/aivd-rolt-spionagenetwerk-op-in-nederland-twee-russische-inlichtingenofficieren-moeten-het-land-verlaten>. Accessed 17 February 2022.
- Baroudy, K., Janmark, J., Satyavarapu, A., Strålin, T., & Ziemke, Z. (2020). *Europe's start-up ecosystem: Heating up, but still facing challenges*. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/technology-media-and-telecommunications/our-insights/europes-start-up-ecosystem-heating-up-but-still-facing-challenges>. Accessed 5 February 2022.
- Christie, E. H. (2021a). 'Economics and technology: Emerging new threats'. Remarks delivered at the Prague Security Studies Institute, Prague, 9 November. *AI Policy Blog*. <https://www.aipolicyconsulting.com/economics-and-technology-new-threats>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Christie, E. H. (2021b). The NATO Alliance and the challenges of artificial intelligence adoption. In S. Lucarelli, A. Marrone & F. N. Moro (eds.), *NATO decision-making in the age of big data and artificial intelligence* (pp. 84–93). Brussels: NATO. <https://www.iai.it/en/publicazioni/nato-decision-making-age-big-data-and-artificial-intelligence>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Dufour, M. (2018). *Will artificial intelligence challenge NATO interoperability?* NATO Defence College, Policy Brief no. 6. December. <https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1239>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- EDA. (2021). *Defence data 2019–2020: Key findings and analysis*. Brussels. <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/brochures/eda—defence-data-report-2019-2020.pdf>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Engvall, J. (2021). *Russia's military R&D infrastructure: A primer*. Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI). <https://www.foi.se/report-summary?reportNo=FOI-R—5124—SE>. Accessed 5 February 2022.
- European Commission. (2022). *Tackling R&I foreign interference*. Staff Working Document. <https://op.europa.eu/s/vR4a>. Accessed 5 February 2022.
- European External Action Service. (2021). *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – For a European Union that protects its citizens, values and interests and contributes to international peace and security*. Working Document, EEAS (2021) 1169, 9 November. <https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/euobs-media/326b61261ab995993ddb7581e47aa4f3.pdf>. Accessed 12 February 2022.
- Fiott, D. (2018). EU–NATO cooperation: The case of defense R&D. In N. Karampekios, I. Oikonomou & E. G. Carayannis (eds). *The emergence of EU defense research policy* (pp. 281–97). Cham: Springer.
- Follorou, J. (2021). La France, comme l'Europe, subit les assauts de l'espionnage russe [France, like Europe, endures Russian espionage attacks]. *Le Monde*, 13 April. https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2021/04/13/la-france-comme-l-europe-subit-les-assauts-de-l-espionnage-russe_6076625_3224.html. Accessed 17 February 2022.

- Kania, E. B. (2019). Chinese military innovation in the AI revolution. *The RUSI Journal*, 164(5–6), 26–34.
- Lin-Greenberg, E. (2020). Allies and artificial intelligence: Obstacles to operations and decision making. *Texas National Security Review*, 3(2), 56–76. <https://tnsr.org/2020/03/allies-and-artificial-intelligence-obstacles-to-operations-and-decision-making/>. Accessed 12 February 2022.
- NATO. (2021). NATO Allies take the lead on the development of NATO's Innovation Fund. Press Release, 22 October. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_187607.htm. Accessed 30 January 2022.
- Reding, D. F., & Eaton, J., *Science & technology trends 2020–2040 – Exploring the S&T edge*. NATO Science & Technology Organization. Brussels. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/4/pdf/190422-ST_Tech_Trends_Report_2020-2040.pdf. Accessed 18 January 2022.
- Stanley-Lockman, Z., & Christie, E. H. (2021). An artificial intelligence strategy for NATO. *NATO Review*, 25 October. <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2021/10/25/an-artificial-intelligence-strategy-for-nato/index.html>. Accessed 5 February 2022.
- US Department of Defense. (2021a). Department of Defense announces establishment of the Trusted Capital Digital Marketplace. Press Release, 13 January. <https://www.Defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2470485/department-of-defense-announces-establishment-of-the-trusted-capital-digital-ma/>. Accessed 19 February 2022.
- US Department of Defense. (2021b). DOD budget request boosts research, nuclear modernization and includes 2.7% pay raise. Press Release, 28 May. <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/2639101/dod-budget-request-boosts-research-nuclear-modernization-and-includes-27-pay-ra/>. Accessed 19 February 2022.
- US, National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence. (n. d.). Commissioners. <https://www.nscai.gov/commissioners/>. Accessed 14 February 2022.
- Wray, C. (2020). 'Responding effectively to the Chinese economic espionage threat'. Remarks at the Department of Justice China Initiative Conference, Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D. C., 6 February. <https://www.fbi.gov/news/speeches/responding-effectively-to-the-chinese-economic-espionage-threat>. Accessed 5 February 2022.
- Zhang, D., Mishra, S., Brynjolfsson, E., Etchemendy, J., Ganguli, D., Grosz, B., Lyons, T., Manyika, J., Niebles, J. C., Sellitto, M., Shoham, Y., Clark, J., & Perrault, R. (2021). *Artificial intelligence index report 2021*. Human-Centered AI Institute, Stanford University. March. <https://aiindex.stanford.edu/report/>. Accessed 5 February 2022.
- Zysk, K. (2021). Defence innovation and the 4th industrial revolution in Russia. *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 44(4), 543–71. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390.2020.1856090>. Accessed 10 February 2022.

Author biography



Edward Hunter Christie is a senior research fellow at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs and the owner of AI Policy Consulting. He served as a NATO official from 2014 to 2020, ending his tenure at NATO in the role of deputy head of the Innovation Unit.



The EU's mutual defence clause? Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 22–26
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221089370
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Henna Virkkunen

Abstract

The article discusses Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union and the principle of mutual defence in general in the EU. Most EU member states base their defence policy around NATO, and thus, there has historically been little appetite to create new overlapping structures for mutual defence. However, during recent years, interest in the further operationalisation and clarification of Article 42(7) has arisen, with the European Parliament and member states such as Finland and France at the forefront of these demands. While the EU's mutual defence is not going to replace or overtake NATO as the cornerstone of Europe's security order, further developing the Common Security and Defence Policy and the EU's mutual defence policy would be beneficial for Europe as a whole.

Keywords

Mutual defence, CSDP, NATO, Finland, Article 42(7), EU

Introduction: the EU's mutual aid and assistance clause

Article 42 of the Treaty on European Union forms the basis of the Union's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). While most of its clauses focus on improving the military capability of the member states and implementing the CSDP, Article 42(7) is more ambitious. This is a mutual defence clause that obliges all member states to render aid to any other member state that becomes a victim of armed aggression on its territory. In this regard, it is very similar to Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, which establishes

Corresponding author:

H. Virkkunen, Finnish Member of the European Parliament.

Email: henna.virkkunen@europarl.europa.eu

This article was written before Russia launched an unprovoked war against Ukraine on 24 February 2022, and also before the EU Council approved the final version of the Strategic Compass on 21 March 2022. It therefore reflects political realities that preceded these two events.



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

the principle of collective defence and the idea that an attack against one member state in Europe or North America is an attack against all.

In practice, the application of Article 42(7) is not so simple. Twenty-one out of the 27 EU member states are members of NATO, which forms the basis of European cooperation in the field of defence. As all the large EU member states are also members of NATO, the will to create new overlapping structures for collective defence has traditionally been lacking, despite the efforts of some non-NATO member states to develop and strengthen EU-based collective defence further. However, with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty already giving NATO member states mutual protection, and the US's key role as a security provider in Europe not likely to change any time soon, there appears to be little appetite for major change.

At least in theory, the EU should be a military powerhouse. The combined military budget of all member states is €168.5 billion (Eurostat 2021), the second largest in the world after the US. With a military of this size, one might think that Europe would have no problem creating and maintaining its own security structures. However, while the combined military budget might seem impressive, simply looking at the amount of money spent does not reveal the organisational weaknesses of European defence cooperation.

One problem with Article 42(7) is that it lacks the level of operationalisation that NATO has. In practice, this means that if a member state were to be attacked, all assistance would have to be organised bilaterally between the attacked country and the country providing the assistance. Even the wording of the article emphasises the fact that it is other member states, not the institutions of the EU, that will provide the aid. While the EU's institutions could theoretically have a role in supporting and organising the aid effort, this is not explicitly mentioned in the EU treaties and there are very few existing structures within the EU that could organise and coordinate the delivery of military aid to an attacked member state.

This contrasts with Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, also known as the solidarity clause, that requires the EU and member states to jointly assist any member state that is a victim of a terrorist attack or of a natural or man-made disaster 'in a spirit of solidarity'. This article also requires the EU to mobilise all the instruments at its disposal, including the military resources made available by the member states, to help the member state that is struggling with the disaster. Compared with Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union, Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union attributes a much larger role to the EU.

It would be fair to say that the EU is not fully prepared to organise a collective defence effort should one of its member states face an armed attack. With EU institutions having a very weak role and the type of aid to be given not specified in any treaty, it is clear that a European dimension is sorely lacking. In the end, the aid that a member state might expect to receive in the case of an attack ranges anywhere from actual armed support and troops to humanitarian aid. The decision on what kind of aid to provide would be up to each individual member state.

Broader EU defence cooperation

While it is clear that Article 42(7) leaves a lot to be desired, what about other aspects of the CSDP? In practice, the achievements of the CSDP have also been modest due to the convoluted nature of organising action. There are multiple different initiatives and agencies responsible for the development of European defence integration, ranging from Permanent Structured Cooperation to the EU Military Committee and the European Defence Fund. This makes the coordination and formulation of concrete policies and goals difficult. The aforementioned lack of political will has also hampered the further development of an actual defence union.

During recent years, however, the concept of strategic autonomy has reignited interest in mutual defence. The ability of Europe to assert itself and influence decisions that affect the continent is becoming more and more important in a world of increasing competition between countries such as the US, China and Russia, and new challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. France has been especially influential in promoting the policy of increased strategic autonomy, and with the start of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU during the first half of 2022, it is likely that the topic will be further discussed during the coming months.

French President Emmanuel Macron addressed this topic in his speech to the European Parliament in January 2022 as the President of the Council of the EU. He stated that the EU must have the capability to block attempts to destabilise Europe, in particular from Russia, and effectively punish those who violate international rules (Macron 2022). He also observed that Europe cannot simply be content with responding to international crises—rather it should be proactive, and able to effectively influence and alter events that affect Europe (Macron 2022). Macron's statements are indicative of the fact that France has historically been one of the key supporters of the concept of strategic autonomy in the EU.

As well as France, Finland has also been a key supporter of stronger European mutual defence. During his tenure as President of the Republic, Sauli Niinistö, who is also responsible for leading Finnish foreign policy together with the Cabinet, has on numerous occasions mentioned his desire for more comprehensive and developed security and defence cooperation for Europe. In a speech in November 2021 at Berlin's Humboldt University, he urged that the EU have a frank discussion on whether it can maintain its values and also preserve its security, and lamented the fact that Europe has the tools but not the willpower to use them when it comes to security policy (Niinistö 2021). Further clarifying the somewhat ambiguous wording of Article 42(7) has also been high on his agenda.

It should be noted that as well as individual member states, the European Parliament also actively promotes the need to develop a flexible and non-binding plan for the activation of Article 42(7) in its annual reports on the implementation of the CSDP. The most recent report also contains a demand for the creation of a more ambitious common understanding of the operationalisation of Article 42(7) (European Parliament 2021). The Council and the European External Action Service, however, have been slow to respond to these demands.

Despite this, it seems unlikely that the drive for strategic autonomy will lead to a true European defensive union like NATO in the near future. Instead, the focus will most likely be on deepening and strengthening existing areas of cooperation such as cybersecurity, health security, counter-terrorism, military mobility and border protection, as well as introducing the new EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of 5,000 troops. This common EU military force has been in the planning in some form or another for a long time, but its establishment and expansion have to date been met with indifference from member states. Thus far, the existing EU Battlegroups established in 2005 have never seen actual combat, although the Union has deployed multiple coalitions-of-the-willing-type military operations on an ad hoc basis since the CSDP became operational in 2003.

Another key development would be the abolition of the unanimity requirement when it comes to decisions related to the CSDP. At the moment, decisions such as those on the use of sanctions and the establishment of crisis-management operations require the agreement of all member states, which often leads to watered-down statements and decisions, or even to the inability to make a decision at all. Removing the unanimity requirement would enable the pursuit of a more robust and ambitious foreign policy and this would allow Europe to effectively influence world affairs and promote a multilateral and rule-based international order.

Most of these objectives were outlined in the first draft of the EU's forthcoming Strategic Compass that was presented to the Council in November 2021 and will be adopted in March 2022. However, the draft Compass left a lot to be desired when it comes to Article 42(7) and mutual defence. It was supposed to clarify the practical application of the article, but the focus of the final document is narrow. Article 42(7) is only mentioned briefly, in the context of regular exercises to strengthen mutual assistance and develop cyber defences. While the focus on cyber affairs is understandable, and the draft Compass was welcomed by the Finnish government, it is clear that the end result was not as comprehensive as many had hoped for. This is a shortcoming that should be fixed in the final version of the Strategic Compass.

This lack of comprehensiveness was to be expected due to the unanimity requirement mentioned above, which inevitably leads to decisions being based on the lowest common denominator. While consensus is important, applying unanimity to foreign and defence policy delivers unsatisfactory results that please no one. The draft Strategic Compass is, in general, lacking in ambition, but this is especially the case when it comes to Article 42(7). European mutual defence and the CSDP have the potential to be much more effective, but at the moment this potential remains under-utilised due to the aforementioned requirement. This change is also something that the European Parliament and the European People's Party group have long advocated. The removal of the unanimity requirement in foreign affairs is the way forward.

Conclusion

It is clear that NATO will remain the key European defence solution for most of the member states. European defence will continue to rely on the US in the future too; the

creation of overlapping structures and organisations would not be useful and nor is there the political will for it. For now, European defence is best handled by NATO, complemented by an EU that is more independent and functional in general foreign and security policy, as well as in sectors not covered by NATO.

However, I also agree that the operationalisation of Article 42(7) must be discussed further, and concrete guidelines and methods for its activation should be created. It should not be just a clause empty of meaning, but an actual, realistic way to aid member states facing an attack, with pre-planned rules and regulations on how it is activated and operationalised. Despite this, we should not be naive and expect Article 42(7) to provide a realistic alternative to NATO membership, at least for Finland.

While for historical reasons some member states, such as Finland, have chosen to stay outside of NATO, for Finland at least, membership would be highly beneficial and would promote increased stability and security in Northern Europe. While it remains the choice of each nation to join NATO or not, everyone should be aware that, at least for now, Article 42(7) is no substitute for NATO's Article 5.

References

- European Parliament, Committee on Foreign Affairs. (2021). *Report on the implementation of the Common Security and Defence Policy – Annual report 2021*. 21 December. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2021-0358_EN.pdf. Accessed 3 February 2022.
- Eurostat. (2021). *How much do governments spend on defence?* 27 August. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20210827-1>. Accessed 28 February 2022.
- Macron, E. (2022). Speech at the European Parliament. Strasbourg, 19 January. *French Presidency of the Council of the European Union*. <https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/french-president-emmanuel-macron-s-speech-at-the-european-parliament-strasbourg-19-january-2022/>. Accessed 3 February 2022.
- Niinistö, N. (2021). 'The case for a stronger Europe in a harder world'. Speech at Humboldt University, Berlin, 23 November 2021. *Office of the President of the Republic of Finland*. <https://www.presidentti.fi/en/speeches/the-case-for-a-stronger-europe-in-a-harder-world-speech-by-president-of-the-republic-of-finland-sauli-niinisto-at-the-humboldt-university-berlin-23-november-2021/>. Accessed 3 February 2022.

Author biography



Henna Virkkunen is a member of the European Parliament from the European People's Party Group. She is a member of the European Parliament's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, and the Committee on Transport and Tourism, and a substitute member of the Special Committee on Artificial Intelligence in a Digital Age. She has also served as Finland's minister of education and science, minister of public administration and local governance, and minister of transport.



The EU's chair was missing at the Ukraine table

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 27–35
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221089371
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Jolyon Howorth

Abstract

The crisis in Ukraine has highlighted the weaknesses of the EU as an international actor. Although the EU is an economic, commercial and regulatory giant, it has not succeeded in emerging as a significant military or security actor—despite having announced a ‘common foreign and security policy’ 30 years ago. In particular, it is deeply divided over policy towards Russia. Moreover, attempts to devise an overall policy for its neighbourhood, and in particular an ‘Eastern Partnership’ focused on the borderline states between the Union and Russia, have been widely judged as failures. In the showdown between Russia and the West over Ukraine, the EU *per se* has been marginalised by both Moscow and Washington. Various EU member states have embraced different preferences with respect to the potential resolution of the Ukraine crisis. In the context of potential discussions, demanded by Vladimir Putin, on a ‘new security order’ for Eurasia, the EU’s absence is tragic.

Keywords

EU, Ukraine, NATO, Russia, European security order

Introduction

Each country has the history of its geography. This insight, attributed to the eminent French geologist Paul Vidal de la Blache (1889), sheds much light on Europe’s disparate responses to the crisis in Ukraine.

As Josep Borrell, the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, remarked on his first visit to Eastern Ukraine on 5 January 2022, ‘It is clear that

Corresponding author:

J. Howorth, 28, Rue du Fer à Moulin, Paris 75005, France.

Email: Howorth45@gmail.com

This article was completed on 20 February 2022 and reflects the author’s assessment of the situation at that time. Since then, the European Union appears to have made strides towards self-assertion as an international actor. In a forthcoming publication with the Martens Centre, the author will analyse the changes that have transpired in the EU’s foreign and security policy since the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022.



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

any discussion on European security must include the European Union and Ukraine' (Luhanska 2022). Borrell was lamenting the fact that, as the Ukraine crisis had mounted through the autumn of 2021, discussions had been dominated by bilateral exchanges between the US and Russia. Although the US has, in fact, gone to extraordinary lengths to keep all European states informed and consulted during the largely bilateral negotiations, the EU's role has been that of a bystander. This has mainly been the result of its own disarray in relating to its neighbourhood (Aslund 2022).

As has been widely noted, Russian President Vladimir Putin has a clear idea of his overall objectives in this crisis. His aim is to call into question the entirety of the post-Cold War security arrangements for the Eurasian space (Hill 2022; Shevtsova 2022). The West, on the other hand, has remained ambivalent about its precise intentions with respect to the future status of the borderland states—those between Russia and the EU (Garton Ash 2022). The US, the EU and NATO have succeeded in mounting a strong, discursive united front in opposition to the Russian threat to Ukraine. This includes broad agreement on the Western implementation of potentially crippling sanctions. But there is little agreement within the West over a long-term strategy for Eurasian security.

This article will assess the geographical and historical reasons for the EU's inability to reach agreement on a security order for Eurasia that meets the minimum security requirements of all parties. This being the case, it concludes that decisions about any such order will essentially continue to be driven from Washington. Such an outcome would be as unsatisfactory for Brussels as it would for Moscow.

The evolution of the EU's Eastern neighbourhood strategy

In 2004, the European Neighbourhood Policy was devised by the EU with the object of creating a 'ring of friends' around the Union's periphery from the Baltic to the Black Sea and from the Bosphorus to the Atlantic (Whitman and Wolff 2012). Moscow's reaction to this EU initiative was 'muted or barely noticeable' (Trenin 2014). The EU was only just emerging as an aspiring foreign-policy actor and the world's focus was on Afghanistan and Iraq. The European Neighbourhood Policy was in no way perceived by Moscow as a threat.

Before the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, there were three distinct EU member state approaches to Russia (Nitoiu 2014). Those states in close proximity to their former hegemon, particularly the Baltics and Poland, took a very hard line with Moscow. Some states, often with little historical or geographical connection to Russia, prioritised industrial and commercial interests. A handful of EU states attempted to marry principles with pragmatism.

With the invasion of Georgia, however, EU member states began to converge on the third position. The 'hard-liners' realised that their tough rhetoric had achieved little. The 'trading states' began to realise that Russia remained a threat. Nevertheless, the three distinct positions were never entirely reconciled and the states in each group retained the essence of their distinct approaches to Moscow. As for Moscow's approach to the EU, Russian diplomats are trained to understand individual European states—few know what

to make of Brussels. The exception that proves the rule is Vladimir Chizhov, who has been Russian Permanent Representative to the EU since 2005, having spent his entire career specialising in European affairs. In general, though, the Kremlin has never really understood the EU or taken its proclaimed ‘common foreign policy’ seriously.

In 2009 the EU embarked on its Eastern Partnership (EaP) programme—an attempt to offer the six states situated in Russia’s ‘near abroad’¹ some degree of European embrace (Korosteleva 2014). The policy was conducted by the European Commission, largely along the lines of its then-recent enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe. From the outset, EU member states were divided over the EaP. Romania and Bulgaria were concerned that their activities in the existing Black Sea Cooperation Forum could be diverted or diluted. Poland hoped the project would lead to EU membership for the Partnership states. France and Germany were firmly opposed to precisely such an outcome, an opposition that de facto ruled out membership. Russia was ignored.

For states that were keen to accede to the EU, such as Ukraine and Georgia, this approach spelled endless frustration. For states with no interest in accession, the EU’s insistence on conditionality consigned the policy to virtual irrelevance. In any case, conditionality was applied selectively: Belarus, which had little to offer the EU, was severely sanctioned for its authoritarianism, while Azerbaijan, which was equally undemocratic but supplies the EU with energy resources, received virtually a free pass (Lehne 2014). The third flaw, and arguably the most serious, was that the ‘policy’ was entirely stripped of any geopolitical considerations, with the EU member states having no collective strategic approach (Keukeleire 2015). The US, for its part, being seriously bogged down in Afghanistan and Iraq, was content to allow the EU to take the lead in Western overtures to the borderland states.

By 2012 it had become clear to Russia that the EaP risked drawing these states into the EU’s commercial and economic network (Cadier 2014). The Euromaidan crisis of 2013–14, which saw the ousting of pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich and the installation in Kyiv of a ‘pro-Western’ government, led directly to the Russian annexation of Crimea and military intervention in Eastern Ukraine. Scholars are deeply divided over the EU’s responsibility for sparking this crisis, as well as over the effectiveness of its subsequent policies towards the region (Cross and Karolewski 2017).

These events were also triggered by NATO’s ambivalent policy towards Ukraine and Georgia. At the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, the US and the UK pushed strongly to offer the two countries a Membership Action Plan. France and Germany were equally strongly opposed, with the remaining EU member states split between these positions. The final Bucharest Declaration stated that ‘We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO’ (NATO 2008). If there is one dominant root cause of today’s stand-off over Ukraine, it is arguably this key issue (Larsen 2021).

Yet, the ‘open door’ policy for NATO membership that Russia so strongly objects to is in fact highly conditional. NATO’s Article X reads (NATO 1949): ‘The Parties may, by *unanimous agreement*, invite any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to *contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area* to accede

to this Treaty' (my italics). Thus, membership is theoretically only possible if it would enhance regional security and if every NATO member state voted in favour. During the 40 years of the Cold War, when regional security was tightly defined in terms of deterrence of Russia, only 4 new members were admitted. In the 30 years since the end of the Cold War, when criteria for membership have been unrelated to deterrence, a further 14 members have been admitted (O'Hanlon and Van Everra 2022). The prospect of Ukraine actually joining NATO is close to zero for the foreseeable future.

To repeat, the current crisis is about much more than Ukraine. It involves a Russian attempt to call into question the US-driven security order underwritten by NATO's constant enlargement towards and beyond the borders of the former USSR. While in the 1990s Russia was obliged, through its own weakness, to acquiesce in that emerging order, it is now determined, from a position of relative strength, to challenge it (Sarotte 2021). With the military invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022, the challenge has become one which will define the future of security arrangements in the Eurasian space.

This has thrown a spotlight on the weaknesses of the EU as a regional security actor. Moscow considers that, despite its formidable role as an international economic, commercial and regulatory giant, the EU has never succeeded in forging a credible role as a military or defence actor. In February 2021, Josep Borrell made an ill-advised visit to Moscow in an attempt to shore up the EU's credentials as a foreign-policy actor. He was publicly humiliated by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, unintentionally underscoring the extent to which Moscow refuses to consider the EU a serious player (Herszenhorn and Barigazzi 2021). The 'demands' that Russia formulated on 17 December 2021 were addressed on the one hand to the US and on the other to NATO. None of them concerned the EU as such.

The approaches of EU member states

As a body, the EU is nevertheless deeply involved in Ukraine. The many different activities that take place in the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area involve thousands of different individuals, companies and agencies in constant interaction with Kyiv (European Commission 2022). A one-billion-euro aid package is being prepared and there are high-level discussions about how to connect Ukraine to the European electricity grid. However, at the end of the day, it is not the activities associated with the European Commission or the European Council that determine the overall impact of Europe in this crisis; it is the position of the member states.

One seasoned analyst noted that the EU member states have long been divided between a 'Helsinki' group, which puts democracy and human rights first and foremost, and a 'Yalta' group, which is prepared to negotiate the subcontinent's geostrategic lineup with the master of the Kremlin (Garton Ash 2022). This is an anachronistic assessment. The historical circumstances behind both Helsinki and Yalta are quite different from those of today. However, there is no doubt that the EU27 are split in terms of the priority they accord to confrontation and cooperation with Moscow. The split is largely dictated by history and geography.

Poland and the Baltic states have been pushing hard to send military equipment to Ukraine. Poland is supplying various military assets, including the Piorun man-portable anti-aircraft missile system and ammunition. Since the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, Warsaw and Moscow have competed energetically for influence in Ukraine. Poland strives to promote a stable democracy and a free-market economy in Ukraine as a means of securing the Polish–Ukrainian border. Russia wants, at all costs, to avoid precisely such an outcome. However, since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, it is clear that Ukrainian public opinion has been moving away from Moscow, even though it may not be aligning with Warsaw (Szeptycki 2021).

The Baltic states have been authorised by Washington to send US-made anti-tank weapons to Ukraine. Estonia has supplied Javelin anti-armour missiles, while Lithuania and Latvia have sent Stinger anti-aircraft missiles which pose a serious threat to Russian helicopters. Latvia has also provided ready-to-eat military meals for Ukrainian troops. The Scandinavian countries have limited their support for Kyiv to political and diplomatic statements, with the Nordic Defence Cooperation group (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) not having pledged any concrete military support at the time of writing (Mehta 2022). Latvia and Estonia had attempted to dispatch to Kyiv a number of German-made howitzer guns that had previously been stationed in Germany, but the shipment was vetoed by Berlin (Milne 2022b). Several NATO states have sent troop reinforcements to the Baltic states, which fear, above all, cyber-attacks and migratory flows (Milne 2022a).

Germany, which, *pace de la Blache*, tends to have the geography of its history, takes a very different line from Poland and the Baltic states. Berlin refuses to contemplate the prospect of German weapons killing Russian soldiers. This is in part driven by guilt about the Nazi invasion of Russia during the Second World War and in part by the legacy of Ostpolitik. One leading young German defence expert wrote: ‘I believe that German millennials have a hard time adjusting to the world we are living in now. We struggle to think in terms of interests, we struggle with the concept of geopolitical power, and we struggle with military power being an element of geopolitical power’ (Franke 2021). The new German leadership has struggled to accept any linkage between the situation with the Nordstream 2 gas pipeline and Russian policy towards Ukraine. It has questioned the wisdom or feasibility of a sanctions policy that excludes Russia from the SWIFT financial transfer system (Chazan and Seddon 2022).

The roots of Germany’s ambivalence over providing military assistance to Ukraine are many and complex. At the most fundamental level, they are perhaps best expressed in terms of a multigenerational rejection of military force as an instrument of policy. The dominant German mindset holds that ‘military force is not just evil, it’s also useless. It has caused the greatest tragedies of the 20th century and a whole lot of needless suffering during the Cold War. Since then, it has only created more chaos and death in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Libya’ (Dirsus 2022). Vice Admiral Kay-Achim Schönbach, the head of the German navy, created a major strain within NATO when he declared that Vladimir Putin deserved ‘respect’ and that Crimea would never be returned to Ukraine (Benhold 2022). However, when, after

the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the issue became that of sanctions, Germany proved to be ahead of the EU itself in stopping the certification of Nordstream 2 (Eddy 2022).

Bulgaria and Romania, as NATO states sharing a border with Ukraine, have been actively seeking to bolster their own national defences. Romania in particular, with its 600 km land border with Ukraine, is concerned about refugee flows in the event of war. France has offered to send 1,000 troops to Romania. Spain and the Netherlands have dispatched fighter jets to Bulgaria, and Madrid has also deployed a frigate to the Black Sea.

Hungary, however, is arguably the European state with the closest ties to Russia. During a controversial visit to Moscow in late January 2022, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán pledged continuing cooperation with Russia and stood by Vladimir Putin's side while the Russian president lambasted NATO during a joint press conference (Chicolas 2022). The Hungarian Foreign Minister, Peter Szijjarto, has stated that Budapest is committed to Russia and wary of Ukraine. He contrasted Russia's generous supply of COVID-19 vaccines and cheap gas, and Moscow's assistance in evacuating Hungarian citizens from Kazakhstan, with Kyiv's alleged mistreatment of 100,000 ethnic Hungarians in Ukraine. Hungary has made it very clear that it will veto Ukrainian membership of either NATO or the EU (Dunai and Shotter 2022).

France is the one EU country that has attempted to take a lead in handling the Ukraine crisis. Again, geography lies at the heart of the centuries-old relations between the two powers that book-end Europe (Yakemtchouk 2011). President Macron, in a speech to the European Parliament on 19 January 2022, spoke boldly of his vision: 'In the coming weeks, we need to bring to being a European proposal to build a new security and stability order. We need to build it between Europeans, then share it with our allies in the NATO framework. And then, we need to propose it to Russia for negotiation' (Macron 2022). These words were seriously misrepresented in foreign media coverage, some of which claimed the French president was aiming to engage in bilateral negotiations with Moscow—which is not what he said (De Weck 2022). However, the spirit behind the words clearly implied the need for a transcendence of the current post-Cold War order and a quest for new security arrangements that would be acceptable to all parties, including Russia. Macron's challenge in thinking through that transcendence and in persuading the other players of its wisdom is positively Herculean.

That challenge was the driving force behind Macron's high-profile (and high-risk) visit to Moscow on 7 February 2022, in which he engaged in five hours of discussions with Vladimir Putin. The French president, who is concurrently holding the Presidency of the EU and was wearing both hats, believes that the world is at a 'tipping point in history' (Cohen 2022) and that dialogue is crucial. Macron was careful to choreograph his trip with prior consultations with all the key players in the Western camp, including Poland and the Baltic states. He stuck rigidly to the Western playbook by making it clear to Putin both that the West was solidly united and that any aggression against Ukraine would come at a terrible cost to Moscow. The Russian president has stated that Macron is the one European statesman with whom he can have a serious conversation.

It is widely assumed that the two presidents discussed the ‘Normandy format’ for negotiations over Ukraine which, since 2014, have brought together France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine. These talks, which were intended to implement the Minsk Agreements on the status of the Russian-backed separatist regions of Eastern Ukraine, had been stalled since 2019 (Atland 2020). Since the talks began, the military situation on the ground had shifted in favour of Kyiv, as it had received massive support from the West. Yet strict implementation of the Minsk agreements would have given the political edge to the Russian-backed separatists. What Putin presumably hoped from Paris and Berlin was that they would send a strong diplomatic message to Kyiv that progress on Minsk had become a Russian ultimatum (Dubost 2022). But Putin was no longer prepared to pursue diplomatic channels. War is now upon us.

Conclusion

The crisis over Ukraine goes right back to 1991, when Kyiv became the key player in the disintegration of the former Soviet Union (Sarotte 2021, 121–34). The overwhelming priority for the George H. W. Bush administration was to secure Ukraine’s nuclear arsenal. In that context, the prospect of NATO membership was already dangled as an incentive to Kyiv’s new leaders to conform to US preferences. And as NATO enlargement became a progressive reality during the 1990s, it became increasingly difficult for US leaders to accept that a new dividing line should be drawn across Europe to the west of Ukraine. Yet full membership risked infuriating Russia. That dilemma has never been resolved.

In the now aborted diplomatic negotiations between the West and Russia, the EU, because of both geography and history, should logically have been in a position to help forge an agreement that would meet the minimum security requirements of all sides. But because Moscow saw its demands as only being answerable in Washington, the EU’s leverage was reduced to the imposition of ‘massive and targeted sanctions’ on Russia (Von der Leyen 2022). The threat of such sanctions did not deter Putin. Whether their imposition as punishment will change his behaviour is an open question (Leonhardt 2022)

The likelihood, therefore, is that the US will continue to call the shots on security in the Eurasian space. This is an undesirable strategic diversion for Washington. It is politically unsatisfactory for Brussels. And it is historically unacceptable for Russia. The Ukraine crisis is not about to be resolved to the satisfaction of the major players. Sadly, the EU as such is not even among them.

Note

1. Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia.

References

- Aslund, A. (2022). How the European Union has made itself irrelevant in Ukraine. *Politico*, 25 January.

- Atland, K. (2020). Destined for deadlock? Russia, Ukraine, and the unfulfilled Minsk agreements. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, 36(2), 122–39.
- Benhold, K. (2022). Where is Germany in the Ukraine standoff? *New York Times*, 24 January.
- Cadier, D. (2014). Eastern Partnership vs Eurasian Union? The EU–Russia competition in the shared neighbourhood and the Ukraine crisis. *Global Policy*. doi:10.1111/1758-5899.12152.
- Chazan, G., & Seddon, M. (2022). Germany’s Russia problem: Ukraine crisis tests new government. *Financial Times*, 31 January.
- Chicolas, O. (2022). Orban pledges cooperation with Moscow in storm of Ukraine crisis. *Moscow Times*, 1 February. <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/02/01/orban-pledges-cooperation-with-putin-in-storm-of-ukraine-crisis-a76225>. Accessed 15 February 2022.
- Cohen, R. (2022). Emmanuel Macron in his labyrinth. *New York Times*, 12 February.
- Cross, M. K. D., & Karolewski, I. P., eds. (2017). Europe’s hybrid foreign policy: The Ukraine–Russia crisis. Special issue, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 55(1).
- De la Blache, P. (1889). *États et Nations de l’Europe autour de la France*. Paris: Delagrave.
- De Weck, J. (2022). Macron’s pivot on Russia. *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, 2002/1. <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/macrons-pivot-russia>. Accessed 17 February 2022.
- Dirsus, M. (2022). Why Germany behaves the way it does. *War on the Rocks*, 4 February. <https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/why-germany-behaves-the-way-it-does/>. Accessed 15 February 2022.
- Dubost, M. (2022). Emmanuel Macron sur la corde raide russo-ukrainienne. *Institut Maigne*, 9 February. <https://www.institutmaigne.org/blog/emmanuel-macron-sur-la-corde-raide-russo-ukrainienne>. Accessed 15 February 2022.
- Dunai, M., & Shotter, J. (2022). Ukraine neighbours embrace NATO help but Hungary expresses doubts. *Financial Times*, 27 January.
- Eddy, M. (2022). Germany puts a stop to Nord Stream 2, a key Russian natural gas pipeline. *New York Times*, 22 February.
- European Commission. (2022). *EU – Ukraine*. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/cooperation/international/ukraine/. Accessed 15 February 2022.
- Franke, U. (2021). A millennial considers the new German problem after thirty years of peace. *War on the Rocks*, 21 May. <https://warontherocks.com/2021/05/a-millennial-considers-the-new-german-problem-after-30-years-of-peace/>. Accessed 15 February 2022.
- Garton Ash, T. (2022). Putin knows exactly what he wants in Eastern Europe – unlike the West. *The Guardian*, 3 January. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jan/31/putin-russia-eastern-europe-ukraine>. Accessed 15 February 2022.
- Herszenhorn, D. M., & Barigazzi, J. (2022). Borrell stands by as Lavrov calls EU ‘unreliable partner’. *Politico*, 5 February. <https://www.politico.eu/article/borrell-stands-by-as-lavrov-calls-eu-unreliable-partner/>. Accessed 15 February 2022.
- Hill, F. (2022). Putin has the US right where he wants it. *New York Times*, 24 January.
- Keukeleire, S. (2015). Lessons for the practice and analysis of EU diplomacy from an ‘outside-in’ perspective. In S. Gstohl & E. Lannon (eds.), *The neighbours of the European Union’s neighbours: Diplomatic and geopolitical dimensions beyond the European Neighbourhood Policy* (pp. 247–242). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Korosteleva, E. (2014). *Eastern Partnership: A new opportunity for the neighbours?* London: Routledge.
- Larsen, H. (2021). Why NATO should not offer Ukraine and Georgia Membership Action Plans. *War On the Rocks*, 8 June. <https://warontherocks.com/2021/06/why-nato-should-not-offer-ukraine-and-georgia-membership-action-plans/>. Accessed 17 February 2022.
- Lehne, S. (2014). *Time to reset the European Neighbourhood Policy*. Carnegie Europe. February. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2014/02/04/time-to-reset-european-neighborhood-policy/h021>. Accessed 15 February 2022.

- Leonhardt, D. (2022). Can sanctions work? Yes, but they often don't. *New York Times*, 23 February.
- Luhanska, S. (2022). Ukraine: Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell at the press conference after meeting the Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba. *EEAS*, 5 January. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/109427/ukraine-press-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-press-conference-after-meeting_en. Accessed 15 February 2022.
- Macron, E. (2022). Speech at the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 19 January. <https://presidence-francaise.consilium.europa.eu/en/news/french-president-emmanuel-macron-s-speech-at-the-european-parliament-strasbourg-19-january-2022/>. Accessed 15 February 2022.
- Mehta, A. (2022). Baltic states in support of Ukraine. *Breaking Defense*, 25 January. <https://defense.info/partners-corner/2022/01/baltic-states-in-support-of-ukraine/>. Accessed 17 February 2022.
- Milne, R. (2022a). Estonian president warns of Russian hybrid warfare. *Financial Times*, 12 February.
- Milne, R. (2022b). Latvia slams Germany's 'immoral' relationship with Russia and China. *Financial Times*, 28 January.
- NATO. (1949). *North Atlantic treaty*. Washington, D. C. 4 April. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_17120.htm. Accessed 17 February 2022.
- NATO. (2008). *Bucharest summit declaration*. Bucharest. 3 April. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm. Accessed 17 February 2022.
- Nitoiu, C. (2014). EU–Russia relations: Between conflict and cooperation. *International Politics*, 51, 234–53. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/ip.2014.7>. Accessed 17 February 2022.
- O'Hanlon, M., & Van Everra, S. (2022). There is no NATO open-door policy. *The Hill*, 27 January. <https://thehill.com/opinion/national-security/591448-there-is-no-nato-open-door-policy>. Accessed 15 February 2022.
- Sarotte, M. E. (2021). *Not one inch: America, Russia and the making of the post–Cold War stalemate*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Shevtsova, L. (2022). What Putin really wants. *New York Times*, 7 January.
- Szeptycki, A. (2021). Poland versus Russia: Competition in Ukraine. *East European Politics, Societies and Cultures*, 35(4), 1113–35.
- Trenin, D. (2014). Ukraine is not the only battlefield between Russia and the West. *Carnegie Europe*, 21 March. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=55049>. Accessed 15 February 2022.
- Von der Leyen, U. (2022). Press statement on Russia's aggression against Ukraine. 24 February. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_22_1322
- Whitman, R., & Wolff, S. (eds). (2012). *The European Neighbourhood Policy in perspective: Context, implementation and impact*. London: Palgrave.
- Yakemtchouk, R. (2011). *La France et la Russie : Alliances et Discordances*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Author biography



Jolyon Howorth is Professor Emeritus and Jean Monnet Professor ad personam of European politics at the University of Bath. He is also a senior research associate at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies.



Matching risk assessment and capabilities: Challenges to Central and Eastern European member states

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 36–47
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221086414
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Yordan Bozhilov

Abstract

Located on the eastern flank of the EU, the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries have a specific perception of risks and threats and hence unique views on how to guarantee their security. This is particularly relevant with regard to their attitudes towards Russia. As members of both the EU and NATO, the CEE countries are in favour of stronger EU–NATO cooperation in security and the non-duplication of these organisations' efforts. Some of the countries see NATO as the key guarantor of their security. For several reasons, CEE countries have serious deficits in their defence capabilities and rely heavily on collective ones.

Keywords

Strategic Compass, Central and Eastern Europe, Security risks, Defence capabilities, Russia, EU–NATO cooperation

Introduction

The EU's much-awaited Strategic Compass will be adopted in March 2022. Its goals are to provide the EU with a tool for risk assessment, to outline the EU's ambitions in coping with challenges and threats, and to harmonise the development and procurement of military and civilian capabilities. Each of these elements is essential for the EU to realise its ambition to be a security provider.

Ten Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries joined the EU in 2004 and 2007,¹ having made enormous efforts and reforms to overcome the heritage of decades of

Corresponding author:

Yordan Bozhilov, Sofia Security Forum, 309-A-13 "Chavdaritsa" str., 1309 Sofia, Bulgaria
Email: bozhilov@sofiaforum.bg



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

authoritarian Communist rule. Despite several geographical, historical and cultural similarities, there are significant differences among the CEE countries, both in terms of how they define and assess security risks and threats, and their views on how to address them. This article aims to analyse what the CEE countries see as the main risks to their security and the challenges they face in building defence capabilities, as well as drawing conclusions from this analysis for the EU's Strategic Compass. The article argues that the Strategic Compass must pay due attention to the individual member states' concerns and unique positions in terms of threat assessments and capabilities.

Risk and threat assessments in CEE

The cornerstone of any security system is risk assessment, as it is on this basis that it can be decided how to meet and address risks and the proper formats for cooperation and partnership can be identified. This is relevant for the EU and its desire to build a European security identity. Failure to adopt a common approach and a unified risk assessment could hamper the creation of a consensus on the Strategic Compass, or leave it as a document without added value. Achieving a common assessment of the types of risks, as well as their degree, will certainly not be an easy task as 'there is as yet no common approach to how member state governments understand threats to the EU's security' (Fiott 2020, 2).

According Nicole Koenig (2020, 2),

The divergence in threat perceptions among member states is a central weakness of the [Common Security and Defence Policy]. Some worry about Russian aggression in the East while others are far more concerned about the consequences of state fragility in the South. Still others focus on relatively new security challenges such as climate change, cyber-attacks and disinformation. These differences have important implications for the EU's role as a security provider. They shape national preferences regarding policies, capabilities and alliances.

The analysis of the strategic documents and papers of individual EU member states undertaken by Daniel Fiott (2020, 6) shows that countries identify a wide range of security risks and threats. This list includes terrorism, radicalisation, cyber-threats, hybrid threats, organised crime, weapons of mass destruction, conflicts in different regions, migration, climate change, Russia, demographic issues, North Korea, frozen conflicts, the militarisation of space and more.

As can be seen from the comparison of these papers, some of the risks are commonly identified, while there is divergence in the assessment of other threats. There are also differences in the level of acuteness of the identified risks and threats. As pointed out by Fiott, 'Comparing national strategies may also allow us to observe whether there is a common threat perception in the EU or whether such a perception can amount to a common "strategic culture"' (Fiott 2020, 2). And a common strategic culture, according to High Representative/Vice-President of the European Commission Josep Borrell (2020), 'means understanding the world in the same way'.

It is of crucial importance for the success of the Strategic Compass that all countries come to a common understanding of current and future risks and threats, and to this end it is necessary to better understand the concerns of each country. Bearing in mind the diverging views on security issues seen in Fiott's analysis, this could easily be described as an arduous task. The CEE countries identify many different risks and threats, but what differs most is their varying assessments of Russia as a risk to their security (Fiott 2020, 6). Taking into account the current state of relations between the West and Russia, and the growing tension there, I will pay special attention to the threat analyses related to Russia, as this is a key issue for the Strategic Compass.

It is to be emphasised that the assessment of Russia divides not only the CEE countries but all countries across Europe. A Pew Research poll from 2020 concluded that

In Western Europe, a median of only 31% see Russia favorably, including 12% of Swedes, 23% of Dutch respondents and 26% of Britons. CEE citizens are more divided. Majorities in Slovakia (60%) and Bulgaria (73%) see Russia favorably – the most positive ratings the country gets globally. Majorities in Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic and Ukraine say the opposite. Notably, only 34% of people in the Czech Republic have a positive view of Russia, compared with six-in-ten in Slovakia, a wide divergence among nations that used to form a single Soviet republic. (Huang and Cha 2020)

Adopting a common European assessment of the risk which Russia poses to the EU and individual countries will therefore almost certainly prove a challenge.

Analysts from the RAND Corporation, an American think tank, also share the assessment that perceptions of Russia differ significantly and that 'NATO's western and southern members do not see as immediate a threat from Russia' (Pezard et al. 2017, 5). However, while these countries do not assess Russia as a substantial risk to their security, on the other pole are those countries in close proximity to Russia, which perceive it as an 'existential threat' (Pezard et al. 2017, 5).

Even though the CEE countries are all geographically close to Russia, their assessments of the country differ substantially. According to a study by GLOBSEC, a Slovakia-based think tank, countries from CEE and the Western Balkans can be separated into three different groups based on their attitudes towards Russia. The first group consists of the EU countries of Bulgaria and Slovakia, plus Serbia and Montenegro. These countries have a positive attitude towards Russia and have developed relations in historical, political, cultural and other spheres, and Russia is seen as a strategic partner. Many of the citizens of these countries even believe that NATO and the West antagonise Russia. The second group comprises countries neutral to Russia, such as Hungary, Czechia and North Macedonia, where attitudes towards Russia are marked by pragmatism and, to some extent, sympathy. The third group are countries that are sceptical of Russia, where the majority of people see it as a threat. These are Poland and Romania, countries with a negative historical experience of Russia (Milo 2021). Although GLOBSEC's research does not cover Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, these three countries should undoubtedly

be added to the last group. It is worth mentioning, that despite different attitudes towards Russia, all CEE countries adhered to the EU's common approach to Russia by agreeing to EU sanctions following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and calling for Russia to respect Ukraine's sovereignty.

It is important to understand the causes of these divergent views of Russia, that is, the factors and drivers that influence perceptions of Russia. According to the RAND analysts, 'a critical factor influencing European perceptions of the military threat posed by Russia appears to be geographical proximity to Russia' (Pezard et al. 2017, 5).

While important, geographical proximity is not the only factor that shapes the attitude of CEE countries towards Russia. For example, although Bulgaria borders Russia through the Black Sea, the majority of Bulgarians view Russia very favorably. One of the reasons for this is the historical ties between the countries. According to Dr Dimitar Bechev (2018), Russia has many elements of influence over Bulgaria and its citizens, including Bulgaria's almost total dependency on Russian energy supplies, the close relations of the Bulgarian and Russian Orthodox Churches, and the ties of some Bulgarian political and economic elites with Russian individuals and organisations. Russia uses all these points of leverage to sustain its positive image in Bulgaria.

In this manner a combination of factors besides geography, such as history, cultural ties, economic factors, political and other relations, hybrid warfare campaigns and openly pro-Russian propaganda, influence the image of Moscow in the CEE countries.

Obviously, threat assessments vary not only between the CEE countries, but across Europe. The practical question for the EU—and in particular for the Strategic Compass—is how to reach a common threat assessment. In this regard I share the opinion of Nicole Koenig (2020, 4) that, '[r]ather than depicting the lowest common denominator, the analysis should reflect and acknowledge different member state perspectives'. Looking simply for the lowest common denominator could endanger European unity and credibility. The Strategic Compass should address the most pressing security concerns of each member state or it will simply remain a piece of paper with no practical significance.

Establishing a common definition of the risks is only the first challenge which the Strategic Compass faces. The second key issue is how to respond to the identified risks and threats. The CEE countries are again strongly divided.

As we have seen above, Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia assess the risk posed by Russian as an existential threat, so their first and main priority is to guarantee a credible defence, including conventional territorial defence. From this point of view, for these countries NATO offers the key approach to tackling this risk, while EU efforts and policies are seen as only complementary.

As Marcin Terlikowski (2021, 73), from the Polish Institute of International Affairs, points out,

[M]embership in NATO and the transatlantic bond will still be perceived in Poland as the key means of deterrence and defense against Russia. This will, in turn, continue to define Polish approach to defense cooperation and strategic partnerships in general. What will remain priority for Poland will be military cooperation projects, run within the framework of NATO, and—perhaps in the first place—the implementation of the ambitious agenda of bilateral cooperation with the US, based on troops rotating to Poland and the infrastructure investments. European defense projects, like the EU’s Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) will remain a lower priority, as will bilateral collaboration with European NATO Allies.

The positions of the Baltic countries and Romania are similar, as can be seen from a country-by-country analysis carried out by the European Council on Foreign Relations. The authors emphasise that, ‘Lithuanian officials perceive [European Strategic Autonomy] as a pragmatic tool for Europe’s neighbourhood, but never as a substitute for NATO. They see the United States as a key partner in defending their country against Russia’ (Franke and Varma 2019, 60).

From this perspective, the five countries of Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are not only sceptical of the EU’s ability to address the challenges emanating from Russia, but could also be expected to oppose any action to reduce NATO’s role in defence at the expense of a greater role for the EU. The rest of the CEE countries, which have a different view of the Russian risk, do not oppose an enhanced role for the EU in security and defence, as long as this does not lead to the duplication of efforts and capabilities, and hence more expenditure, as discussed below.

Therefore, it is important for the EU to define its role in the security of its member states. For the CEE countries the key question is will the EU take on responsibility for defence, including territorial defence, and develop the necessary capabilities? The latter is unlikely. As noted by Thierry Tardy, ‘twenty years of [Common Security and Defence Policy] have largely failed to position the EU as a credible defence actor, and there is little evidence that any EU member state seriously wants to pursue that goal’ (Tardy 2021, 2). And according to Mr Borrell (2021), ‘The EU does not aim to be a military power in traditional terms, but we do need to be better able to defend ourselves’. If the EU shows no ambition or political will to be a credible defence actor, the CEE countries will be sceptical of the Union’s ability to cope with the Russian threat and will see NATO as ‘the central defence guarantor’ (Tardy 2021, 2).

Of course, Russia presents multiple risks to Europe. According to the NATO Supreme Allied Command Transformation (2021, 6) assessment, ‘Russia will use a suite of military and non-military hybrid warfare tools, including disinformation campaigns, influence operations, economic sanctions, diplomatic pressure and energy supply cuts, to guard against any potential external threat and undermine Western democracies’. If NATO is considered the prime responder to classical military threats, looking for solutions to other risks and threats opens up the possibility of enhanced NATO–EU cooperation, which will require the right balance of roles to be found.

Regardless of the balance, the Strategic Compass should address the EU's role in European defence. There are three reasons for this. The first is that the EU has to show solidarity with all its members and adhere to Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union, the mutual aid and assistance clause. The second reason is because the US, a key NATO ally, due to the shift of its strategic focus to Asia, may become engaged in a conflict that would not allow it to come to the aid of European Allies, or at least not immediately. Third and finally, there are EU member states that are not covered by NATO's collective defence clause. The roles of the EU and NATO in European security and defence, as well as NATO–EU relations, should therefore undoubtedly be addressed in the Strategic Compass and in NATO's new strategic concept. Within this context it is a positive that the two processes are running in parallel.

Capability development: challenges for CEE

The processes of risk assessment, defining the level of ambition and capability development should be synchronised. Finding the balance among these three processes will be of key importance for European security and defence. Undoubtedly, building up the necessary capabilities, both military and civilian, will require time and resources, and will be challenging.

One of the main challenges to European capabilities will be overcoming the approach to development that is based on national priorities and views, which to a high degree is influenced by national risk and threat assessments. As mentioned in the 2020 Coordinated Annual Review on Defence report of the European Defence Agency:

The prime reference for participating Member States' (pMS) future defence plans continues to be national defence interest, based on different perceptions of the security environment, historical background, specific regional security environment and threats as well as risks to national security. This determines national defence spending, the size and shape of national capability profiles and defence related activities, including the approach towards defence cooperation and the openness towards the European defence initiatives. (European Defence Agency 2020, 2)

From the perspective of the development of European capabilities, the CEE countries have some similarities with each other, but also some differences. Understanding the unique positions of these countries will contribute to making better decisions at the European level.

The CEE countries differ in terms of population, economic power, size and the structure of their armed forces, among many other factors. Table 1 below shows some of the parameters related to their military capabilities.

Based on the number of servicemen, we can say that, with the exception of Poland, the countries on the EU's eastern flank do not have large armies, meaning they do not possess significant military potential. This also means that they lack key capabilities,

Table 1. National defence expenditure in CEE.

Country	In national currency (millions)	In US dollars (millions)	As a share of GDP (%)	Estimated defence expenditure as a share of GDP for 2021 (%)	Military personnel (thousands)
Bulgaria	1,593 (leva)	962	1.45	1.56	24.6
Czechia	66,737 (koruny)	2,910	1.16	1.42	25.0
Estonia	569 (euros)	637	2.03	2.28	6.4
Hungary	596,008 (forint)	2,050	1.25	1.60	23.0
Latvia	618 (euros)	692	2.03	2.27	6.4
Lithuania	977 (euros)	1,094	2.00	2.03	14.9
Poland	45,404 (zloty)	11,824	1.98	2.10	113.1
Romania	19,527 (new lei)	4,608	1.85	2.02	64.5
Slovakia	1,610 (euros)	1,802	1.71	1.73	12.2
Slovenia	511 (euros)	572	1.06	1.28	6.0

Source: NATO (2021).

Note: The data for all countries are for 2019, with the exception of those for Bulgaria, which are for 2018, as in 2019 there was a one-off payment for eight F-16 aircraft which significantly increased defence expenditure for that year.

especially when it comes to territorial defence, or carrying out missions and operations on national territories or abroad. For this reason these countries rely on NATO capabilities to fill in the gaps. The clearest example of this is the deployment since the beginning of 2022 of fighter jets from the US, Spain, Belgium and the Netherlands, among others, to Bulgaria, Romania and Poland to enhance the NATO Air Policing mission amid tensions with Russia. The Baltic countries rely entirely on the Allies' fighters for policing their airspace.

While the CEE countries have done a lot to transform their defence systems to meet NATO and EU standards, much of the critical military infrastructure and armaments are from the time of their participation in the Warsaw Pact and are morally and/or physically obsolete. Currently all the CEE countries are implementing ambitious military modernisation programmes, but a lot of time and resources will be needed to achieve full compatibility with their NATO and EU allies.

A key factor in building new capabilities is national defence budgets. As can be seen from the table, only those CEE countries which identify Russia as a threat to their sovereignty allocate 2% of GDP (or close to it) to defence. The other countries' allocations are below this threshold but are gradually increasing. Bulgaria plans to reach the 2% pledge by 2024 according to official national documentation (Bulgaria, Ministry of Defence 2017).

If we look more closely at the defence budgets, we can see that the real volume of defence expenditure, whether in the national currency or in US dollars, is relatively low (columns 2 and 3 of the table). If added together, the total defence expenditure of all CEE

countries in 2019 was \$27,151 million, which is similar to the defence expenditure of Italy (\$23,559 million) and almost half the defence expenditure of Germany (\$52,549 million) (NATO 2021). Total EU defence spending in 2019 totalled €186 billion (European Defence Agency 2021), meaning that the expenditure of the CEE countries comprised less than 13% of this.

The next problem relates to the structure of defence budgets. The *2020 Annual Report on the State of Defence of the Republic of Bulgaria* shows that the Ministry of Defence spends 62.5% (1,150 million leva) on personnel, 18.3% (338 million leva) on maintenance and 19.2% (354 million leva) on capital expenditures (Bulgaria, Ministry of Defence 2020). If converted from the national currency into euros, however, this equates to just €181 million on new equipment, which is extremely insufficient to modernise the armed forces.

Similar to Bulgaria, about 60% of the Polish defence budget is allocated to personnel expenditure (Głowacki 2021). Despite this, Poland allocates a relatively large amount for modernisation and new equipment due to its relatively larger defence budget. Romania also has serious ambitions in the sphere of defence innovation and acquisition. According to Janes, Romanian capital expenditure 'increased to RON8.6 billion [approximately €1.74 billion] in 2022 and official projections suggest it will reach RON14 billion [approximately €2.83 billion] by 2025. As a percentage of the budget, this is a move from 15% in 2015 to 32% in 2022 and is projected to reach 41% in 2025, exceeding the 20% NATO target' (Popescu 2021).

Despite all the efforts of the CEE countries to modernise their defence capabilities, it is still going to take a lot more resources and time. All the CEE countries are united behind the idea that the guiding principle in capacity building is synchronisation with NATO's capability-building process, not the EU planning process. For countries such as Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, this is because they see NATO and the US as the key guarantors of their sovereignty and territorial integrity. The other countries—Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary and Slovenia—fear that building separate European defence capabilities will require additional defence investments, and they want to avoid the duplication of capabilities between NATO and the EU. As Ulrike Franke and Tara Varma point out, the countries that form CEE would like to see 'efforts to develop European Strategic Autonomy as compatible with NATO, so long as Europe avoids delinking, duplicating, or discriminating' (Franke and Varma 2019, 74).

Despite their willingness to reach 2% of GDP spending on defence, due to their relatively low defence expenditure and the structure of their defence budgets, the CEE countries will experience difficulties building defence capabilities, especially in terms of the acquisition of sophisticated new military equipment.

A separate issue is to what extent the CEE countries can contribute to European capacity building. In most of the CEE countries the military production base, if one

exists at all, was built years ago to meet the needs of the former Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Despite significant investments in recent years to launch the production of defence products that meet NATO and EU standards, the military–industrial complex in CEE generally remains at a different technological level, which makes closer integration with Western European defence production and procurement processes impossible. The differences in the defence production bases could be an obstacle to the realisation of one of the main goals of the European Defence Industrial Development Programme, namely ‘to foster cooperation between undertakings and Member States, in the development of defence products or technologies’ (European Commission n. d.).

This leads to a difficult question: will the CEE countries become part of the European Defence Industrial Base, and hence be part of the development and production of defence capabilities for the EU and NATO, or will the countries from different parts of Europe become divided into ‘producers’ and ‘buyers’? At the 2019 NATO summit, Bulgarian President Rumen Radev raised this issue and called on the Allies ‘to look for mechanisms to ensure that the Alliance does not become an alliance between producers and buyers of defence products, but rather an alliance between partners that jointly develop defence capabilities through the integration of research and joint production’ (Bulgaria, President of the Republic 2022).

It is important to address this question in the Strategic Compass and other relevant EU documents and policies in order to guarantee the geographical balance of the common European defence market. I share the opinion of the contributors to a Centre for European Policy Studies article, that

to guarantee geographical balance in the nascent single market for defence and lessen concerns in Central and Eastern Europe about undermining NATO’s collective security blanket, the Commission should consider financial support the eastern and south-eastern flanks. The aim should also be to encourage partnerships between these countries’ local defence and technological industrial bases, and the expertise of multinational corporations in Western Europe. (Blockmans and Macchiarini Crosson 2020)

While defence capability building must be addressed in the EU Strategic Compass, it also needs to be addressed through the prism of the role of partners, mainly the US. Since the turn of the century many of the CEE countries have acquired high-tech defence products from the US, not only to increase their defence capabilities but also to attract American investment, demonstrate the importance of the transatlantic relationship, and underline the role of the American factor in their defence and security.

Conclusion

As we can see, the CEE countries seriously differ in their assessments of the risks to their security and hence in their approaches to addressing them. Several of the countries assess the Russian risk as an existential threat and rely mainly on NATO and the US to deal with it.

The development of defence capabilities in the CEE countries is primarily seen as a NATO-led process, with European defence planning viewed as complementary. For the CEE countries, European defence initiatives should reinforce NATO, rather than provide an alternative or create duplication.

The eastern flank of the EU will remain underdeveloped in terms of defence capabilities, despite the willingness and efforts of the CEE countries to invest in their armed forces. Thus these countries will continue to rely on collective capabilities, especially for territorial defence.

Cooperation between the CEE member states and Western European member states in the development and production of high-tech defence products is very difficult due to differences in the defence production bases. It is important to create the conditions for the CEE countries to participate in various European projects by making common funds available.

Note

1. These were Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

References

- Bechev, D. (2018). *Russia's influence in Bulgaria*. New Direction. <https://newdirection.online/2018-publications-pdf/ND-report-RussiasInfluenceInBulgaria-preview-lo-res.pdf>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Blockmans, S., & Macchiarini Crosson, D. (2020). Four steps towards a European Defence Union. *Centre for European Policy Studies*, 18 March. <https://www.ceps.eu/four-steps-towards-a-european-defence-union/>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Borrell, J. (2020). Remarks made at the European Defence Agency's annual virtual conference, Brussels, 4 December. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/89945/european-defence-agency-remarks-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-annual-virtual_en.
- Borrell, J. (2021). 2021 in review: A year of transitions. *EEAS, HR/VP Blog*, 27 December. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/109350/2021-review-year-transitions_en. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Bulgaria, Ministry of Defence. (2017). Национален план за повишаване на разходите за отбрана на 2% от брутният вътрешен продукт на Република България до 2024 г [National plan for the increase of defence expenditures to 2% from the GNP of the Republic of Bulgaria by 2024]. Sofia. https://www.mod.bg/bg/doc/cooperation/20181005_Natsionalen_plan_BG.pdf. Accessed 2 February 2022.
- Bulgaria, Ministry of Defence. (2020). Доклад за състоянието на отбраната и въоръжените сили 2020 [2020 annual report on the state of defence of the Republic of Bulgaria]. https://www.mod.Bg/bg/doc/drugi/20210405_Doklad_otbrana_2020.pdf. Accessed 2 February 2022.
- Bulgaria, President of the Republic. (2022). Address to the people and the National Assembly after the swearing-in ceremony at the 47th National Assembly, 19 January. <https://m.president.bg/en/cat45/1474/Vstapitelna-rech-na-prezidenta-Rumen-Radev-pred-47to-Narodno-sabranie>. Accessed 26 January 2022.

- European Commission, Directorate-General for Defence Industry and Space. (n.d). European Defence Industrial Development Programme (EDIDP). https://ec.europa.eu/defence-industry-space/eu-defence-industry/european-defence-industrial-development-programme-edidp_en. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- European Defence Agency. (2020). 2020 CARD report, executive summary. <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/reports/card-2020-executive-summary-report.pdf>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- European Defence Agency. (2021). *Defence data 2018-2019: Key findings and analysis*. <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/brochures/2019-eda-defence-data-report.pdf/>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Fiott, D. (2020). *Uncharted territory? Towards a common threat analysis and a Strategic Compass for EU security and defence*. EU Institute for Security Studies, Brief no. 16. https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%2016%20Strategic%20Compass_0.pdf. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Franke, U., & Varma, T. (2019). *Independence play: Europe's pursuit of strategic autonomy*. European Council on Foreign Relations. July. <https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/Independence-play-Europes-pursuit-of-strategic-autonomy.pdf>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Głowacki, B. (2021). Poland pledges major new defense spending. Is it real, or political hype? *Breaking Defense*, 9 November. <https://breakingdefense.com/2021/11/poland-pledges-major-new-defense-spending-is-it-real-or-political-hype/>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Huang, C., & Cha, J. (2020). Russia and Putin receive low ratings globally. *Pew Research Centre*, 7 February. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/02/07/russia-and-putin-receive-low-ratings-globally/>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Koenig, N. (2020). *The EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence: Just another paper?* Hertie School, Jacques Delors Centre, 10 July. https://hertieschool-f4e6.kxcdn.com/fileadmin/2_Research/1_About_our_research/2_Research_centres/6_Jacques_Delors_Centre/Publications/20200710_Strategic_Compas_Koenig.pdf. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Milo, D. (2021). *The image of Russia in Central & Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans*. GLOBSEC. Bratislava. <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Image-of-Russia-Mighty-Slavic-Brother-or-Hungry-Bear-Nextdoor.pdf>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- NATO. (2021). *Defence expenditure of NATO countries (2014–2021)*. 11 June. PR/CP(2021)094. https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/6/pdf/210611-pr-2021-094-en.pdf. Accessed 2 February 2022.
- NATO Supreme Allied Command Transformation. (2021). *Regional perspectives report on Russia, strategic foresight analysis*. Norfolk, VA. <https://www.act.nato.int/application/files/9816/1350/4281/regional-perspectives-2021-01.pdf>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Pezard, S., Radin, A., Szayna, T., & Larrabee, S. F. (2017). *European relations with Russia: Threat perceptions, responses, and strategies in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis*. RAND Corporation. Santa Monica, CA. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1500/RR1579/RAND_RR1579.pdf. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Popescu, A.-R. (2021). Romania passes state budget, increases defence spending. *Janes*, 30 December. <https://www.janes.com/defence-news/news-detail/romania-passes-state-budget-increases-defence-spending>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Tardy, T. (2021). *For a new NATO–EU bargain*. Egmont Institute, Security Policy Brief no. 138. <https://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2021/02/SPB138.pdf?type=pdf>. Accessed 26 January 2022.
- Terlikowski, M. (2021). Poland. In C. Brustlein (ed.), *Collective collapse or resilience? European defense priorities in the pandemic era* (pp. 65–74). Ifri. Paris. https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/brustlein_ed_collective_collapse_or_resilience_2021.pdf. Accessed 26 January 2022.

Author biography

Yordan Bozhilov is the founder and president of the Sofia Security Forum. He was a long-standing government official in the Bulgarian Ministry of Defence (1992–2013) and defence and security adviser to the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2013–18).



The EU to the rescEU? Assessing the geopolitics of the EU's medical stockpile

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 48–55
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221088368
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Andrew Glencross

Abstract

This article uses a geopolitical lens to assess the EU's response to COVID-19 by exploring the Commission's creation of an emergency medical stockpile, dubbed rescEU. The article describes the creation, financing and distribution of this stockpile, which comes under the aegis of the Civil Protection Mechanism, in its first year of operation, 2020–1. What the analysis shows is how the creation and distribution of medical assistance was justified by the need to adapt to a changing international environment, one in which Russia and China contested the EU's solidarity, both within the EU27 and towards its neighbours. The EU has committed to investing large sums to develop pandemic resilience via stockpiling. However, what remains to be seen is how far such a policy can strengthen solidarity and counteract anti-EU narratives in the global context of the increasing strategic competition facing the EU.

Keywords

Stockpiling, COVID-19, Geopolitics, Health emergency, Pandemic resilience

Introduction

The EU response to COVID-19 took many forms, from a stimulus package to finance economic recovery to institutional reform to create an agency to enhance preparedness for future health emergencies. These measures have been framed as an attempt to carry out a further 'rescue of the nation state in Europe' (Brooks et al. 2021, 235) in a nod to how integration set the foundations for post-war economic reconstruction. One particularly striking aspect of the EU's response was the move to increase pandemic resilience by promoting the stockpiling of medical countermeasures, notably personal

Corresponding author:

A. Glencross, ESPOL, Catholic University of Lille, 83 Boulevard Vauban, 59016 Lille, France.
Email: andrew.glencross@univ-catholille.fr



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

protective equipment (PPE). However, as this article demonstrates, the rescEU stockpile, nested under the aegis of the Civil Protection Mechanism (CPM), is a public health tool created within a broader geopolitical setting, one Josep Borrell (2020) has called ‘a battle of narratives’.

The European Commission faced a complex policy dilemma when it sought to extend its competences into the domain of public health. The EU justified the need for such policies on the basis of output legitimacy: collective action would achieve results that were better than those any single member state could hope to accomplish by acting independently in conditions of interdependence (Majone 2005). This justification was particularly apt given the need to protect the interests of the smaller member states, which have limited purchasing power for medical countermeasures. The desire to build up a stockpile of PPE to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and build resilience for future health emergencies was thus linked to polity legitimacy (Ferrera et al. 2021), which had been suffering from a decade of crises.

The article proceeds by first explaining how EU medical assistance in the period 2020–1 was loaded with geopolitical considerations, because access to medical aid—both within the EU and in its immediate neighbourhood—formed part of the EU’s strategic competition with Russia and China. Second, it describes the development of the rescEU programme and how EU stockpiling is financed and organised. Third and finally, data on the distribution of Civil Protection and rescEU stockpiles is analysed to show how these resources were distributed within the EU and amongst third countries. This demonstrates how Brussels’ stockpiling policy was linked to the need to counteract Chinese and Russian attempts to demonstrate that they were more reliable partners than the EU. In this sense, the move towards stockpiling as an EU policy for developing pandemic resilience is indicative of the changing international order that has obliged the EU to rethink its global role.

The geopolitical setting of EU medical assistance during the pandemic

The EU’s response to COVID-19 took place within a setting that was from the start considered a public health emergency. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control informed the Commission on 7 January 2020 about the presence of a new type of viral pneumonia in Wuhan, China. Two days later, the Commission, acting on a threat assessment from the Centre, posted the first notification of this virus on the Early Warning and Response System. Not long after, on 17 January, the Health Security Committee, comprised of national public health representatives and ministries, met to discuss the pandemic threat for the first time (Kyriakides 2020). Consequently, the EU was swift to frame the risk as that of a serious cross-border threat to health, which would require a common approach as far as possible. This approach went hand in glove with that of the World Health Organization, which on 30 January 2020 declared the COVID-19 outbreak a public health emergency of international concern, before raising the stakes by defining it as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 (Davies and Wenham 2020: 1230–1).

An early intervention by the French and German governments explicitly framed the pandemic not just as a health emergency, but also as a geopolitical challenge that required a ‘new European approach based on strategic health sovereignty’ (France, Ministry for Europe 2020). In a situation of squeezed supply chains and an anticipated race to find a vaccine, the goal promoted by these two EU heavyweights was ‘to reduce EU dependency’ (France, Ministry for Europe 2020) when dealing with health shocks. Even more explicitly, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, warned that the pandemic was accompanied by ‘a geo-political component including a struggle for influence through spinning and the “politics of generosity”’ (Borrell 2020).

He singled out Russia and China as active agents in a battle of narratives that at this point in time sought to challenge the EU on its own turf by contesting the existence of European solidarity during the crisis. Both countries did so by putting on a highly politicised and performative show of medical assistance, especially towards Italy and Serbia. These two countries became enmeshed in a diplomatic tussle over the provenance of medical aid and other forms of support. The EU’s decision in mid-March 2020 to impose export restrictions on certain kinds of PPE, which initially affected Serbia even though it is an EU candidate country, was a public-relations disaster that allowed China to showcase its generosity. The European Commission was obliged to respond by removing Serbia from export restrictions and providing a substantial new aid package to support public health in the country (Ruge and Oertel 2020).

For its part, China organised significant shipments of PPE—at a time of exceptional global demand—to help Italian medical staff, using both governmental channels and private actors such as Huawei. This action again contrasted with the initial response of some EU countries, notably France and Germany, to impose national export bans on PPE and other medical equipment. Another feature of the Chinese assistance (which, unlike Russia’s, was not free of charge) was a concerted media campaign fostered by the Chinese embassy in Rome to showcase Italian gratitude. The Chinese authorities sought to highlight the EU’s inaction; as Small (2020, 51) writes, ‘it was not enough to argue that the Chinese Communist Party had succeeded; others had to be seen to fail’. EU leaders were caught off guard by the Chinese public-relations messaging that accompanied Beijing’s medical assistance. Indeed, the European Commission tried to counteract this narrative by highlighting the 56 tons of medical assistance that the EU had provided on the quiet to China in February 2020 via the CPM (Small 2020, 6).

The EU to the rescEU?

The EU’s pandemic stockpiling strategy to assist member states, announced in March 2020, was established under the aegis of the EU’s CPM. The latter dates from 2001 and is designed to coordinate the pooling and deployment of civil protection resources—drawing on EU funding—to provide emergency relief within and outside Europe. What constitutes such an emergency is broadly defined. In 2007, the Council of the EU (2007, 10) clarified that the mechanism exists to help protect ‘people but also the environment and

property, including cultural heritage, in the event of natural and man-made disasters, acts of terrorism and, technological, radiological or environmental accidents, including accidental marine pollution, occurring inside or outside the Community'. The wide scope of this definition reflects the difficulties faced in finding a consensus among the member states about what kinds of civil emergencies to prioritise (Bremberg and Britz 2009). In 2019, the CPM was revised to better align with the EU priority of responding to climate change. Thus was born the 'rescEU' stockpile, consisting of a pooled reserve of member state resources for disaster management, notably a fleet of aircraft for fighting forest fires.

Stockpiling itself is an ancient technique of governance based on anticipatory knowledge; it can also be decentralised and delegated to private firms or citizens (Folkers 2019). Many countries stockpile resources such as oil, gas, industrial products and foodstuffs as a way to manage temporary supply disruptions or spikes in prices. Medical stockpiles, once a feature of Cold War nuclear contingency planning, gained new relevance at the turn of the twenty-first century as the 2001 US anthrax attacks, as well as the emergence of SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) and both avian and swine flu, reminded policymakers of the need for spare capacity to provide resilience in the face of an emergency. In fact, the very concept of 'health security' came to the fore in this period, as evidenced by the establishment of the EU Health Security Committee, which was first constituted as an informal committee after the 2001 anthrax attacks (Elbe et al. 2014, 443).

The H5N1 avian flu outbreak in 2005 caused a flurry of stockpiling activity across EU member states, but without centralised coordination. National governments sought to secure vast supplies of anti-viral medicine as part of pandemic preparedness measures designed to protect front-line health workers and prevent health systems from becoming overwhelmed (Elbe et al. 2014). By the time COVID-19 struck, countries such as the US, Canada, Australia, France and the UK already had experience of amassing pharmaceutical and PPE stockpiles. The EU's decision to follow suit was prompted by Italy's request for PPE in February 2020, when its own stocks were extremely low—which was why aid from Russia and China garnered so much attention at the time. However, the CPM was ill-prepared for this request and so the Commission urgently revised the rescEU regulation to allow for the purchase and distribution of PPE and associated medical countermeasures. This was justified on the basis of 'taking action to get more equipment to member states', which Commission President von der Leyen presented as 'EU solidarity in action', because 'helping one another is the only way forward' (European Commission 2020a).

From an initial budget of €50 million, the Commission successfully argued for a huge increase in funding for rescEU as part of the 2021–7 multiannual financial framework, leading to an allocation of €1.1 billion, which will be supplemented by €1.9 billion from NextGenerationEU funds (European Council 2020). Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarčič announced this increased financing by explaining that 'When the coronavirus hit Europe, there was a lack of many kinds of medical equipment across Member States. Yet the EU did not have the power or the means to offer equipment; we could only encourage cooperation. Citizens expect the EU to act during a crisis. We all need to be

better prepared and learn the lessons. rescEU will be massively strengthened to leave no EU country behind during a crisis' (European Commission 2020b).

The stockpile, for which the Commission pays 100% of the availability, deployability and operational costs to mitigate what the Implementing Decision (European Commission 2021b, 36) calls 'low probability risks with a high impact', co-exists alongside the CPM. That is, the former is invoked in exceptional circumstances when the latter is insufficient to provide adequate assistance. Hence the stockpile is designed as a measure of last resort, for when national capacities are overwhelmed. It is also intended to provide lasting capacity beyond the immediate exigencies of the current pandemic. For instance the German-based rescEU stockpile of PPE has been contracted to operate until the end of 2027, with a mandate to make stocks available for transport within 12 hours of notification. As of June 2021, nine member states had offered to host rescEU stockpiles and thereby assume logistical responsibility for procurement: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Sweden and the Netherlands (European Commission 2021a).

Distributing EU resources

Nine member states received emergency assistance from the EU in the first year of the rescEU scheme's operation (March 2020 to March 2021). Italy benefited from support on 6 of the 22 occasions when the CPM, notably in the form of teams of doctors or other emergency responders, or rescEU was activated to supply a country in need. Croatia and Slovakia received aid on four occasions, while Bulgaria, Czechia, France, Ireland, Lithuania and Spain received assistance three times or fewer (see Table 1). At the same time, the CPM and the rescEU stockpile also distributed medical countermeasures to a range of non-EU countries. In the period from April 2020 to April 2021, these mechanisms were used 37 times to distribute PPE, hand sanitiser, ventilators and ambulances, or to send medical teams to 12 countries (as well as Dutch and French Caribbean islands). The largest beneficiaries of this COVID-19 assistance, in terms of the number of separate deliveries, were Montenegro (19), North Macedonia and Serbia (10 each), and Moldova (7). The remaining recipients, which included Ukraine, Kosovo, Georgia and Bosnia received fewer than five deliveries each (see Table 2).

The nature of the distribution of EU emergency assistance demonstrates Brussels' geopolitical understanding of the pandemic. Within the EU, it was Italy that benefited most, reflecting the fact that it was not just on the front line of the pandemic but was also a test case for demonstrating intra-European solidarity to counter Russian and Chinese narratives to the contrary. Outside the EU, the pressure on Brussels to fulfil its promises of support were felt particularly acutely in the Balkans, where again Russia and China sought to sow division. Indeed, the European Parliament was so concerned about the instrumentalisation of Russian and Chinese medical support in Serbia that in its March 2021 country report it asked the Commission and the member states to ensure sufficient vaccine supplies for the entire Western Balkans (European Parliament 2021). The Parliament explicitly noted that Serbia was a battleground for COVID-19 geopolitical narratives, stating that it 'deplores

Table 1. Intra-EU emergency assistance, March 2020–March 2021.

Country	Number of deliveries	From	EU CPM	RescEU
Italy	6	Romania, Austria, Slovakia, Denmark, Germany	4	2
Croatia	4	Austria, Romania, Germany	1	3
Slovakia	4	Belgium, Denmark, Romania	4	0
France	3	Norway, Greece	2	1
Czechia	2	Austria, the Netherlands	1	1
Spain	2	Romania, Germany	0	2
Bulgaria	1	N/A	1	0
Ireland	1	Belgium, Romania, Luxembourg, Portugal, Sweden	1	0
Lithuania	1	N/A	0	1

Source: Author's own compilation.

Table 2. Emergency assistance outside the EU, March 2020–March 2021.

Country	Number of deliveries	From	EU CPM	RescEU
Montenegro	15	Austria, Romania, Estonia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Greece, Germany, Belgium	6	9
North Macedonia	10	Austria, Estonia, Slovakia, Czechia, France, Slovenia	6	4
Serbia	10	Austria, Slovakia, Germany, Slovenia	5	5
Moldova	7	Austria, Czechia, Romania	7	0
Ukraine	4	Slovakia, Poland, Denmark	4	0
Armenia	2	Italy, Czechia, Austria	2	0
Curaçao	2	The Netherlands	2	0
Aruba	1	The Netherlands	1	0
Azerbaijan	1	Italy	1	0
Belarus	1	Poland	1	0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	Austria	1	0
Kosovo	1	Slovenia	1	0
Mongolia	1	Czechia, France	1	0
St Martin	1	The Netherlands	1	0

Source: Author's own compilation.

the disinformation campaign concerning EU assistance during the pandemic by government officials' (European Parliament 2021, 11). Hence it is no coincidence that the vast majority of non-EU assistance via the EU CPM went to the Western Balkans, the countries of which were also the only recipients of aid via the rescEU stockpile.

Conclusion

The above analysis has demonstrated that the developments in the field of pandemic resilience and solidarity are best situated within a geopolitical understanding of contemporary EU policymaking. By assuming the mantle of protector of European health during the pandemic, the Commission made itself dependent on securing support through policy results. However, an essential part of the debate over polity legitimacy was the need to engage in a ‘battle of narratives’ with those who downplayed EU solidarity in a time of need. The distribution of EU assistance via the CPM and the new rescEU stockpile hence seems to have taken into account the way particular countries, such as Italy and Serbia, became spaces of contestation over the extent of EU pandemic support. Looking to the future, the questions will be whether this trend continues, as stockpiling is set to play a central role in EU health security, and how far the provision of medical countermeasures aligns with the goal of strategic autonomy. After all, procurement from outside the EU remains the mainstay for supplying PPE (European Court of Auditors 2021).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Ndeye Diop for her brilliant assistance in helping to collect and sort data.

References

- Borrell, J. (2020). The coronavirus pandemic and the new world it is creating. *EEAS Blog*, 23 March. https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/76379/coronavirus-pandemic-and-new-world-it-creating_en. Accessed 22 January 2022.
- Bremberg, N., & Britz, M. (2009). Uncovering the diverging institutional logics of EU civil protection. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 44(3), 288–308.
- Brooks, E., de Ruijter, A., & Greer, S. L. (2021). Another European rescue of the nation-state? In S. L. Greer, E. J. King, E. Massard da Fonseca & A. Peralta-Santos (eds.), *Coronavirus politics: The comparative politics and policy of COVID-19* (pp. 235–48). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Council of the European Union. (2007). Decision 2007/779/EC (Euratom) establishing a Community Civil Protection Mechanism (recast). OJ L314 (8 November), 9.
- Davies, S. E., & Wenham, C. (2020). Why the COVID-19 response needs international relations. *International Affairs*, 96(5), 1227–51.
- Elbe, S., Roemer-Mahler, A., & Long, C. (2014). Securing circulation pharmaceutically: Antiviral stockpiling and pandemic preparedness in the European Union. *Security Dialogue*, 45(5), 440–57.
- European Commission. (2020a). COVID-19: Commission creates first ever rescEU stockpile of medical equipment. Press Release, 19 March. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_476. Accessed 22 January 2022.
- European Commission. (2020b). EU budget for recovery: €2 billion to reinforce rescEU direct crisis response tools. Press Release, 2 June. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/mex_20_987. Accessed 22 January 2022.
- European Commission. (2021a). Coronavirus: rescEU medical stockpile expands in four member states. Press Release, 11 January. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_45. Accessed 22 January 2022.
- European Commission. (2021b). Implementing Decision 2021/1886/EU amending Implementing Decision 2019/570/EU as regards stockpiling rescEU capacities in the area of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear incidents. OJ L386 (27 October), 35.

- European Council. (2020). Multiannual financial framework 2021–2027 and Next Generation EU (commitments, in 2018 prices). Press Release, 21 December. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/47567/mff-2021-2027_rev.pdf. Accessed 22 January 2022.
- European Court of Auditors. (2021). *Review no. 01: The EU's initial contribution to the public health response to COVID-19*. Luxembourg. <https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/18/Review-COVID-public-health-EN.pdf70.pdf>. Accessed 22 January 2022.
- European Parliament. (2021). European Parliament resolution on the 2019–2020 Commission reports on Serbia. 2019/2175(INI), 25 March. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2021-0115_EN.html. Accessed 22 January 2022.
- Ferrera, M., Miró, J., & Ronchi, S. (2021). Walking the road together? EU polity maintenance during the COVID-19 crisis. *West European Politics*, 44(5–6), 1–24.
- Folkers, A. (2019). Freezing time, preparing for the future: The stockpile as a temporal matter of security. *Security Dialogue*, 50(6), 493–511.
- France, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs. (2020). European Union – French–German initiative for the European recovery from the coronavirus crisis. 18 May. <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2020/05/18/french-german-initiative-for-the-european-recovery-from-the-coronavirus-crisis>.
- Kyriakides, S. (2020). Answer to parliamentary question E-002015/20 on behalf of the European Commission. 24 July. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-9-2020-002015-ASW_EN.html. Accessed 22 January 2022.
- Majone, G. (2005). *Dilemmas of European integration: The ambiguities and pitfalls of integration by stealth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ruge, M., & Oertel, J. (2020). Serbia's coronavirus diplomacy unmasked. *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 26 March. https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_serbias_coronavirus_diplomacy_unmasked. Accessed 22 January 2022.
- Small, A. (2020). The meaning of systemic rivalry: China and Europe beyond the pandemic. *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 13 May. https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/the_meaning_of_systemic_rivalry_europe_and_china_beyond_the_pandemic. Accessed 22 January 2022.

Author biography



Andrew Glencross is Associate Professor of Political Science and Deputy Director for International Affairs at the European School of Political and Social Sciences at the Catholic University of Lille. He is the author of several books, including *Why the UK Voted for Brexit: David Cameron's Great Miscalculation* (Palgrave 2016), and has published research on many areas of European integration in journals such as *European Journal of International Relations*, *International Affairs* and *International Theory*.



The Coordinated Maritime Presences concept and the EU's naval ambitions in the Indo-Pacific

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 56–65
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221089871
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Niklas Nováky

Abstract

Since the launch of the first-ever EU naval operation in 2008, the ongoing Operation Atalanta off the Horn of Africa, EU naval forces have operated primarily in Europe's vicinity or in regions in which great-power tensions have been low. Yet, the Union has also begun to seek a naval role for itself in more sensitive regions, namely the Indo-Pacific, via the new Coordinated Maritime Presences concept. This article analyses the EU's plans to play a more visible naval role in the Indo-Pacific, and argues that the extension of this concept to the region would raise the EU's level of ambition as a naval actor. However, the EU's ability to be a meaningful maritime security provider in the Indo-Pacific depends on the EU countries coming closer to seeing eye-to-eye on how the Union should approach China, and on their willingness to send vessels to the Indo-Pacific.

Keywords

EU, CSDP, Maritime security, Indo-Pacific, Coordinated Maritime Presences, Strategic Compass

Introduction

Since the creation of the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), the Union has launched three naval operations in this framework. These are Operation Atalanta, which has protected maritime traffic off the Horn of Africa from Somali pirates since 2008;

Corresponding author:

N. Nováky, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 20 Rue du Commerce, 1st floor, Brussels, B-1000, Belgium.

Email: nn@martenscentre.eu

This article was written before the EU Council decided to extend the CMP concept in the North-Western Indian Ocean on 21 February 2021, and before it approved the EU's Strategic Compass on 21 March 2022. It therefore reflects realities that preceded these two events.



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

Operation Sophia, which sought to disrupt the business model of human smugglers and traffickers in the Central Mediterranean from 2015 to 2020; and Operation IRINI, which has contributed to the implementation of the UN's arms embargo on Libya since 2020.

The EU's past and present naval activities are impressive considering that the CSDP's original *raison d'être* was to provide the EU with the capacity to conduct land-based military operations in its neighbourhood following its failure to deal with the wars of Yugoslav succession in the 1990s (Howorth 2007, 207). In fact, Atalanta, Sophia and IRINI show that EU security and defence cooperation has acquired a significant naval dimension. Since the late 2000s, this dimension has also become increasingly visible in EU documents such as the 2014 EU Maritime Security Strategy and the 2016 EU Global Strategy, both of which express the Union's desire to become a more effective naval actor globally.

At the time of writing, the EU is considering extending its new Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) concept to the Indo-Pacific, increasingly a centre of geopolitical competition. In this area China's rise and ambitions are challenging the regional rules-based order and established principles of international law, such as the freedom of navigation. The CMP concept is a flexible, non-CSDP tool that can be implemented in any maritime area of the world that the Council of the EU decides to designate as a Maritime Area of Interest (MAI) (EEAS 2021a). Establishing an MAI would not, however, create a CSDP naval operation like Atalanta; rather, it would enhance coordination between EU countries' vessels, which would remain under their national chains of command. The EU has been conducting a pilot of the CMP concept since January 2021 to coordinate its member states' national naval deployments in the Gulf of Guinea, which has become the world's number-one hotspot for maritime piracy. If the Gulf of Guinea pilot is successful and the CMP concept is extended to the Indo-Pacific, EU vessels might eventually contribute to ensuring freedom of navigation and open sea lines of communication in the region, and conduct joint naval exercises and port calls with the Union's partners.

This article argues that the EU's plans to have a naval presence in the Indo-Pacific via the CMP concept suggest that the Union is seeking to raise the level of ambition of its naval dimension to narrow the gap between its maritime rhetoric and what it does in practice. Depending on the geographical scope of a possible Indo-Pacific MAI, having an EU naval presence in China's backyard could put the Union in a situation in which it has to deal with the vessels of an unfriendly great power if it wishes to contribute to the freedom of navigation and open sea lines of communication in the region. This would be unexplored territory for the Union's security and defence policy. The rest of this article is divided into three sections. The first explains what the CMP concept is and what it does. The second analyses the EU's plans to extend the CMP concept to the Indo-Pacific, provided that the Gulf of Guinea pilot is successful. The third and final section concludes the article.

The CMP concept

The EU is working on more flexible ways of conducting naval operations in response to growing demand, both from within the EU and from the outside world, for the Union to be a maritime security provider in various parts of the globe. To this end, the Union has

developed the CMP concept, which began to emerge in 2019 (EEAS 2019). It can be implemented in any maritime area of the world that the Council of the EU decides to designate as an MAI to the Union (EEAS 2021a). It uses, on a voluntary basis, EU countries' naval assets that are already deployed to or passing through a specific MAI.

The idea is that EU countries will volunteer their naval assets to perform additional tasks in the MAI that have a specific EU dimension, while keeping those assets under national chains of command. The CMP MAI Coordination Cell, which has been established within the EU Military Staff, will coordinate the activities of these naval assets, and share analysis and information between them. It uses the Maritime Surveillance network, a solution developed by the European Defence Agency that allows dialogue between European maritime information systems to create a common 'Recognised Maritime Picture' (EDA 2021). In a nutshell, the CMP concept relies on enhanced coordination of EU countries' national naval assets to ensure a more permanent and more visible European maritime presence in the MAI. It is therefore a tool for information exchange between the participating EU countries and for enhancing complementarities and synergies between their national naval assets (Bosilca and Riddervold 2021).

On 25 January 2021, the EU launched a pilot of its new CMP concept in the Gulf of Guinea and established the region as an MAI. The Gulf of Guinea is a strategic region in West Africa that encompasses 17 countries from Senegal to Angola. It is rich in natural resources (i.e. hydrocarbons, minerals and fisheries) and critical to African maritime traffic: it contributes 20% of that traffic and has nearly 20 commercial ports. Due to these attributes and the region's high unemployment and corruption levels, criminal activity has surged in the Gulf of Guinea: it suffers *inter alia* from illegal and unreported fishing, drugs and arms trafficking, and maritime piracy. The Gulf of Guinea is currently the world's number-one piracy hotspot: in the first quarter of 2021, it accounted for 43% of all reported piracy incidents in the world (ICC Commercial Crime Services 2021).

The Gulf of Guinea was chosen for the pilot of the CMP concept because there is a need to improve maritime security in the region. In addition, the EU is familiar with the Gulf of Guinea as it has been monitoring maritime security in the region for years (Germond 2015, 186). It also has an established a presence there—the Union is undertaking multiple multi-million-euro programmes and projects to improve the capacities of the littoral states in areas such as maritime security and fisheries governance (EEAS 2021a). The CMP pilot seeks to further enhance the EU's maritime presence and political influence in the Gulf of Guinea, to promote international cooperation at sea and to contribute to the Union's broader integrated approach towards the region (Council of the EU 2021c). The idea is that those member states that have naval vessels deployed in or transiting through the EU's Gulf of Guinea MAI will voluntarily assume additional tasks that have a specific EU dimension. The CMP concept is expected to have important positive ramifications for the region's security environment and for transatlantic cooperation too, given that the US also has a presence in the Gulf of Guinea (Borges de Castro 2022). In February 2021, the European External Action Service informed the European Parliament that it was expecting two Spanish, two Italian, two Portuguese and up to three French naval vessels to be present in the Gulf of Guinea and available to patrol the Union's MAI

in 2021 (European Parliament Multimedia Centre 2021). However, the CMP is not a CSDP operation; it is a flexible Common Foreign and Security Policy tool that does not have a command-and-control structure. It seeks to increase the coherence of the member states' national naval presences in the Gulf of Guinea, which remain under national chains of command, and to improve their access to information. This makes it similar in character to the EU's naval coordination action, which sought to facilitate the availability and operational action of EU member states' naval assets in the fight against maritime pirates off the coast of Somalia before the launch of Operation Atalanta in 2008. The Council will review the CMP pilot in February 2022, after which the concept might be extended to additional regions.

The EU's naval ambitions in the Indo-Pacific

In June 2020, the EU began to develop a 'Strategic Compass' for its security and defence policy.¹ The aim of the Strategic Compass, which is scheduled to be adopted in March 2022, is to enhance implementation of the Union's existing level of ambition in security and defence, and to develop new goals and targets to guide development in this field. These goals and targets will be organised within four thematic baskets: act (crisis management), secure (resilience), invest (capabilities) and partner (partnerships). Each will have implications for the EU's naval ambitions (Fiott 2021).

In spring 2021, the Strategic Compass process focused on strategic dialogue, during which EU member states put forward more than 20 non-papers and organised over 50 events to develop proposals that could be included in the final document. As that process has advanced, EU member states have discussed *inter alia* how to develop CSDP naval operations and the CMP concept to improve the EU's operational readiness; how to respond to geopolitical tensions in the maritime domain to ensure that the Union can protect its interests; the possibility of organising EU naval exercises to enhance the interoperability of the member states' navies; and how to show support for the Union's partners, enhance maritime capacity building and improve joint maritime situational awareness.

Many of the maritime-security-related discussions that have taken place in the context of the Strategic Compass process have focused on the CMP concept and boosting the EU's partnerships with countries in the Indo-Pacific, which the Union defines as 'the geographic area from the east coast of Africa to the Pacific Island States' (Council of the EU 2021a, 3). This is due to the Indo-Pacific's economic importance to Europe, the growing geopolitical tensions in the region and the increased attention given to it by individual European countries. France, Germany and the Netherlands have published national Indo-Pacific strategies since 2018 and they have also pushed the EU to pay greater attention to the region. France views itself as a resident power in the Indo-Pacific due to its overseas territories in the region,² and believes that a 'whole-of-EU' approach to the Indo-Pacific would complement its national strategy and enhance the visibility and impact of its national naval deployments (Pajon 2021).

Some guidelines have already been set for the EU's naval ambitions in the Indo-Pacific. On 19 April, the Council adopted conclusions on the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy,

which the Commission and the European External Action Service then presented on 16 September. The conclusions and the new Indo-Pacific strategy itself contain two notable points about the Union's naval ambitions in the region. First, the EU will explore the possibility of replicating its Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO) II activities in the Southern Pacific (Council of the EU 2021a, 8). Launched in April 2020, CRIMARIO II is an EU-funded project. It has a budget of €7.5 million and is managed by Expertise France, a French agency for international technical cooperation (CRIMARIO 2021).³ The project seeks to contribute to a safer and more secure maritime domain through cross-sectoral, inter-agency and cross-regional cooperation. The Union has already extended the geographical scope of CRIMARIO II from the Indian Ocean into South and South-East Asia to contribute to safer sea lines of communication, and is now looking to extend it even further.

Second, the EU will assess the possibility of establishing an MAI in the Indo-Pacific in the framework of the CMP concept, provided that its pilot in the Gulf of Guinea is successful. According to the Council, the objectives of an MAI in the Indo-Pacific could be, *inter alia*, to cooperate with partners' navies and build their capacities where relevant, to establish comprehensive monitoring of maritime security and freedom of navigation, and to take action to ensure environmental security in the area (Council of the EU 2021a, 9). The Council further stated that the CMP concept 'could contribute to addressing the existing security challenges in the region', and that EU member states 'acknowledge the importance of a meaningful European naval presence in the Indo-Pacific' (Council of the EU 2021a, 9).

The extension of the CMP concept to the Indo-Pacific would strengthen the EU's role in the region. First, it would 'amplify' the impact of the member states' national naval assets when they are deployed in the region (Morcos 2021). France is currently the EU country with the largest naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, with 10 ships there, including 4 frigates (Barry and Decis 2021). Germany is also seeking to play a small naval role in the region by deploying the frigate *Bayern*, which set sail for the Indo-Pacific in August 2021 for a six-month mission to uphold the freedom of navigation in international waters and express support for Germany's partners (Sprenger 2021). The CMP concept would help coordinate such national deployments and increase information sharing between vessels.

Second, the extension of the CMP concept to the Indo-Pacific would allow the EU to enhance its partnerships with countries such as India, Japan and South Korea, *inter alia* through joint naval exercises, port calls and greater information sharing (Fiott and Lindstrom 2021, 44; Desmaele et al. 2021, 41). It would therefore 'concretely translate' the key importance of the Indo-Pacific for the EU's foreign and security policy (Jourdain 2021) and show the Union's partners that the EU is committed to contributing to their security.

Third, the extension of the CMP concept to the Indo-Pacific would raise the concept's overall level of ambition: it would mean that the EU would have a permanent naval presence in a sensitive region where its vessels might have to deal with vessels from China, a great power with significant geopolitical ambitions in the Indo-Pacific.

Due to the sensitivity of the Indo-Pacific as an area of operation, the EU is unlikely to deploy a CSDP naval operation there. Despite the EU's cautious political alignment with the US on China in 2021 following the G7 summit in Cornwall and the EU–US summit in Brussels (G7 2021; Council of the EU 2021b), the Union continues to be divided on how it should approach China and how it should deal with Beijing's territorial ambitions in the Indo-Pacific. Although the European Commission labelled China as 'a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance' in 2019 (European Commission 2019, 1), there continue to be significant differences of opinion between EU countries on what the Union's tone vis-à-vis Beijing should be: recent EU statements on China's actions in the South China Sea and in Hong Kong have been either vetoed or watered down by several member states which have developed close ties to China (Von der Burchard and Barigazzi 2021). The main thing that EU countries agree on is that freedom of navigation and open sea lines of communication should be maintained in the Indo-Pacific in accordance with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Thus, given that the EU can deploy naval power only by consensus (Germond 2015, 101–2), it is unlikely that the Council will find the unanimity needed to launch a CSDP naval operation in the Indo-Pacific anytime soon: the political sensitivity of such a deployment would be far greater than that relating to criticism of Beijing's human rights record. In addition, developments in the Indo-Pacific do not pose an existential threat to the EU (Pejsova 2019, 4), which is why the Union is likely to play only a limited role in the region.

From an EU perspective, the CMP concept provides the Union with a more flexible and less sensitive way to have a naval presence in the Indo-Pacific. Given that it does not create a CSDP operation and the participating countries' vessels remain under national chains of command, it might be easier for the Council to extend the concept to the Indo-Pacific. The April 2021 Council conclusions on the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy and the discussions that were held in the framework of the Strategic Compass process in spring 2021 certainly suggest that the Union is moving in this direction. A permanent naval presence in the Indo-Pacific would enable the Union to protect its interests in the region more effectively by ensuring that international law is respected in the maritime and other domains, thereby contributing to the security of its regional partners and acting in cooperation with the US. Some have even argued that developing the CMP concept in the Indo-Pacific could eventually constitute a credible deterrent to China in the South China Sea (Tyrrell 2021). However, China may not see the difference between the CMP concept and a CSDP naval operation, which means that extending the concept to the Indo-Pacific could cause EU–China relations to deteriorate further (Pacheco Pardo and Leveringhaus 2021, 26–7).

However, there are questions marks over the EU's ability to play an effective naval role in the Indo-Pacific via the CMP concept. First, the vetoed and watered-down EU foreign-policy statements on China point to a reluctance in some EU capitals to agree to proposals in the Council that might offend Beijing and negatively affect their bilateral relationships with China. Although this reluctance is unlikely to torpedo the extension of the CMP concept to the Indo-Pacific entirely, given the current momentum, it is likely to influence the geographical focus of a possible EU MAI in the region. It could be that such an MAI would cover the Indian Ocean, which is already familiar territory for the

EU due to Operation Atalanta, while more sensitive areas such as the East and South China Seas would remain outside of it due to differences among EU capitals.

Second, there is the question of resources: only France has a long-standing naval presence in the Indo-Pacific. Although Germany, Italy and the Netherlands have the capacity to play a greater naval role in the region, they would have to commit more resources, which could only happen gradually due to tight military budgets, competing security challenges closer to Europe (e.g. Russia) and existing operational commitments (Crabtree 2022). Some experts have therefore argued that Germany should focus its diplomatic and military activities on the North Atlantic and the High North regions, and rely primarily on diplomatic and economic instruments in the Indo-Pacific, which they see as sufficient to assure partners in the region of Berlin's sustained interest (Paul and Swistek 2021, 42). Most other EU countries still lack national Indo-Pacific strategies and remain unwilling to engage militarily in the region (Koenig 2021). The fear of China's response might also deter some EU countries from contributing vessels, particularly if the EU's Indo-Pacific MAI also covered East and South-East Asia and/or involved cooperation with the US (Pacheco Pardo and Leveringhaus 2021, 26).

It is therefore necessary to wait for the outcome of the review of the CMP pilot in the Gulf of Guinea and the conclusion of the Strategic Compass process in March 2022 to see more clearly where the EU is heading in the Indo-Pacific as a naval actor.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, the EU is planning to establish a permanent naval presence in the Indo-Pacific using the CMP concept, provided that the Gulf of Guinea pilot is successful. This has been indicated by both the Council and the EU's new Indo-Pacific strategy. It has also been discussed in the framework of the Strategic Compass process, which will conclude in March 2022.

The discussions that have been held in the framework of the Strategic Compass process and the EU's new Indo-Pacific strategy suggest that the Union is seeking to raise the level of ambition of the naval dimension of its security and defence policy. Although extending the CMP concept to the Indo-Pacific would not create a CSDP naval operation, it would nevertheless mean that the EU would have a more-or-less permanent naval presence in China's backyard. The participating countries' vessels might, for example, conduct freedom of navigation operations and contribute to open sea lines of communication in the region. Having such a presence would be unexplored territory for the EU, given the high geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific due to China's behaviour in the East and South China Seas.

It is possible that the EU's plans to extend the CMP concept to the Indo-Pacific will be hampered by the specific sensitivities of certain member states. With regard to the Indo-Pacific, these sensitivities will be expressed as a reluctance among these member states to support EU actions that might offend China. In the past, we have seen that several member states that have developed close political and economic ties to Beijing have vetoed or watered down EU statements critical of China's actions. If the EU lacks the political

cohesion to criticise China when most of its member states deem such criticism necessary, it is unlikely to have the political capacity to agree to having a meaningful—from the perspective of its partners—naval presence in the Indo-Pacific. Although extending the CMP concept to the Indo-Pacific would not create a CSDP naval operation, doing so would nevertheless require unanimity among the member states due to the EU's decision-making rules in its foreign policy and CSDP. It is therefore possible that the EU will not be able to achieve that unanimity, despite the rhetoric that is coming from Brussels regarding the need to boost the EU's effectiveness as a global maritime security provider.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank George Pepios, research and editorial intern for the *European View* at the Martens Centre, for his assistance in conducting research for this article.

Notes

1. The Strategic Compass is a German idea that emerged in the run-up to Germany's autumn 2020 EU Council Presidency. Germany could see that there was a gap between the EU's existing level of ambition in security and defence, and what the Union does in practice in this field. Germany could also see that there was a need to provide greater political direction to the EU's security and defence policy following the launch of new initiatives such as Permanent Structured Cooperation and the European Defence Fund.
2. These are French Polynesia, New Caledonia and Wallis-et-Futuna.
3. More specifically, CRIMARIO II seeks to (1) enhance information exchange and analysis, and crisis/incident management; (2) strengthen inter-agency cooperation in maritime surveillance, policing, investigation and judicial matters; and (3) facilitate the implementation of international legal instruments and regional arrangements.

References

- Barry, B., & Decis, H. (2021). Posturing and presence: The United Kingdom and France in the Indo-Pacific. *International Institute for Strategic Studies, Military Balance Blog*, 11 June. <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/military-balance/2021/06/france-uk-indo-pacific>. Accessed 26 August 2021.
- Borges de Castro, R. (ed). (2022). *Europe in the world in 2022: The transatlantic comeback?* European Policy Centre, 2022 Outlook Paper. 21 January. https://www.epc.eu/content/PDF/2022/Outlook_Paper_2022.pdf. Accessed 8 February 2022.
- Bosilca, R.-L., & Riddervold, M. (2021). *The European Maritime Security and Defence Policy architecture: Implications for Norway*. Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. December. https://www.nupi.no/nupi_eng/Publications/CRISTin-Pub/The-European-Maritime-Security-and-Defence-Policy-Architecture-Implications-for-Norway. Accessed 8 February 2022.
- Council of the EU. (2021a). EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific – Council conclusions. Brussels, 7914/21. 16 April. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7914-2021-INIT/en/pdf>. Accessed 26 August 2021.
- Council of the EU. (2021b). EU–US summit statement: 'Towards a renewed transatlantic partnership'. Press Release, 15 June. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/06/15/eu-us-summit-statement-towards-a-renewed-transatlantic-partnership/>. Accessed 11 February 2022.

- Council of the EU. (2021c). Gulf of Guinea: Council conclusions launching the pilot case for the Coordinated Maritime Presences concept. Press Release, 25 January. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/01/25/gulf-of-guinea-council-conclusions-launching-the-pilot-case-for-the-coordinated-maritime-presences-concept/>. Accessed 26 August 2021.
- Crabtree, J. (2022). Where next for EU security policy in the Asia-Pacific? *IISS*, 21 January. <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2022/01/where-next-for-eu-security-policy-in-the-asia-pacific>. Accessed 9 February 2022.
- CRIMARIO. (2021). Rationale & objectives. <https://www.crimario.eu/en/the-project/rationale-objectives/>. Accessed 26 August 2021.
- Desmaele, L., Ernst, M., Kim, T., Pacheco Pardo, R., & Reiterer, M. (2021). *The EU's Indo-Pacific strategy: Prospects for cooperation with South Korea*. KF-VUB Korea Chair Report. 30 September. <https://brussels-school.be/sites/default/files/KF%20VUB%20Korea%20Chair%20The%20EU's%20Indo%20Pacific%20Strategy.pdf>. Accessed 9 February 2022.
- EDA (European Defence Agency). (2021). Maritime Surveillance (MARSUR). [https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/all-activities/activities-search/maritime-surveillance-\(marsur\)](https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/all-activities/activities-search/maritime-surveillance-(marsur)). Accessed 26 August 2021.
- EEAS (European External Action Service). (2019). Remarks by High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini at the press conference following the informal meeting of EU defence ministers. 29 August. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/66784/remarks-high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-press-conference-following_en. Accessed 9 February 2022.
- EEAS. (2021a). EU maritime security factsheet: The Gulf of Guinea. 25 January. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/52490/eu-maritime-security-factsheet-gulf-guinea_en. Accessed 26 August 2021.
- EEAS. (2021b). Factsheet: Coordinated Maritime Presences. 25 January. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/91927/factsheet-coordinated-maritime-presences_en. Accessed 26 August 2021.
- European Commission. (2019). *EU–China – A strategic outlook*. Joint Communication, JOIN (2019) 5 final, 12 March. <https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/communication-eu-china-a-strategic-outlook.pdf>. Accessed 26 August 2021.
- European Parliament Multimedia Centre. (2021). Subcommittee on Security and Defence. 25 February, 13:45-15:45. https://multimedia.europarl.europa.eu/en/subcommittee-on-security-and-defence_20210225-1345-COMMITTEE-SEDE_vd. Accessed 26 August 2021.
- Fiott, D. (2021). *Naval gazing? The Strategic Compass and the EU's maritime presence*. EUISS, Brief no. 16. July. <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/naval-gazing-strategic-compass-and-eus-maritime-presence>. Accessed 26 August 2021.
- Fiott, D., & Lindstrom, G. (2021). *Strategic Compass*. EUISS, Chaillot Paper no. 171. December. https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_171_0.pdf. Accessed 9 September 2021.
- G7. (2021). *Carbis Bay G7 summit communiqué*. <https://www.g7uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Carbis-Bay-G7-Summit-Communique-PDF-430KB-25-pages-3-1.pdf>. Accessed 11 February 2022.
- Germond, B. (2015). *The maritime dimension of European security: Seapower and the European Union*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Howorth, J. (2007). *Security and defence policy in the European Union*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- ICC Commercial Crime Services. (2021). Gulf of Guinea remains world's piracy hotspot in 2021, according to IMB's latest figures. 13 April. <https://www.icc-ccs.org/index.php/1306-gulf-of-guinea-remains-world-s-piracy-hotspot-in-2021-according-to-imb-s-latest-figures>. Accessed 26 August 2021.

- Jourdain, M. (2021). *The EU as a global actor in the Indo-Pacific*. Atlantic Council, Europe Center. 17 December. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/the-eu-as-a-global-actor-in-the-indo-pacific/>. Accessed 9 February 2022.
- Koenig, N. (2021). *From Strategic Compass to common course: Key deliverables and implementation paths*. Hertie School, Jacques Delors Centre. 10 December. <https://www.delorscentre.eu/en/publications/detail/publication/strategic-compass>. Accessed 9 February 2022.
- Morcos, P. (2021). The European Union is shaping its strategy for the Indo-Pacific. *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Critical Questions, 19 April. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/european-union-shaping-its-strategy-indo-pacific>. Accessed 26 August 2021.
- Pacheco Pardo, R., & Leveringhaus, N. (2021). *Security and defence in the Indo-Pacific: What is at stake for the EU and its strategy?* Directorate-General for External Policies (European Parliament). December. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2022/653660/EXPO_IDA\(2022\)653660_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2022/653660/EXPO_IDA(2022)653660_EN.pdf). Accessed 9 February 2022.
- Pajon, C. (2021). France: The leading European power in the Indo-Pacific. In J. Bowen (ed.), *Europe's Indo-Pacific embrace: Global partnerships for regional resilience*. Perth USAsia Centre & Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. September. <https://perthusasia.edu.au/our-work/perthusasia-kas-europe-indopacific-report-2021.aspx>. Accessed 8 February 2021.
- Paul, M., & Swistek, G. (2021). Maritime choice: Indo-Pacific versus Arctic–North Atlantic priorities. In G. Maihold, S. Mair, M. Müller, J. Vorrath & C. Wagner (eds.), *German foreign policy in transition: Volatile conditions, new momentum*. SWP, Research Paper no. 10. December. https://www.swp-berlin.org/publications/products/research_papers/2021RP10_GermanForeignPolicy.pdf. Accessed 9 February 2022.
- Pejsova, E. (2019). *The EU as a maritime security provider*. EUISS, Brief no. 13. December. https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%2013%20Maritime_0.pdf. Accessed 26 August 2021.
- Sprenger, S. (2021). German warship 'Bayern' heads to the Indo-Pacific. *DefenseNews*, 2 August. <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2021/08/02/german-warship-bayern-heads-to-the-indo-pacific/>. Accessed 26 August 2021.
- Tyrrell, Á. J. (2021). Enhancing transatlantic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. In J. Bowen (ed.), *Europe's Indo-Pacific embrace: Global partnerships for regional resilience*. Perth USAsia Centre & Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. September. <https://perthusasia.edu.au/our-work/perthusasia-kas-europe-indopacific-report-2021.aspx>. Accessed 8 February 2021.
- Von der Burchard, H., & Barigazzi, J. (2021). Germany slams Hungary for blocking EU criticism of China on Hong Kong. *Politico*, 10 May. <https://www.politico.eu/article/german-foreign-minister-slams-hungary-for-blocking-hong-kong-conclusions/>. Accessed 26 August 2021.

Author biography



Niklas Nováky is a senior research officer at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies in Brussels and author of the book *European Union Military Operations: A Collective Action Perspective* (Routledge 2018).



European gas price crisis: Is Gazprom responsible?

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 66–73
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221084761
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Vladimir Milov

Abstract

Many commentators have blamed Gazprom, Europe's largest gas supplier, for contributing to the 2021–2 European natural gas price crisis through market manipulation and withholding the necessary gas supply volumes from the European market. Is there any substance to such claims? Is Gazprom really involved in manipulating the European gas market and prompting the record-breaking surge in European natural gas prices? The current article analyses the official figures on Gazprom's production capabilities, and supply and demand, and offers some insights as to why exactly claims of market manipulation by Gazprom should be taken seriously. It argues that Gazprom did indeed have the ability to ease the pressure on the European gas market in 2021, but did not use it as one would expect of a company acting in good faith. Figures shown in the article lay out a detailed case that the EU authorities should open an investigation into Gazprom's market manipulation.

Keywords

EU, Energy, Supply crisis, Russia, Gazprom, Natural gas

Introduction

The European gas price crisis of 2021 caused an unprecedented surge in natural gas prices in the EU. At times prices exceeded \$2,000 per thousand cubic metres, an absolute historic record, and nearly 20 times higher than the average European natural gas price in 2020 (TASS 2021a). A combination of unfavourable conditions contributed to the development of the crisis, including soaring demand for natural gas after the lifting of COVID-19–related restrictions, subsequent depletion of European underground stored gas stocks, sharply increasing liquefied natural gas prices in Asia which led its suppliers

Corresponding author:

V. Milov, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 20 Rue du Commerce, 1st floor, Brussels, B-1000, Belgium.

Email: v_milov@freerussia.eu



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

to prioritise exports to Asia over the European market, reduced renewable energy supplies and other factors.

While some of the causes of the price crisis may be attributed to objective market factors—the natural gas price surge in Asia, the particularly cold winter of 2020–1 and the related drawdown of European underground gas stocks—many commentators have also highlighted potential market manipulation by the Russian gas giant Gazprom, Europe’s key natural gas supplier, as a cause (e.g. Sheppard et al. 2022; Abnett 2021).

In this article some basic facts are provided to support the theory of deliberate European gas market manipulation by Gazprom. The article does not attempt to analyse the entire complex nature of the European natural gas price crisis of 2021, but focuses on one specific aspect: whether there was significant input from Gazprom in escalating the crisis by withholding available gas-production capacities and produced volumes from the European market. The specific question answered here is: did Gazprom do all it could to satisfy additional demand for gas in Europe against the backdrop of rocketing gas prices and insufficient stored gas stocks ahead of the 2021–2 winter season?

The clear answer is no, Gazprom did not do all that it was possible to avoid the crisis. Moreover, it supplied Europe with less gas in 2021 than in each year in the 2017–20 period, and it has significant excess upstream gas-production capacity and stored gas stocks that could help to resolve the European gas price crisis—but it is not using these capabilities as one would expect of a company acting in good faith.

Did Gazprom deliver a ‘record breaking volume’ of gas to Europe in 2021?

Despite Gazprom’s aggressive public-relations claims about a ‘record-breaking’ level of gas exports to Europe in 2021 (*RIA Novosti* 2021), the facts do not support these assertions. In reality, Gazprom supplied only 185.1 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas to the so-called far abroad (countries beyond the former Soviet space) (Table 1). This is notably less than the annual exports of 2017–19 and only 3.2% (5.8 bcm) higher than in COVID-struck 2020 (*RIA Novosti* 2022).

Table 1. Gazprom’s gas exports to its far abroad in 2017–21.

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total gas exports (bcm)	192.2	200.8	199.0	179.3	185.1

Sources: *RIA Novosti* (2022), *RBC* (2021b) and *Gazprom Export* (2022a).

At the time of writing, in early January 2022, Gazprom has not provided a detailed country-by-country breakdown of its gas exports, but it is clear that the EU has received a volume of Russian gas that is close to a five-year low. In contrast, gas exports to China have surged, more than doubling in 2021. Whereas during the 12 months of 2020, only 4.1 bcm of gas were transported to China via the ‘Power of Siberia’ gas pipeline, in

Table 2. Gazprom's gas supplies to the EU (in bcm).*

	2021	2020	Reduction (2021 vs. 2020)
Total September–December	44.7	58.2	–13.6
December	11.5	15.2	–3.7
November	10.5	14.4	–4.0
October	10.5	14.8	–4.2
September	12.2	13.8	–1.6

Source: *Gazprom* (2021a).

* The figures in the table may not add up due to rounding.

January–September 2021 alone, 7.1 bcm were supplied to the country (Vozdvizhenskaya 2021). This means that the total annual gas supply to China will likely be around 10 bcm in 2021, exceeding the 5.8 bcm gain in total gas exports to the far abroad in 2021. Another sharp increase in Russian gas exports in 2021 was to Turkey: according to Gazprom, supplies to Turkey surged by 63%, or by 10.3 bcm (26.7 bcm in 2021 vs. 16.4 bcm in 2020) (*RIA Novosti* 2022).

The rest of Gazprom's exports to its far abroad—besides China and Turkey—are mostly to the EU. This means that—if the Chinese and Turkish volumes are subtracted from the total figures—the volume of gas received by the EU from Russia in 2021 was more than 10 bcm smaller than that received in the COVID-impacted 2020, and far smaller than in 2017–19.

This conclusion is actually supported by the day-to-day EU gas-supply statistics provided by Gazprom on its website. According to this data, in September–December 2021 alone Gazprom reduced its supplies to the EU by 13.6 bcm (see Table 2). Throughout the year, the media reported that Gazprom had refused to book additional gas transit capacity via the Ukrainian gas transit network or via the Yamal–Europe gas pipeline that runs through Belarus and Poland; according to Gazprom's own data (2021a), gas supplies via Ukraine and Belarus/Poland were reduced by an average of 58% and 51% respectively in the period September–December 2021. There is no reasonable explanation from Gazprom for this reduction in supply.

In early 2022 Gazprom continued to reduce gas supplies to its European consumers. According to the company itself, between 1 and 15 January 2022, gas exports to countries beyond the former Soviet Union were 41.1% (or 3.7 bcm) lower than during the same period in 2021 (*Gazprom* 2022).

Gazprom has significant excess gas production capacity

Against this backdrop, Gazprom publicly admits that it possesses significant excess production capacity, which could easily be used to boost European gas supplies—but it is clearly being kept out of the market. A speech delivered by Gazprom's Chief Executive

Alexey Miller in September noted that, ‘our excess production capacities, which is to say, the production capacities that we secure for achieving peak production, amount to nearly 150 billion cubic meters of gas’ (Miller 2021). Mr Miller has openly underscored that this vast excess production capacity is a ‘competitive advantage’ capable of significantly influencing the market (Miller 2021). At the same time, Mr Miller admitted that Gazprom’s gas output in 2021 was the ‘best figure in the last 13 years’ (*Gazprom* 2021b); Gazprom therefore clearly has enough gas to provide additional supplies to the European market. In August 2021, Gazprom reported a fire at the Urengoy condensate treatment plant, which was mentioned as the cause of some production shut-ins (*Interfax* 2021). But this cannot be considered a significant factor against the backdrop of such excess production capacity and a reported overall surge in gas output.

However, the question of why Gazprom did not use these exceptional gas production capabilities to supply additional volumes to European consumers during 2021 remains unanswered. This paves the way for an investigation by the EU authorities into the possible withholding of gas volumes from the market in a critical period, given the fact that Gazprom publicly admits to massive excess upstream gas production capacity.

Excessive build-up of stored gas stocks in Russia

While claiming that Gazprom is simply ‘incapable’ of providing extra gas supply volumes to the European market beyond its minimum contractual commitments (*Kommersant* 2021), not only is the gas giant boasting about its 150 bcm excess gas production capacity but it has also reported a record-breaking injection of gas into Russian storage facilities of 72.6 bcm (*RBC* 2021a). This figure rises to 73.8 bcm when one includes what has been added to Gazprom-owned storage facilities in Belarus and Armenia (*RBC* 2021a). That is an increase of nearly 22%, or more than 13 bcm, on the storage reserves accumulated in Russian gas storage facilities in the winter of 2020–1, which Gazprom reported back then as a ‘record volume of injection’ (*RBC* 2021a). This 13 bcm of gas could have significantly eased the pressure on the European gas market: it almost exactly corresponds to the reduction in Gazprom’s supplies to the EU in September–December 2021 (see Table 2). During Alexey Miller’s meeting with President Vladimir Putin on 29 December 2021, he stated that by the end of December, stored gas volumes in Europe’s underground reservoirs were 21 billion cubic metres lower than for the same period in 2020 (*President of Russia* 2021), meaning that Gazprom’s additional supply of 13 bcm of gas would have reduced the European underground stored gas shortage by two-thirds. Therefore, an extra 13 bcm of gas from Russia would have significantly contributed to solving the problem.

Perhaps Russia needed a record-sized gas supply due to extremely cold weather? The winter of 2021–2 does indeed appear to be cold—but not to the extent that Russia needed to increase its underground gas reserves by 22% compared to the record-breaking 2020–1 injection season. Mr Miller himself reported to Putin on 29 December 2021 that, at that point, Russia’s underground storage facilities were still filled to 83% of their capacity,

and only 17% of these record-breaking reserves had been drawn upon in November and December (*President of Russia* 2021).

Please note that Gazprom includes these domestic gas storage injection volumes when it calculates Russian domestic gas consumption—so when Gazprom reports an increase in Russian domestic gas consumption in 2021 of about 30 bcm (*Gazprom* 2021b), these volumes include the 13 bcm of gas injected into domestic storage facilities.

The bottom line is that, on top of maintaining enormous excess upstream gas production capacity, Gazprom has injected a record-breaking volume of gas into Russian gas storage facilities. This means that it has plenty of gas to satisfy additional European demand, if it only had the will to do so. But it does not.

Withholding gas from European gas storage facilities

Gazprom owns significant gas storage capacity in Europe—according to its own data, a total capacity of over 12 bcm (*Gazprom Export* 2022b). This is about 10% of the total European underground gas storage capacity, which totals about 120 bcm (GlobalData Energy 2021).

According to media reports, Gazprom filled its own European underground gas storage ahead of the 2021–2 winter season at a much slower pace than other European storage owners. In October 2021, *The Financial Times* reported that while European storage levels were low, an analysis of European gas industry data showed that the largest shortfalls were at sites owned or controlled by Gazprom, in what critics said increasingly pointed to an attempt to squeeze European energy supplies. ‘The big deficits are where Gazprom facilities are,’ said Domenicantonio Di Giorgio, adjunct professor of finance at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, who has analysed data from Gas Infrastructure Europe, an industry body (Sheppard et al. 2021). ‘Data from [Gas Infrastructure Europe] show that in countries where Gazprom does not own storage facilities, such as in France and Italy, the level of gas in storage has reached near-normal levels for this time of year’ (Sheppard et al. 2021).

Given the above-mentioned EU undersupply figures for 2021, it is quite clear that the shortfall of 21 bcm in European underground gas stocks at the end of December 2021, as mentioned by Alexey Miller (*President of Russia* 2021), can predominantly be attributed to Gazprom’s actions—both to the reduction of gas supplies to the EU in 2021, and to the deliberate policy of not injecting gas into Gazprom-owned storage facilities in Europe ahead of the 2021–2 winter season. It should be noted that Gazprom’s policy of emptying its own gas stores in Europe in 2021

- cannot be considered normal commercial behaviour for underground gas storage companies, since normally they would be inclined to increase the amount of gas injected ahead of a potentially cold winter season in order to maximise profit; and

- contradicts Gazprom's own policy, illustrated by the record-breaking increase in the injection of gas into Russian storage facilities by nearly a quarter in 2021.

Did European companies actually ask Gazprom for extra supply volumes?

When accused of European gas market manipulation, Gazprom usually replies with the statement that it has satisfied the firm's contractual supply obligations and has not received any additional gas supply requests from European consumers (*TASS* 2021b). This brings us to the issue of the non-transparent contractual relations between Gazprom and its main European counterparts—who see 'exclusive' relations with Gazprom and secured volumes of gas supply through long-term contracts as a major competitive advantage, and often prefer not to speak out against Gazprom in public.

When the international media asked Gazprom's European counterparts whether they had sent requests to Gazprom asking for increased fuel supplies, most of them refused to provide a straightforward answer: 'when asked by Reuters, European energy firms Wingas and Engie said they had not asked for extra gas, while Eni, Uniper, OMV and RWE did not elaborate apart from saying Gazprom had met contracted commitments' (Golubkova and Soldatkin 2021).

This situation stresses the need to further investigate the contractual relations between Gazprom and its major European counterparts operating under long-term contracts. In the situation of a sizeable gas deficit in Europe leading to record-breaking price spikes, European gas companies should provide clear answers as to whether they actually demanded extra gas supplies from Gazprom, and if they did, what the response was. A European anti-trust investigation of alleged gas market manipulation by Gazprom could provide clear answers to these questions.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the figures provided above, in 2021 Gazprom significantly reduced the actual volumes of gas supplied to the EU against the backdrop of a significant increase in demand and shortfalls in European underground stored gas stocks.

Gazprom does possess significant excess upstream gas production capacity and has injected record-breaking volumes of gas into its own storage facilities in Russia, meaning that it had the ability to supply much bigger volumes of gas to the European market in 2021. But, despite this, it withheld gas from the European market.

Unlike other European underground gas storage operators, Gazprom—which owns about 10% of the European underground gas storage capacity—did not take sufficient measures to fill its stores with gas reserves ahead of the 2021–2 winter season. Much of the current shortfall in European underground gas stocks can be attributed to empty Gazprom-owned stores. The size of the shortfall is comparable to Gazprom's undersupply of the EU in 2021.

Keeping its European gas stores near-empty is not normal commercial behaviour for storage facility operators, and contradicts Gazprom's own policy, which is illustrated by the record-breaking increase in the injection of gas into Russian storage facilities by nearly a quarter in 2021.

There is a significant lack of transparency in relations between Gazprom and its European gas consumer counterparts, who refuse to publicly comment on whether they requested more gas from Gazprom under their long-term contracts ahead of the supply-tight winter. Moreover, if such requests were made, it is not known how Gazprom responded.

These circumstances and facts are significant enough to demand the launch of a full-scale investigation into Gazprom's alleged manipulation of the European natural gas market ahead of the 2021–2 winter season by withholding available volumes of gas from the market, and thus forcing gas prices to surge. Withholding the necessary gas volumes from the European market directly violates Article 102 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union:

Any abuse by one or more undertakings of a dominant position within the internal market or in a substantial part of it shall be prohibited as incompatible with the internal market in so far as it may affect trade between Member States. Such abuse may, in particular, consist in: . . . (b) limiting production . . . to the prejudice of consumers.

Therefore, the EU should launch an investigation into Gazprom's anti-competitive behaviour immediately.

References

- Abnett, K. (2021). Group of EU lawmakers seeks probe of Gazprom's role in gas price surge. Reuters, 17 September. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/group-eu-lawmakers-seeks-probe-gazproms-role-gas-price-surge-2021-09-17/>. Accessed 25 January 2022.
- Gazprom. (2021a). Actual gas supplies for EU. December. <https://www.gazprom.com/investors/disclosure/actual-supplies/2021/>. Accessed 21 January 2022.
- Gazprom. (2021b). Alexey Miller takes stock of Gazprom's preliminary results for 2021. 23 December. <https://www.gazprom.com/press/news/miller-journal/2021/798735/>. Accessed 21 January 2022.
- Gazprom. (2022). Gas production and supplies: Results for first half of January. 17 January. <https://www.gazprom.com/press/news/2022/january/article546189/>. Accessed 25 January 2022.
- Gazprom Export. (2022a). Gas supplies to Europe. <http://www.gazpromexport.ru/en/statistics/>. Accessed 21 January 2022.
- Gazprom Export. (2022b). Storage. <http://www.gazpromexport.ru/en/projects/storage/>. Accessed 21 January 2022.
- GlobalData Energy. (2021). Germany leads underground working gas storage capacity in Europe. *Offshore Technology*, 22 September. <https://www.offshore-technology.com/comment/underground-gas-storage-europe/>. Accessed 21 January 2022.
- Golubkova, K., & Soldatkin, V. (2021). Analysis: Russia's Gazprom feels the heat over Europe's red-hot gas prices. Reuters, 7 October. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russias-gazprom-feels-heat-over-europes-red-hot-gas-prices-2021-10-06/>. Accessed 21 January 2021.
- Interfax. (2021). Gazprom analyzing impact of Urengoy gas plant fire on supplies to Russia, Europe. 6 August. <https://interfax.com/newsroom/top-stories/72416/>. Accessed 25 January 2022.

- Kommersant*. (2021). «Газпром» придержит газ [Gazprom to withhold gas]. 31 August. <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/4966772>. Accessed 25 January 2022.
- Miller, A. (2021). Speech delivered at the conference ‘Challenges and opportunities at the growing energy markets in Asia’ (General Meeting of International Business Congress), *Information Directorate*, Gazprom, 17 September. <https://www.gazprom.com/press/news/2021/september/article537938/>. Accessed 21 January 2022.
- President of Russia*. (2021). Meeting on heating season. 29 December. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67466>. Accessed 21 January 2022.
- RBC*. (2021a). “Газпром” создаст рекордный резерв газа в подземных хранилищах [Gazprom to create record gas storage stock]. 23 October. <https://www.rbc.ru/economics/23/10/2021/61732fdb9a794766b8ae1606>. Accessed 21 January 2022.
- RBC*. (2021b). Экспорт «Газпрома» в дальнее зарубежье в 2020 году упал на 10% [Gazprom’s exports to far abroad fall by 10% in 2020]. 2 January. <https://www.rbc.ru/economics/02/01/2021/5ff086879a79478bebb7da08>. Accessed 21 January 2022.
- RIA Novosti*. (2021). “Газпром” увеличил поставки газа в Европу на 11 миллиардов кубов [Gazprom increased supplies to Europe by 11 bcm]. 28 October. <https://ria.ru/20211028/post-avki-1756740980.html>. Accessed 25 January 2022.
- RIA Novosti*. (2022). “Газпром” увеличил экспорт в страны дальнего зарубежья в 2021 году [Gazprom increased exports to far abroad countries in 2021]. 2 January. <https://ria.ru/20220102/gazprom-1766423742.html>. Accessed 21 January 2022.
- Sheppard, D., Khan, M., & Chazan, G. (2021). Gazprom’s low gas storage levels fuel questions over Russia’s supply to Europe. *Financial Times*, 28 October. <https://www.ft.com/content/576a96f7-e41d-4068-a61b-f74f2b2d3b81>. Accessed 21 January 2022.
- Sheppard, D., Politi, J., & Seddon, M. (2022). IEA chief accuses Russia of worsening Europe’s gas crisis. *Financial Times*, 12 January. <https://www.ft.com/content/668a846e-d589-4810-a390-6d7ff281054a>. Accessed 25 January 2022.
- TASS*. (2021a). Gas price in Europe exceeds \$2,000 per 1,000 cubic meters first time ever – trading data. 21 December. <https://tass.com/economy/1378687>. Accessed 25 January 2022.
- TASS*. (2021b). “Газпром” заявил, что полностью исполняет экспортные контрактные обязательства [Gazprom states that it fully respects export contract commitments]. 29 December. <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/13327659>. Accessed 25 January 2022.
- Vozdvizhenskaya, A. (2021). Газпром: Экспорт газа в Китай “существенно увеличится” в конце года [Gazprom: Gas exports to China will ‘significantly increase’ at the end of the year]. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 14 December. <https://rg.ru/2021/12/14/gazprom-eksport-gaza-v-kitaj-sushchestvenno-velichitsia-v-konce-goda.html>. Accessed 21 January 2022.

Author biography



Vladimir Milov is a Russian opposition politician, publicist, economist and energy expert. He is a former deputy minister of energy of Russia, and is currently economic adviser to opposition leader Alexey Navalny.

European solutions for shadow oligarchic rule in Europe's East: Do they work? The case of Georgia

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 74–81
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221090282
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Salome Samadashvili

Abstract

This article looks at the EU's intervention as the mediator in a domestic political stand-off in Georgia, triggered by the parliamentary elections of 2020. Believing the results of the elections to be fraudulent, the parliamentary opposition rejected them. European Council President Charles Michel then stepped in, initiating a mediation process between the government and the opposition in 2021 and securing a political agreement intended to end the crisis. Analysing the relevant geopolitical and policy framework for this intervention, and its successes and failures, presents fertile ground for understanding the EU as the foreign-policy actor in its neighbourhood and the implications of such a role for the Eastern Partnership initiative. This article argues that while the EU's active leverage model for supporting democracy was applied in the case of Georgia, the shortcomings and miscalculations of the premises on which the policy model was built limited its success.

Keywords

Georgia, Mediation, Eastern Partnership, Leverage model, Democracy promotion, Geopolitical competition

Introduction

Russian President Vladimir Putin has yet again decided to engage in geopolitical gerrymandering, carving up Europe's security architecture to his liking and demanding guarantees which will halt NATO's expansion. NATO is not the only 'evil' Russia is attempting to stop from spreading to its neighbourhood. The real menace, as perceived by the Kremlin, is liberal democracy. In Putin's view, NATO and the EU are the actors

Corresponding author:

S. Samadashvili, Parliament of Georgia, 8 Shota Rustaveli Ave, Tbilisi, Georgia, 0118
Email: salomesamadashvili@gmail.com



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

which bring the metastases of this dangerous ailment to Russia's neighbourhood and thus pose a terminal risk to its ruling regime. With the recent escalation of geopolitical competition in the region of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries, the role of the EU as a foreign policy actor, in what is often referred to as Europe's shared neighbourhood with Russia, has gained added importance. Both Ukraine and Georgia have association, free-trade and visa-free travel agreements with the EU. Both rely on the EU as a security actor, hosting Common Security and Defence Policy missions in their territories (European Commission 2021). The two countries have enthusiastic pro-European citizens (*National Democratic Institute* 2017; *International Republican Institute* 2021). While the high standard of living and economic prosperity within the EU is certainly an attraction, most Ukrainians and Georgians also believe that democracy is a good way to live (*National Democratic Institute* 2019). Therefore, how the EU fares in supporting democracy in these countries is important not only to Russia—which hopes that it fails—but also to the citizens of those countries, whose hope lies with the EU.

This article examines how successful the EU's intervention was in supporting Georgia's democracy through the mediation effort initiated by European Council President Charles Michel in the spring of 2021. It first reviews the political context in which the intervention took place and then looks at the results of the intervention—both the agreement secured and its current state of implementation. It then goes on to assess whether the intervention can be considered a success or failure by applying the theoretical framework of the leverage model, as used by the EU for democracy promotion in its neighbourhood. Finally, based on this assessment, the final part of the article offers policy advice for future EU efforts to help democratic transformations in the EaP countries.

Since the author was a member of the negotiating team during the mediation on behalf of the Georgian opposition, most of the observations offered in the article are original and are not attributable to secondary sources.

Political context of the EU's intervention in Georgia in 2021

Russia perceives the existence of democracy, both in its neighbourhood and in the West, as offering an opportunity to influence the outcome of elections. The year 2012 was a successful one for Russia in Georgia, with the oligarch Bidzina Ivanishvili, who made his fortune in Russia, managing to defeat the staunchly pro-Western government of former President Mikheil Saakashvili. Since then, Georgia has not seen much progress on its path towards integration with either the EU or NATO. The Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreement, which were largely negotiated before 2012, have been signed, but implementation is less than encouraging, reforms have stalled and Georgia seems to be stuck just where Russia wants it to be—in a no man's land between Russia and the West. Ivanishvili resigned from his position as prime minister as early as 2013, before resigning his chairmanship of the governing Georgian Dream (Kartuli Otsneba, GD) party in 2020, declaring his withdrawal from politics.

The parliamentary elections of 2020, conducted against a backdrop of extreme political polarisation, resulted in a severe political crisis. Alleging widespread electoral violations, the opposition refused to recognise the results of the elections. Months of negotiations led by the European and US diplomatic missions in Georgia did not produce results. In February 2021 the crisis deepened further. The chair of the main opposition party United National Movement (Ertiani Natsionaluri Modzraoba, UNM), Nick Melia, was detained when he refused to pay the bail imposed on him by the government-controlled court after his arrest for allegedly leading a public insurgency in June 2019 (Adkins 2021). When the highest political level of the EU—the European Council in the form of Council President Charles Michel—entered the murky waters of Georgian domestic politics, the opposition made the following main demands: the release of all prisoners arrested in connection with the anti-Russian occupation protests in June 2019, including Melia; changes to the electoral administration; and early elections. Michel's involvement was encouraged by Members of the European Parliament from various political groups when he visited Georgia in 2021 (Gotev 2021).

Michel's visit to the EaP countries in March 2021 was also initially planned as a show of the EU's geopolitical presence in the region, which Russia considers its backyard, after the harsh treatment shown to the EU High Representative/Vice-President of the European Commission Josep Borrell on his last visit to Moscow (Rettman 2021). By taking on the role of peacemaker in Georgian politics, the EU was trying to prove its relevance in the region. The stakes were high, the drama immense and all eyes were on the EU, both in the region and in Russia. A failure to find a negotiated way out of the crisis, possibly leading to further instability in Georgia, would play into Russia's hands. Would the EU, with its structured, rules-based approach to policy, prevail and help Georgia overcome its democratic challenges, or would Russia claim another democratic failure in its neighbourhood? The implications were great for both Georgia's future and the EU's policy in the region (Foy and Peel 2021).

The EU-brokered agreement and its results as of January 2022

Led by President Michel and his Special Envoy, Ambassador Christian Danielson, the difficult negotiation process was spread over an eight-week period in spring 2021. The negotiations concluded with the creation of the agreement, 'A Way Ahead for Georgia', in April (*EU Neighbours East* 2021). It consisted of five key parts: addressing politicised justice, electoral reform, the conditions under which early elections might be called, judicial reform and a power-sharing agreement in the parliament. A large majority of the opposition parties which had seats in the parliament signed the agreement, as did the governing party and some independent members of parliament.

The UNM—the largest opposition party—initially refused to sign the deal. The EU moved forward with the agreement despite the UNM's opposition, as the key number of votes for changing the constitution and implementing the other reforms had been

achieved, and the political process was able to move back to the parliament. The GD declared its withdrawal from the agreement in July 2021 (*Agenda.ge* 2021), and the UNM, revising its earlier position of adamant opposition, then joined the EU-negotiated deal in September, took its seats in the parliament and called on the GD to return to the agreement as well (*Civil Georgia* 2021). The ruling party refused to do so, declaring it null and void. The GD has assured its EU partners that it will implement the agreed reforms in any case. However, except for the release of several people, including Nick Melia, from prison, the terms of the ‘Michel Agreement’, as the document is known, are being neglected. The power-sharing agreement in the parliament has not been implemented, the constitutional changes have not been completed, and the promises of judicial and electoral reform have been ignored. Regional elections were held in autumn 2021. But according to assessments by local and international observers, they were not an improvement over the parliamentary elections (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe 2021). Former President Mikheil Saakashvili returned from Ukraine and was arrested on the day before the local elections, which has further polarised the political environment. Under the framework of the agreement, a Jean Monnet dialogue was to be created. But to date no meeting has taken place in this context as the parliamentary chair from the GD has not found the time to meet the Members of the European Parliament who planned to visit Georgia in January 2022 (*Civil Georgia* 2022).

Furthermore, in February the government made an additional move that went against both the letter and spirit of the agreement. Despite a trial which had lasted three years, the courts had been unable to convict Mamuka Khazardze and Badri Japaridze, the leaders of the pro-European party Lelo, on charges of money-laundering. But in February the government accused them of having committed a fraud in 2008, even though the prosecutors had dropped this charge much earlier in the trial. The same court then decided that the statute of limitations had expired and did not give them a custodial sentence. But in a clear act of political retribution, the GD decided to strip Japaridze, who had played a key role in securing the 2020 political agreement, of his parliamentary mandate (*OC Media* 2022).

Failure or success?

Was the EU intervention a success or a failure, and why did it turn out as it did? To answer these questions, one must consider the top-down approach that the EU employs to induce democratic reform—as opposed to the bottom-up approach through which the EU encourages democratic reform by supporting civil society and citizens. When using the top-down approach, the EU tries to bring about reforms through the use of political conditionality, thus aiming to force political elites to implement the desired changes; this is known as the leverage model (Lavenex and Schimmelfennig 2011). Assisting Georgia with its democratic consolidation and, by so doing, demonstrating that the EU remains the key actor in the region were the two key goals of the mediation process initiated by Michel. According to him, the EU was hoping to help Georgia demonstrate its progress towards achieving ‘a mature democracy, [which] is the route towards stability and prosperity and . . . the route towards an ever-closer relationship between EU and Georgia’ (Makszimov 2021). For policy solutions to work, they have to be based on the right

premises in terms of their targets, underlying assumptions and the tools used to achieve them.

Targets

Two aspects of Georgia's political model present particular challenges for the EU. The first is the informal rule by Bidzina Ivanishvili, who still today, as a private citizen, takes the key political decisions. The second is the political role of Saakashvili in the UNM. Due to his politically motivated prosecution, he has not been able to play a formal role in the party over the last nine years, but despite this he remains an important political influencer due to his popularity with the UNM voters. In a sense, both Ivanishvili and Saakashvili continue to play important roles in Georgian politics, one informally, as the shadow decision-maker behind the GD, and the other as a prosecuted leader, who has either been in political exile or prison for the past nine years. This was the first shortcoming of the EU's intervention efforts: the two men in charge of the largest political groups were not at the negotiating table, albeit for different reasons. Attempts to use leverage on the political elite to reach the solution that the EU deemed important for strengthening democracy were therefore doomed with these two key figures left untargeted by the policy. While the smaller opposition parties and independent politicians deserve credit for working with the EU to make the agreement a success, the nature of the strongly polarised political scene has limited their influence.

Underlying assumptions

The key premise on which the policy intervention rested was the commitment of all relevant actors to the idea that Georgia's future lies in Europe. With the GD's declaration that it wants to apply for EU membership in 2024 and the staunchly pro-Western stance of the opposition, there seemed to be no reason to doubt that this key premise was both justified and relevant.¹ However, in Georgia's zero-sum political culture of mutual destruction, political compromise can be perceived as weakness. The refusal of the UNM to sign the agreement and the withdrawal of the GD from it were clear signs of this. Thus, the leverage model used to influence the political actors had another inherent weakness: it made a flawed assumption about the political values and culture in the country.

Tools

When using the leverage model of democracy support, the key to success is having leverage over the target that is strong enough to achieve the desired outcome. In the process of negotiations, the EU made assumptions about what its points of leverage were over the political actors. Taking the traditional approach to EU conditionality was meant both to persuade the governing GD to sign the agreement and to secure its implementation. However, the EU was surprised when its intention to withdraw the macro-financial assistance earmarked for Georgia for 2021, due to the lack of progress on judicial reforms, was met by a pre-emptive counter-move by the Georgian government, which refused to accept the assistance (Kinchia 2021). Thus, the governing party not only defied the EU

when it withdrew from the agreement negotiated by Michel, but also attempted to neutralise the EU's leverage.

To sum up, the goal pursued by the EU's policy intervention—helping Georgia to overcome its challenges and move towards a more mature democracy and a less polarised political environment—seems a long way from being achieved. As a result the EU has become gravely disappointed with Georgia's political class, and a certain 'Georgia fatigue' has set in among policymakers. The second goal, that of demonstrating the EU's relevance in the region to Russia by preventing further destabilisation of the Georgian domestic political scene, has however been partially achieved. The EU remains deeply involved in the country, and the widespread support among Georgian citizens for the EU's commitment to the political negotiations was apparent. Polls show that, across the political divide, Georgian citizens have cheered the EU's efforts to help the country overcome its crisis (*National Democratic Institute* 2017). However, the EU's disappointment with the current results of the negotiations and the agreement is undermining Georgia's European future.

Conclusion

The lessons which the EU can draw from this experience in Georgia are five-fold. First, the citizens in many EaP countries remain the key allies when it comes to supporting and promoting democracy. While engagement with the political elites is important, both top-down and bottom-up support for democracy needs to continue. The greater the demand for reform along the lines of EU policy at the citizen level, the better the EU's chances of succeeding. After all, one of the key factors in the UNM's decision to sign the agreement was the polls, which showed that the majority of its voters supported the agreement negotiated by the EU. The most important allies of the EU in the region are the citizens of the EaP countries.

Second, when dealing with political elites, the reality of the post-Soviet world, where shadowy oligarchs often dominate public life from behind the scenes, has to be better factored into EU policy. This means that when the leverage model of democracy is applied, those exercising real power need to know that they will face the consequences of their actions, whether these are personal sanctions or another form of leverage. Political actors need it made clear that there will be rewards for those who are reliable partners and punishments for those who are not. In this respect, it is important to carefully map and identify the key partners for the EU and assist them in their electoral empowerment.

Third, better use should be made of the connections which have been cultivated between the political elites at the European and local levels—through associate memberships of the pan-European parties, such as the UNM's membership of the European People's Party and the GD's membership of the European Socialists.

Fourth, the EU also needs to review its pressure points among the EaP partners which fail to deliver results. In Georgia, for instance, where the commitment of the citizens to a European future seems to be stronger than among some political elites, a clear demonstration by the EU

of its attitude towards those leaders who show open disdain for their commitments to the EU might be an even better point of leverage than the withdrawal of assistance.

Finally, the goal of the EU's leverage model should continue to be changing systems and rules. While engagement with the elites and bottom-up support for democracy are important, the third element, engagement in reforms, remains key, as long as the EU is willing to impartially assess the results of such reforms and does not shy away from calling a spade a spade. Thus, if the large investment in the judicial and electoral reforms in Georgia fails to deliver, it would benefit the country, as well as EaP policy, to halt the assistance programme, rather than give cover to failed reform projects for the purpose of bureaucratic expediency.

Strengthening democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights in the EaP countries should remain the centrepiece of the EU's policy. Russia's goal is to prove that these values are incompatible with the societies in what it considers its backyard. Every time the EU proves Russia wrong, it scores a foreign-policy victory in this geopolitical competition—a competition which Russia has brought to Europe's doorstep, undermining European stability and defying the EaP's declared objective of helping its Eastern partners to become successful democracies.

Note

1. On 3 March 2022, Georgia submitted its formal EU membership application, following Russia's decision to launch an unprovoked war against Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

References

- Adkins, W. (2021). Georgian political leader arrested amid political crisis. *Politico*, 23 February. <https://www.politico.eu/article/georgian-opposition-leader-arrested-amid-political-crisis-nikanor-melia/>. Accessed 28 January 2022.
- Agenda.ge*. (2021). Ruling Georgian Dream leaves EU-mediated agreement. 28 July. <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2021/2131>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- Civil Georgia*. (2021). UNM to sign EU-brokered deal. 1 September. <https://civil.ge/archives/438177>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- Civil Georgia*. (2022). MEPs cancel Tbilisi visit as Georgian speaker 'Didn't find time to engage'. 22 January. <https://civil.ge/archives/468003>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- EU Neighbours East*. (2021). 'A way ahead for Georgia'. Proposal by President of the European Council Charles Michel to the representatives of Georgian political parties. <https://eunighbourseast.eu/news-and-stories/publications/a-way-ahead-for-georgia-proposal-by-president-of-the-european-council-charles-michel-to-the-representatives-of-georgian-political-parties/>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations. (2021). European Peace Facility: Council adopts assistance measures for Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and the Republic of Mali. 2 December. https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news/european-peace-facility-council-adopts-assistance-measures-georgia-republic-moldova-ukraine-and-2021-12-02_en. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- Foy, H., & Peel, M. (2021). EU mediation in Georgia's political crisis tests Brussels' clout. *The Financial Times*, 18 March. <https://www.ft.com/content/a9538521-0ae4-4d87-b32e-2f83b710ca5a>. Accessed 24 January 2022.

- Gotev, G. (2021). MEPs ask Charles Michel to mediate in Georgia. *Euractiv*, 24 February. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/meps-ask-charles-michel-to-mediate-in-georgia/>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- International Republican Institute*. (2021). IRI poll in Ukraine finds continued support for European integration against backdrop of COVID-19 pandemic. <https://www.iri.org/resource/iri-poll-ukraine-finds-continued-support-european-integration-against-backdrop-covid-19>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- Kincha, S. (2021). Georgian government rejects EU aid. *Euractiv*, 31 August. <https://oc-media.org/georgian-government-rejects-eu-aid/>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- Lavenex, S., & Schimmelfennig, F. (2011). *EU democracy promotion in the neighbourhood: From leverage to governance? Democratization*. doi:10.1080/13510347.2011.584730.
- Makszimov, V. (2021). Michel seeks to mediate Georgian political crisis. *Euractiv*, updated 7 July. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/eastern-europe/news/michel-seeks-to-mediate-georgian-political-crisis>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- National Democratic Institute*. (2017). NDI poll: Georgians increasingly support EU and Euro-Atlantic aspirations; view Russia as a threat. Press Release, 12 May. https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20poll%20press%20release_April%202017_Foreign%20Affairs_ENG.pdf. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- National Democratic Institute*. (2019). NDI poll: Georgians losing faith in their country's democracy, but report enthusiastic participation in last election. Press Release, 30 January. https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI%20Georgia_Political%20Poll%20Press%20Release_%20December%202018_English_Final.pdf. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- OC Media*. (2022). Georgian lawmakers expel three opposition MPs from the Parliament. 16 February. <https://oc-media.org/georgian-lawmakers-expel-three-opposition-leaders-from-parliament/>. Accessed 20 February 2022.
- Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. (2021). *Georgia, local elections, second round, 30 October 2021: Statement of preliminary findings and conclusions*. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/8/c/502704.pdf>. Accessed 24 January 2022.
- Rettman, A. (2021). Russia humiliates Borrell in Moscow. *EUobserver*, 5 February. <https://euobserver.com/foreign/150844>. Accessed 28 January 2022.

Author biography



Salome Samadashvili is a Georgian Member of Parliament and deputy chair and political secretary of Lelo for Georgia. In the period 2005–13 she was head of Georgia's mission to the EU. From 2016 to 2020 she represented the UNM in the Georgian Parliament.



Including grand corruption in the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime: Why it matters

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 82–90
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221086412
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



**Massimo Gordini, Katarzyna Szczypka
and Aslınur İnalci**

Abstract

When the EU adopted the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (GHRSR) to impose targeted sanctions on human rights violators, grand corruption remained outside the array of abuses covered by the instrument. Nevertheless, grand corruption creates the conditions for large-scale systemic human rights violations and enables patronal networks whose goals are inherently opposed to those of the EU's values-based foreign policy. The inclusion of grand corruption in the GHRSR would provide Brussels with an instrument to influence these networks to its own advantage, address the root causes of human rights abuses and defend its own democratic institutions. Further changes to the GHRSR, such as the introduction of qualified majority voting and the inclusion of the European Parliament and/or civil society in the listing process, would complete the picture and make this sanctions regime a powerful tool for the Union's foreign policy.

Keywords

Human rights, Sanctions, Common Foreign and Security Policy, Democracy, Foreign policy, QMV, Corruption

Introduction

Adopted in late 2020, the Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime (GHRSR) is also known as the EU's 'Magnitsky sanctions'. Enabling the Union to impose asset freezes and visa bans, it addresses 'serious human rights violations' (Eckes 2021, 1). This

Corresponding author:

Massimo Gordini, Open Dialogue Foundation, Rond-point Schuman 6/5, Brussels 1040, Belgium.
Email: massimo.gordini@odfoundation.eu



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

includes crimes against humanity such as genocide, torture and slavery; extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; forced disappearance of persons; arbitrary arrests or detentions; human trafficking; sexual and gender-based violence; and violations of the freedom of peaceful assembly, association, opinion, expression, religion or belief. It can target ‘natural or legal persons, entities or bodies, who are responsible for’ violations or abuses; those ‘who provide financial, technical, or material support for or are otherwise involved in’ violations and abuses, ‘including by planning, directing, ordering, assisting, preparing, facilitating, or encouraging such acts’; and those who are associated with the former two groups (Council of the European Union, cited in Eckes 2021, 3).

The absence of corruption on the list of crimes covered by the GHRSR sets it apart from its American counterpart. Too often corruption and human rights have been ‘addressed as separate domains of knowledge in both international academic and practical work’ (Andersen 2018, 179). However, they most often share the same root causes (Peters 2019). Corruption often sows the seeds for the dynamics that precede and later inform more serious human rights violations (Andersen 2018).

This article analyses the EU’s foreign-policy objectives and how grand corruption undermines them. It will present the ways in which the introduction of sanctions against those guilty of grand corruption could serve the Union’s foreign policy and will also add a few thoughts on other changes that could strengthen the GHRSR.

The EU’s foreign-policy goals

The EU has been described as a ‘normative power’ (Manners 2002), a term that focuses on the important role values and norms play in the Union’s approach to foreign policy. Article 21(1) of the Treaty on European Union states that ‘the Union’s action on the international scene shall be guided by . . . principles . . . which it seeks to advance in the wider world: democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights’. The main goals are to avoid state failure or the collapse of state institutions and achieve rules-based stability in the rest of the world, which the Union believes can best be done by boosting the resilience of democracies (Stivachtis and Georgakis 2013, 96). The 2016 EU Global Strategy is clear about this:

It is in the interests of our citizens to invest in the resilience of states and societies to the east stretching into Central Asia, and south down to Central Africa. Fragility beyond our borders threatens all our vital interests . . . resilience is a broader concept, encompassing all individuals and the whole of society. A resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development lies at the heart of a resilient state. (European External Action Service 2016, 23–4)

Non-democratic systems are often built around a patrimonial system (Hale 2014), whereby power is not held by a state with impersonal institutions governed through the rule of law, but by networks of personal connections, at the top of which sit the patrons. Systemic corruption allows these figures to use the country’s resources to run clientele-based pyramids and amass immense power in their hands. Such a situation, in which

personal funds and state funds become one and benefit the heads of certain cliques, undermines the very foundations of a democratic state (Rose-Ackerman 1996).

Building upon the classic theory of linkage and leverage by Levitsky and Way (2006), Tolstrup wrote of the existence of ‘gatekeeper elites’ (2013, 718). However intense the EU’s connections or powerful its coercive might, in non-democratic third countries it must still work through these gatekeeper elites. These are a country’s elites, particularly the ruling ones, who can choose to hinder, allow or even enhance the Union’s influence in the country.

Kleptocratic, patronal elites, however, have no interest in allowing the Union to seriously influence their country’s politics as this would undermine the very structure of power on which they depend. At best, they will allow what some scholars call ‘thin Europeanization’, a few adjustments to comply at a superficial level with EU demands, but not structural change (Buhari-Gulmez 2017, 22). How can the EU seriously address these pyramids, and why should it?

Grand corruption: a threat to EU foreign-policy objectives

Grand corruption is an obstacle to the Union’s foreign policy in three ways: it is a threat to democracy and the rule of law, creating the basis for future human rights violations; it undermines the general stability of a country; and it strengthens hostile networks in the target country.

Grand corruption undermines the rule of law and democracy

Grand corruption typically occurs when public officials or others abuse high-level power for the benefit of the few at the expense of the many, resulting in depriving a substantial part of the population of a fundamental right, or a major financial loss for the state or its people (Duri 2020, 25). Often grand corruption is so prevalent that analysts talk of ‘state capture’, whereby the state has been entirely bent to fulfil private interests (Christelis and Langseth 2004, 23) and laws and regulations are modified depending on the personal incentives of the capturing elite (Kenny and Søreide 2008, 5).

In a resolution on the topic, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe asserts (2013, 1):

corruption jeopardizes the good functioning of public institutions and diverts public action from its purpose, which is to serve the public interest. It disrupts the legislative process, affects the principles of legality and legal certainty, introduces a degree of arbitrariness in the decision-making process and has a devastating effect on human rights. Furthermore, corruption undermines citizens’ trust in the institutions.

This means that the rule of law, defined as a fair system in which every citizen is treated equally by an impersonally applied law, is jeopardised by grand corruption, as it introduces a highly personal element into the system and turns the rules into *ad personam*

cases. This not only undermines a key tenet of EU foreign policy, but also infringes the fundamental liberties of the individual, resulting in what is known as negative rights (Balcerowicz 2012) as the citizen does not have any legal certainty to behave freely within the confines of a clearly defined legal framework.

Grand corruption undermines stability

Grand corruption also jeopardises ‘positive’ rights, among which are socio-economic rights to education, public health care, housing, a living wage and so on. Grand corruption depletes the state resources that should grant access to such rights and unfairly places them in the hands of those who belong to certain networks, making the ability to exercise such positive rights dependent on social status and connection (Rose 2016, 433).

Grand corruption also has an adverse impact on key sources of economic growth, such as free competition, entrepreneurship, investment, government efficiency, and improvements in human capital and technology (Gwartney and Stroup 1996, 49). It creates incentives for rent-seeking instead of innovation and socially beneficial entrepreneurship (Tanzi 1998), significantly worsening the living standards of the population. This can greatly affect the political legitimacy of the state, now equated with the ruling networks, and the ensuing legitimacy crisis can lead to upheavals and general instability, an outcome that the EU abhors (Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Seligson 2002).

Ultimately, as was mentioned above, grand corruption is a lifeline for networks that hinder the rule of law and pervert democracy, generating instability and a lack of access to basic rights. The Union needs to hit these malign and subversive networks in the area that keeps them alive and strong—corruption and its profits.

Why targeted sanctions against those guilty of grand corruption?

Altering incentives

Kleptocratic networks, or pyramids, operate according to expectations and personal incentives (Hale 2014). Loyalty within these structures can change depending on the *expectations* of their members: if a leader is perceived to be getting weaker, losing his or her grip or becoming poorer, clients can change networks or apply pressure for a modification in behaviour. Targeted sanctions can therefore have a remarkable influence, because they affect the distribution of resources and the actual power of the leaders of given networks. If a leader or a high-level member is subjected to targeted foreign sanctions this can greatly reduce his or her ability to provide for his or her clients, as well as signalling to them that the cost of loyalty is becoming significantly higher (Shyrokykh 2021, 4). By applying targeted sanctions against leaders, the EU can induce a change in behaviour in the network, forcing low-level members either to convince their leaders to refrain from certain actions or to switch their allegiance to others who are more willing to follow the Union’s lead (Escribà-Folch and Wright 2010, 355; Portela, 2019; Strandow, 2006).

Augmenting leverage

In a kleptocratic system, general sanctions against a whole country cannot deliver, since the burden is then carried by the population at large. The leaders of the patronal networks and their closest clients have various ways of isolating themselves from the economic collapse of their country, often through offshoring their assets, and can easily redistribute the shrinking wealth of the country among themselves, further aggravating the population's suffering (Peksen 2019). Leverage is normally a country-to-country phenomenon; when facing a patronal system or a kleptocracy, this is not the case. Leverage in this instance must be understood as a country-to-individual phenomenon, whereby the EU must target physical persons who hold de facto power in their own private interests. The ability to impose targeted sanctions against those guilty of grand corruption would allow Brussels to greatly increase its leverage vis-à-vis such figures.

Protecting democracies from authoritarian influence

Money that has been stolen in third countries is constantly being invested in the EU, and more generally in Western democracies. Cooley et al. (2018) note the irony of this situation: kleptocrats destroy the rule of law in their own countries in order to enrich themselves, but then store their wealth where they can enjoy solid, reliable legal protection. In addition to this, investments originating from grand corruption help patronal leaders to influence public opinion and policy in democratic countries by 'buying' the support of public relations firms, advisers, politicians, think tanks, newspapers and even universities. The best-known example is arguably Azerbaijan's 'caviar diplomacy', through which Baku offers lavish bonuses to friendly foreign politicians in exchange for their silence about its human rights abuses or even their public praise (Knaus 2015, 11). The ability to impose targeted sanctions against those guilty of grand corruption would allow the EU to freeze the assets of such kleptocrats and protect the democratic environment of the Union, as well as its ability to design and craft its foreign policy without undue, shady influences.

Embracing the full potential of the GHRSR

The ability to impose targeted sanctions against those guilty of grand corruption would greatly improve the Union's ability to influence policy in third countries and its power to uphold its values in its dealings with other countries' leaderships. However, to make the GHRSR truly effective, a few more elements are needed.

As it is currently designed, the GHRSR, as part of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy, is decided through unanimity in the Council. Should qualified majority voting (QMV) be adopted instead, the GHRSR would be significantly fortified. QMV would create incentives for forming coalitions and building alliances, as opposed to rewarding obstructionism (Schuette 2019). What further increases the added value of QMV is, as Nováky (2021, 5) argues, that it 'boost[s] the resilience of the EU's foreign-policy system to third-country influence'. When it comes to targeted, personal sanctions

to counter corruption, this is particularly important. Individual member states occasionally oppose personal sanctions on the grounds of geopolitical proximity to a given authoritarian country or personal ties between local political elites and third-country kleptocrats. Big rivals such as China and Russia, which are increasingly pressuring individual EU member states, will only intensify their divide-and-rule tactics, while smaller kleptocracies will seek to influence the weakest elements in the Union's chain to obtain a friendly veto. Finally, on a technical level, implementing this change would be relatively straightforward. It would not necessitate a revision of the treaties, but could be adopted via the 'passerelle' clause enshrined in Article 31(4) of the Treaty on European Union, which provides for the extension of QMV to new areas if the EU member states agree unanimously (Kaca 2018).

The involvement of the European Parliament and civil society in the listing process would also be extremely beneficial to the resilience of targeted sanctions, in particular those imposed on individuals guilty of grand corruption. One of the reasons why grand corruption has not been included in the GHRSR so far is that the burden of proof is particularly hard to carry on the side of the EU: in a captured state or an advanced kleptocracy the judiciary is part of the system and it is extremely unlikely that it would cooperate with the EU to provide the information necessary to uphold certain sanctions against appeals before the Court of Justice. This problem has already become evident in the cases regarding misappropriation sanctions against individuals from Tunisia, Ukraine and Egypt. The Union has lost too many cases in court and has therefore developed a certain fear of corruption sanctions as they can be hard to substantiate (Portela 2019). However, there are ways to remedy this. As Portela (2020, 8) writes: In sum, in order to withstand Luxembourg's scrutiny, it is vital that designations are supported by ample and solid evidence. Civil society organisations can make a useful contribution by collecting open source documentation of gross human rights violations thanks to their specialised local knowledge and presence on the ground.

The institutionalisation of civil society's inputs to the GHRSR listing process—or at the very least, of the European Parliament's inputs, as Members of the European Parliament are often close to civil society organisations—would allow the Union to outsource some of its background research to actors who have an enormous amount of knowledge and expertise. This would allow the Union to impose sanctions that are backed by facts and can withstand scrutiny.

Conclusion

Grand corruption is the blood of a system that breeds human rights violations. The deterioration of the rule of law, the loss of the independence of the judiciary and the embezzlement of public funds can all undermine positive rights and create negative ones, preventing citizens from enjoying the basic protection of their human dignity. This alone requires the EU to adopt a sanctions regime that can target grand corruption, as while corruption is not in itself a violation of human rights, it creates the conditions for countless abuses.

Grand corruption is, however, also an impediment to some key EU foreign-policy objectives, such as the promotion of democracy, safeguarding the rule of law in third countries and regional stability. If the Union wants to enhance its influence as a normative power and shape partner countries in a way that is reliable, sustainable and resilient, it must have the proper instruments at its disposal to target the kleptocratic networks that hold actual power in the identified countries. It is therefore not merely a matter of a moral commitment to human rights: being able to disrupt or affect ruling circles by targeting their sources of power would greatly augment the Union's leverage and power. It would also protect its internal politics from the undue influence that can result from the investment of dirty money in the EU.

Including the ability to levy sanctions against those guilty of grand corruption would significantly improve the GHRSR's effectiveness and importance. To solidify such an advantage, it is also important to move away from a veto-based system, and to include civil society and the European Parliament in the listing process. These steps would provide important inputs in terms of the documentation of cases and would make the listing process less susceptible to disruption by a single actor.

References

- Andersen, M. K. (2018). Why corruption matters in human rights. *Journal of Human Rights Practice*. doi:10.1093/jhuman/huy004.
- Anderson, C. J., & Tverdova, Y. V. (2003). Corruption, political allegiances and attitudes towards government in contemporary democracies. *American Journal of Political Science*. doi:10.1111/1540-5907.00007.
- Balcerowicz, L. (2012). *Odkrywając wolność. Przeciw zniewoleniu umysłów* [Discovering freedom. Against the enslavement of minds]. Poznań: Zysk i S-ka.
- Buhari-Gulmez, D. (2017). *Europeanization in a global context: Integrating Turkey into the world polity*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Christelis, N., & Langseth, P. (2004). *United Nations handbook on practical anti-corruption measures for prosecutors and investigators*. Vienna: UN Office on Drugs and Crime.
- Cooley, A., Heathershaw, J., & Sharman, J. (2018). The rise of kleptocracy: Laundering cash, whitewashing reputations. *Journal of Democracy*, 29(1), 39–53.
- Duri, J. (2020). *Definitions of grand corruption*. CMI U4 Anti-Corruption Resource Centre. U4 Helpdesk Answer 2020:25. Bergen. <https://www.u4.no/publications/definitions-of-grand-corruption>. Accessed 11 February 2022.
- Eckes, C. (2021). EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime: Is the genie out of the bottle? *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*. doi:10.1080/14782804.2021.1965556.
- Escribà-Folch, A., & Wright, J. (2010). Dealing with tyranny: International sanctions and the survival of authoritarian rulers. *International Studies Quarterly*. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2478.2010.00590.x.
- European External Action Service. (2016). *Shared vision, common action: A stronger Europe. A global strategy for the European Union's foreign and security policy*. Luxembourg. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2871/64849>. Accessed 1 February 2022.
- Gwartney, J. D., & Stroup, R. L. (1996). *What everyone should know about economics and prosperity*. Vancouver: The Fraser Institute.
- Hale, H. (2014). *Patronal politics: Eurasian regime dynamics in comparative perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781139683524.

- Kaca, E. (2018). The introduction of qualified majority voting in EU foreign policy: Member state perspectives. *Polish Institute of International Affairs*, Bulletin no. 162. 4 December. https://pism.pl/publications/The_Introduction_of_Qualified_Majority_Voting_in_EU_Foreign_Policy_Member_State_Perspectives. Accessed 1 February 2022.
- Kenny, C., & Søreide, T. (2008). *Grand corruption in utilities*. World Bank Policy Research, Working Paper no. 4805. <https://elibrary.worldbank.org/doi/epdf/10.1596/1813-9450-4805>. Accessed 14 February 2022.
- Knaus, G. (2015). Europe and Azerbaijan: The end of shame. *Journal of Democracy*, 26(3), 5–18.
- Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2006). Linkage versus leverage. Rethinking the international dimension of regime change. *Comparative Politics*. doi:10.2307/20434008.
- Manners, I. (2002). Normative power Europe: A contradiction in terms? *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*. doi:10.1111/1468-5965.00353.
- Nováky, N. (2021). Qualified majority voting in EU foreign policy: Make it so. *European View*. doi:10.1177/17816858211061837.
- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. (2013). Corruption as a threat to the rule of law. <http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=19951&lang=en>. Accessed 1 February 2022.
- Peksen, D. (2019). Political effectiveness, negative externalities, and the ethics of economic sanctions. *Ethics & International Affairs*. doi:10.1017/S0892679419000327.
- Peters, A. (2019). Corruption as a violation of international human rights. *European Journal of International Law*. doi:10.1093/ejil/chy070.
- Portela, C. (2019). *Sanctioning kleptocrats: An assessment of EU misappropriation sanctions*. Civil Forum for Asset Recovery. Berlin.
- Portela, C. (2020). *A blacklist is (almost) born. Building a resilient EU human rights sanctions regime*. European Union Institute for Security Studies. Brief no. 5. March. <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Brief%205%20HRS.pdf>. Accessed 1 February 2022.
- Rose, C. (2016). The limitations of a human rights approach to corruption. *International & Comparative Law Quarterly*. doi:10.1017/S0020589316000038.
- Rose-Ackerman, S. (1996). Democracy and ‘grand’ corruption. *International Social Science Journal*. doi:10.1111/1468-2451.00038.
- Schuette, L. (2019). *Should the EU make foreign policy decisions by majority voting?* Centre for European Reform. May. https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/pbrief_qmv_15.5.19_1.pdf. Accessed 1 February 2022.
- Seligson, M. A. (2002). The impact of corruption on regime legitimacy: A comparative study of four Latin American countries. *The Journal of Politics*, 64(2), 408–33. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2691854>. Accessed 1 February 2022.
- Shyrokykh, K. (2021). Human rights sanctions and the role of black knights: Evidence from the EU’s post-Soviet neighbours. *Journal of European Integration*. doi:10.1080/07036337.2021.1908278. Accessed 1 February 2022.
- Stivachtis, Y., & Georgakis, S. (2013). Democratization as a peace strategy. *Review of European Studies*. doi:10.5539/res.v5n3p95.
- Strandow, D. (2006). *Sanctions and civil war: Targeted measures for conflict resolution*. Uppsala University. Sweden.
- Tanzi, M. V. (1998). *Corruption around the world – Causes, consequences, scope, and cures*. IMF Staff Paper no. 45. Washington, D.C.
- Tolstrup, J. (2013). When can external actors influence democratization? Leverage, linkages, and gatekeeper elites. *Democratization*. doi:10.1080/13510347.2012.666066.

Author biographies

Massimo Gordini is an advocacy officer at the Open Dialogue Foundation and an alumnus of the College of Europe. His focus areas include EU affairs, human rights, democratisation, European Neighbourhood Policy and EU foreign policy.



Katarzyna Szczypka is an advocacy officer at the Open Dialogue Foundation, a Brussels-based non-governmental organisation protecting human rights in the post-Soviet sphere. She studied political science in Russia and Eastern Europe at University College London and is a Frederic Bastiat Fellow with the Mercatus Institute at George Mason University.



Ashnur İnalci is an MA student in international politics at KU Leuven and an alumna of Bilkent University's Department of International Relations. Her areas of interest include EU foreign policy, human rights, migration and good governance. She is currently carrying out an internship with the Open Dialogue Foundation as an advocacy assistant.



The state of American democracy after Trump

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 91–99
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221089399
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Constantine Arvanitopoulos

Abstract

Democracy is retreating worldwide. As Freedom House reports, the US has not escaped this trend. The system of checks and balances of American democracy managed to thwart Trump's assault on democracy. But together with longstanding institutional and structural defects, his presidency clearly indicates that American democracy is on the verge of political decay. Political polarisation, inequalities, identity politics and the inability of the two political parties to reach compromises are further testing the American democratic institutions. To avert decay, the US needs a reform coalition to bring about institutional changes; and more importantly, to establish inclusive economic policies and a renewed focus on citizenship, duty and a shared purpose.

Keywords

Democracy, Checks and balances, Vote suppression, Polarisation, Inequalities, Identity politics

Introduction

Democracy is retreating worldwide. Freedom House reports that the number of democracies is shrinking and that democracy is declining in the US itself (Freedom House 2019). The same report maintains that the great challenges facing American democracy started before Donald Trump's presidency. 'Intensifying polarization, declining economic mobility, the outsized influence of special interests, and the diminished influence of fact-based reporting in favor of bellicose partisan media' were some of the problems already facing American democracy before Trump (2019, 17).

The US is in the midst of a political and constitutional crisis that could seriously threaten its democracy over the next years. The storming of Capitol Hill on 6 January

Corresponding author:

C. Arvanitopoulos, The Fletcher School at Tufts University, 160 Packard Ave, Medford, MA 02155, USA.
Email: constantine.arvanitopoulos@tufts.edu



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

2021 was an assault on democracy that continues unabated. The hope that Trump would fade away after the January 2021 insurrection and his subsequent electoral defeat has proved futile. Trump's shadow lingers over the political system and the Republican Party. He has built a movement around a cult of personality that allows him to maintain high rates of popularity and support among his followers.

Under Trump's 'hostile takeover' of the Republican Party, as Jared Kushner phrased it (cited in Diamond 2020), all kinds of tactics are being used to bend the rules to the party's advantage, including suppressing the vote. State legislatures are enacting legislation that amounts to vote suppression, while giving themselves greater control of the election certification process (Kagan 2021). More than 100 leading scholars of democracy have signed a Statement of Concern warning about grave threats to American democracy stemming from the efforts to suppress voting (Norris 2021).

This article argues that American democracy is being threatened with political decay by the lasting effects of Trump's presidency together with longstanding institutional defects, as well as extreme polarisation, widening inequalities and identity politics. For this decay to be averted, there is urgent need of enlightened leadership and a broad reform coalition to bring about institutional changes; inclusive economic policies; and a renewed focus on citizenship, duty and shared purpose.

The effects of Trump's presidency on American democracy

Aristotle warned that demagogues who could capture the minds of the people posed a real threat to democracy. Aware of these risks, 'the framers of the Constitution instituted a system of checks and balances. The point was not simply to ensure that no one branch of the government dominated the others but also to anchor in institutions different points of view' (Snyder 2021). They designed a system 'to protect minority points of view, to protect us from leaders inclined to lie, cheat and steal, and to protect the majority against minorities who are determined to subvert the constitutional order' (Galston and Kamarck 2022).

Proving resilient at both the federal and state levels, these checks and balances managed to thwart the Trumpian assault on democracy. Congress held its own, confronting the president with impeachment charges not once but twice. The judiciary remained independent and resisted his attempts to overturn the election results. A total of 62 lawsuits that Trump's legal team filed were either dropped or unsuccessful in court. Many of these decisions were made by Republican judges. The former president's biggest disappointment may have been 'the Supreme Court's decision not to hear election challenges concerning states he claimed he had won' (Galston and Kamarck 2022).

The states also resisted Trump's federal actions or decisions, especially regarding the pandemic. And the military upheld the long democratic tradition of civil-military relations in the US whereby the armed forces, under civilian control, stay out of politics. Finally, the press remained fundamentally free even though Trump 'spent four years using the bully pulpit of the presidency to mock the press. He revoked the press

credentials of reporters he did not like. Nevertheless, reporters were not afraid to call out his lies' (Galston and Kamarck 2022). However, the discrediting of the traditional media—together with the decline of local news, which was a result of the financial crisis of 2008—and Trump's skilful use of social media, especially Twitter, led to distortion of the truth and reality during his presidency. In a functional representative democracy, the social media cannot be citizens' only source of information. Social media 'supercharge the mental habits by which we seek emotional stimulation and comfort, which means losing the distinction between what feels true and what actually is true' (Snyder 2021).

The checks and balances of the American political system withstood the Trump presidency's frontal assault on the democratic institutions, norms, conventions and traditions of the US. However, his presidency polarised this system to the extreme and exacerbated weaknesses in its institutions. His constant attack on the truth, culminating in the 'Big Lie' of the rigged election, has misinformed and disoriented US citizens and has sapped the foundations of American democracy. 'There is no guarantee that constitutional democracy will survive another sustained—and likely better-organized—assault in the years to come' (Galston and Kamarck 2022).

Institutional factors

The deterioration of democracy started even before Trump, it being the result of 'the persistent gridlock in US Congress, deepening political polarisation and the corrupting role of dark money in politics. It accelerated during the last four years, with attacks on the news media, risks to the impartiality of the courts, and the weakening role of Congress as an effective check and balance on executive powers' (Norris 2021). Moreover, the assortment of deep structural problems and sweeping historical changes that are taking place simultaneously make this an existential crisis for American democracy.

The aftermath of the 2020 presidential election highlighted the problems of the 'unique combination of a majoritarian electoral system with strong minoritarian institutions' (McCoy and Press 2022). The Senate, for example, is highly disproportionate in its representation, with 'two senators per state regardless of their population, from Wyoming's 580,000 to California's 39,500,000' (McCoy and Press 2022). This disproportionality becomes particularly problematic when it comes to the electoral college. 'All but two states give the winner of the popular vote in their state all of the electors from that state' (Lessig 2021). This disproportionality has resulted in elections being focused on the so-called swing states. These states provide sufficient electoral college votes to win the election regardless of the outcome in the popular vote.

This, in effect, is how Trump won in 2016, despite his claim that he had won not only the electoral college but the popular vote as well. His argument was that Hillary Clinton had won the popular vote because millions of people had voted illegally (O'Toole 2020).

After the 2020 election Trump actively tried to overturn the will of the people. When that failed, the assault on the electoral process took a more organised form. 'Republican

majorities in state legislatures are passing laws making it harder to vote and weakening the ability of election officials to do their jobs. Trump's supporters are also trying to defeat incumbents who upheld the integrity of the election and replace them with the former President's supporters' (Galston and Kamarck 2022).

If you add to these efforts the traditional gerrymandering, you have a new organised attack against American democracy from the ground up. Partisan gerrymandering has resulted in a radical manipulation of legislative districts. A study by the USC Schwarzenegger Institute found that after the 2018 election the result of gerrymandering was that almost 60 million Americans live under minority rule in their state legislatures.

Polarisation

The destructive power of polarisation in American politics makes things even worse. A recent Carnegie Endowment article argues that 'the United States is the only advanced Western democracy to have faced such intense polarization for such an extended period' (McCoy and Press 2020). According to the authors one of the reasons for this intense polarisation is the so-called white backlash, the reaction of the white population to a demographic shift that threatens their dominant position in all arenas of power. Polarisation goes beyond politics to the basis of the social pyramid, affecting even consumer interests and lifestyle preferences (Ruch et al. 2020). The result is a polarised political system and an increasingly polarised society.

There has been a fundamental change in the ideological nature of the two major parties in the US, and this has contributed to the intensity of the country's political polarisation. The two parties have been transformed from large associations encompassing wide ideological trends to ideologically homogeneous parties. In recent years partisan identities have gradually merged 'with our racial, religious, geographic, ideological, and cultural identities' (Klein 2020). These merged identities make the two-party system highly polarised and rigid and have 'attain[ed] a weight that is breaking our institutions and tearing all the bonds that hold this country together' (Klein 2020).

Democratic institutions rest on norms, as well as 'on compromise, cooperation, respect for truth and are bolstered by an active, self-confident citizenry and a free press. When democratic values come under attack and the press and civil society are neutralized, the institutional safeguards lose their power. The gradual erosion of checks and balances thus gives way to sudden institutional collapse' (Acemoglu 2020). The Trump presidency not only assaulted democratic institutions; perhaps equally importantly, 'he destroyed many Americans' trust in their institutions' (Acemoglu 2020).

'The growing polarisation, distrust, intolerance, the intertwining of partisan affiliations with racial, ethnic, or religious identities, and the inability to forge political compromises across partisan divides' are all signs of political decay (Diamond 2020). The term 'political decay' was first used by Huntington in his seminal 1968 work *Political Order in Changing Societies* to explain the instability in many developing countries after

the Second World War. His argument was that ‘socioeconomic modernization caused problems for traditional political orders, leading to the mobilization of new social groups whose participation could not be accommodated by existing political institutions. Political decay was caused by the inability of institutions to adapt to changing circumstances’ (Fukuyama 2014).

Fukuyama has used Huntington’s term ‘political decay’ to account for the causes of political dysfunction in the US today. The political system is decaying, he argues, because its traditional system of checks and balances has become rigid: ‘In an environment of sharp political polarization, this decentralized system is less and less able to represent majority interests and gives excessive representation to the views of interest groups and activist organizations that collectively do not add up to a sovereign American people.’ Fukuyama is rather pessimistic about the prospect of political reform, predicting that political decay in America will continue ‘until some external shock comes along to catalyze a true reform coalition and galvanize it to action’ (Fukuyama 2014).

Inequalities

That parts of the American public place less trust in the country’s institutions is also due to the increasing inequalities that have obfuscated the American dream. In recent decades inequalities have grown exponentially in the US. In a 2014 article, Nick Hanauer writes, ‘During the past three decades, compensation for CEOs grew 127 times faster than it did for workers. Since 1950, the CEO-to-worker pay ratio has increased 1,000 percent . . . CEOs used to earn 30 times the median wage; now they rake in 500 times’ (Hanauer 2014).

Globalisation brought about trade and development but in a very uneven way. For example, increased trade with China and other low-wage countries accelerated the decline in manufacturing employment in the developed world, leaving many economically depressed communities behind. Manufacturing communities in the US saw their jobs shipped off to China and Mexico and experienced rising rates of unemployment at home.

One of the major effects of the post-1990 wave of globalisation in the US is the decoupling of corporations from local communities. Companies and corporations have always been social units as well as economic entities. Corporations were first created in medieval Europe as an independent vehicle to achieve economic progress but also to create prosperity for society or to build institutions for the public good, such as hospitals and universities (Schwab 2020).

However, corporations gradually abandoned this vision and embraced that of Milton Friedman. For the University of Chicago economist, ‘There is one and only one social responsibility of business. To use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profits’ (cited in Schwab 2020). In short, the business of business is strictly business. The result of the transition was that ‘wages in the United States started to stagnate. Union power declined. The natural environment deteriorated as the economy improved. Governments found it difficult to gather taxes from multinational corporations.

In the four decades since 1980, economic inequality of all forms has significantly increased' (Schwab 2020). The economy looks like a bottleneck with the rich in the neck, the poor in the bottle and no wealth going through.

Furthermore, the US has veered away from the post-war spirit of social responsibility and public service, expressed by Kennedy's 'Ask what you can do for your country', to the 'Greed is good' ethos of personal and corporate wealth aggrandisement. Eventually 'the market became everything, public service was devalued, and taxes were for suckers' (Walt 2020).

Inequalities were also exacerbated by the fourth industrial technological revolution. Technological changes created a new social stratification between technologically literate and technologically illiterate citizens and workers. Workers were being left behind, either because automation was leading them to unemployment or because they did not have the means to acquire the new skills essential to re-enter the workforce.

This was not the only impact of technology on American democracy, however. The growth of gigantic Internet platforms that wielded so much control over political communication posed a big challenge. 'These behemoths now dominate the dissemination of information and the coordination of political mobilization . . . No liberal democracy is content to entrust concentrated power to individuals based on assumptions about their good intentions' (Fukuyama et al. 2021).

Globalisation intensified inequalities, but the information available gave people immediate knowledge of those disparities. Citizens could now have all the data at hand and could make comparisons, and that brought resentment.

Identity politics

During the twentieth century political competition in the US was mainly defined by economic issues. The Democratic Party was largely associated with policies that favoured increased government spending, a larger welfare state and regulations on business. The Republican Party, in turn, was associated with policies that favoured limited government, fewer safety nets and more *laissez-faire* policies. In the twenty-first century political competition appears to centre around the issue of identity.

Political struggles do not revolve solely around economic conflict anymore, but around the resentment of groups in society that believe their dignity has been affronted and their rights have been violated. The left shifted its emphasis from the 'conditions of the working class to the often psychological demands of an ever-widening circle of marginalized groups' (Fukuyama 2018). According to Fukuyama, the Hegelian struggle for recognition, as the ultimate driver of human history, is the essence of identity politics—and it is this that drives a large part of the political struggles today.

McCoy and Press argue that one of the reasons that the US is so polarised is 'the durability of identity politics in a racially and ethnically diverse democracy' (2022). As the

Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements have shown, identity politics was a natural and inevitable response to injustice. More importantly, these movements have brought about a social awakening, and changes in public policy and cultural norms in the direction of greater socioeconomic equality.

However, the right used identity politics to focus on, and subsequently to mobilise, other groups of society that fall outside of the cultural scope of the new left. These groups include working-class people that have become impoverished or have been left behind because of the negative effects of globalisation or automation and the forces of the technological revolution, and farmers and farm households that have low income and low wealth. Among a significant segment of white American society that has been dragged into the underclass and feels threatened by other social groups, there has been a negative reaction, the white backlash. Thus, a new political competition has emerged alongside cultural and identity politics.

A side effect of this identity politics is the issue of political correctness, which has also mobilised the right. Trump's rhetoric and behaviour would have ended the career of any politician in the past. For many of his supporters, Trump may be 'mendacious, malicious, bigoted, and unpresidential, but at least he says what he thinks' (Fukuyama 2018, 119). By attacking political correctness head on, Trump 'was moving the focus of identity politics from the left, where it was born, to the right, where it is now taking root' (Fukuyama 2018, 119). The identity politics of the right includes ethnicity; the Christian religion; rural residence; and belief in traditional family values. Trump dangerously included race. In fact, he 'was careful not to articulate overly racist views. But he has happily accepted support from individuals and groups that hold them. Since his rise, white nationalism has moved from a fringe movement to something much more mainstream in American politics' (Fukuyama 2018, 120).

Identity politics was embraced by both the Democrats and the Republicans in a way that, far from helping to overcome urban-rural, religious-secular and racial-ethnic cleavages, actually exacerbated them (Edsall 2022). In an article that has been highly criticised by the left, Mark Lilla (2016) wrote that 'American liberalism has slipped into a kind of moral panic about racial, gender, and sexual identity that has distorted liberalism's message and prevented it from becoming a unifying force capable of governing.' In a book he wrote a year later, Lilla insisted that Trump's accession to the White House was a backlash against an obsession with identity politics on the part of the American left: 'We need no more marchers. We need more mayors' (Lilla 2017, 37).

Be that as it may, it is clear that identity politics has contributed to the polarisation of the political system. The Republican Party has moved to more conservative and extremist views, as represented by its Tea Party wing, while the Democratic Party has veered to the left (Mann and Ornstein 2012).

Conclusion

Political polarisation, institutional factors, inequalities and identity politics are testing the constitutional stability of American democracy. Trump's presidency weakened its

institutions and traditions and assaulted the system's checks and balances. Trump viciously attacked the separation of powers, the free press, the independent judiciary and the integrity of elections. He exacerbated existing weaknesses in the political system. But more importantly he intensified political polarisation to such an extent that it is difficult to see how it could be reversed. Polarisation within the political system has trickled down to the electorate. In this way it has become self-perpetuating in that it places ideological extremists in both parties at an advantage and leads to a situation where those running for office increasingly hold extreme views. According to McCoy and Press (2022), 'only 16 of the 52 countries that reached levels of pernicious polarization succeeded in achieving depolarization.'

Polarisation is also fed by the 'identity wars' between the two parties. The remedy, perhaps, is not to abandon the idea of identity but to 'define larger and more integrative national identities that take into account the de facto diversity of existing liberal democratic societies' (Fukuyama 2018).

In 1941 Roosevelt made his Four Freedoms speech, which proposed four fundamental liberties that people everywhere in the world ought to enjoy: freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want and freedom from fear. He also outlined the benefits of democracy, which included economic opportunity, employment, social security and the promise of adequate health care. In this way he outlined a common 'national good', and his New Deal policies extended economic prosperity to almost all Americans.

Today American democracy needs another New Deal. It needs enlightened leadership and a reform coalition that will bring about not only institutional changes but also, and more importantly, inclusive economic policies and a renewed focus on citizenship, duty and shared purpose. Otherwise, it is threatened with political decay.

References

- Acemoglu, D. (2020). America's democratic unraveling. *Foreign Affairs*, 15 June. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/americas-democratic-unraveling>. Accessed 2 March 2022.
- Diamond, L. (2020). A new administration won't heal American democracy: The rot in US political institutions runs deeper than Donald Trump. *Foreign Affairs*, 5 November. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-11-05/new-administration-wont-heal-american-democracy>. Accessed 2 March 2022.
- Edsall, T. (2022). America has split, and it's now in 'very dangerous territory'. *The New York Times*, 26 January.
- Freedom House. (2019). *Democracy in retreat: Freedom in the world 2019*. https://freedom-house.org/sites/default/files/feb2019_FH_FITW_2019_Report_ForWeb-compressed.pdf. Accessed 10 December 2021.
- Fukuyama, F. (2014). America in decay: The sources of political dysfunction. *Foreign Affairs*, September–October. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2014-08-18/america-decay>. Accessed 2 March 2022.
- Fukuyama, F. (2018). *Identity: The demand for dignity and the politics of resentment*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

- Fukuyama, F., Richman, B., & Goel, A. (2021). How to save democracy from technology. *Foreign Affairs*, January–February. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2020-11-24/fukuyama-how-save-democracy-technology>. Accessed 2 March 2022.
- Galston, W. A., & Kamarck, E. (2022). *Is democracy failing and putting our economic system at risk?* Brookings Institution report. 4 January.
- Hanauer, N. (2014). The pitchforks are coming . . . for US plutocrats. Special report. *Politico*, July–August.
- Huntington, S. (1968). *Political order in changing societies*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Kagan, R. (2021). Our constitutional crisis is already here. *The Washington Post*, 23 September.
- Klein, E. (2020). *Why we're polarized*. New York: Avid Reader Press.
- Lessig, L. (2021). Why the US is a failed democratic state. *The New York Review of Books*, 10 December.
- Lilla, M. (2016). The end of identity liberalism. *The New York Times*, 18 November.
- Lilla, M. (2017). *The once and future liberal: After identity politics*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Mann, T. E., & Ornstein, N. J. (2012). *It's even worse than it looks: How the American constitutional system collided with the new politics of extremism*. New York: Basic Books.
- McCoy, J., & Press, B. (2022). What happens when democracies become perniciously polarized? Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. 18 January.
- Norris, P. (2021). American democracy is at risk from Trump and the Republicans: What can be done? *The Guardian*, 6 June.
- O'Toole, F. (2020). Democracy's afterlife: Trump, the GOP and the rise of zombie politics. *The New York Review of Books*, 3 December.
- Repucci, S. (2021). *From crisis to reform: A call to strengthen America's battered democracy*. Freedom House special report. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/US_Democracy_Report_FINAL_03222021.pdf. Accessed 20 January 2022.
- Ruch, A., Decter-Frain, A., & Batra, R. (2022). *Millions of co-purchases and reviews reveal the spread of polarization and lifestyle politics across online markets*. 17 January. <https://arxiv.org/abs/2201.06556>. Accessed 30 January 2022.
- Schwab, K. (2020). Capitalism must reform to survive: From shareholders to stakeholders. *Foreign Affairs*, 16 January. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2020-01-16/capitalism-must-reform-survive>. Accessed 2 March 2022.
- Snyder, T. (2018). *The road to unfreedom*. New York: Tim Duggan Books.
- Snyder, T. (2021). The American abyss. *The New York Times Magazine*, 14 January.
- Walt, S. M. (2020). The death of American competence. *Foreign Policy*, 3 March. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/23/death-american-competence-reputation-coronavirus/>. Accessed 2 March 2022.

Author biography



Constantine Arvanitopoulos holds the Karamanlis Chair of Hellenic and European Studies at the Fletcher School at Tufts University and is a Senior Research Associate at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies. He is a former Minister of Education, Religious Affairs, Culture and Sports of Greece.

Peace in the ground: How land degradation in the Sahel impacts Europe and what the EU can do about it

European View
2022, Vol. 21 (1) 100–109
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221089487
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Eero Wahlstedt and Joonas Mikkola

Abstract

The deterioration of security and humanitarian conditions in the Sahel region has widely acknowledged implications for the EU, and the strategic importance of tackling them has been established in EU strategies. Local land degradation sits at a nexus of the many challenges as it is a driver of poverty, famine, conflict, migration, poor governance, loss of biodiversity and climate change. A local framing of the issues makes it possible to identify the actions that can address them. The vast number of people engaged in land-based livelihoods offers the potential to halt and even reverse degradation. The main limiting factor for this is the lack of targeted financing. The EU can be a leader in this process through (1) integrating ecosystem health into existing programming; (2) designing new projects targeting sustainable land use; (3) supporting the development of monitoring systems that enable funding, including from carbon markets; and (4) lowering administrative barriers to partnerships.

Keywords

Climate change, Security, Sustainable development, Sahel, Ecosystem restoration, Nature-based solutions

Introduction

The Sudano-Sahelian region of Africa spans 5,400 kilometres from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea, separating the Sahara Desert from the Western Coast and tropical areas of Africa. It has a tropical semi-arid climate, characterised by heat and low rainfall. It consists mostly of grasslands, savannahs and shrublands. Although political designations

Corresponding author:

E. Wahlstedt, Ebed Khatim 148, Khartoum, Sudan.

Email: eero.wahlstedt@gmail.com



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

of Sudano-Sahelian countries vary, they generally include Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad and Sudan, with important neighbouring countries being Nigeria, Algeria, Ethiopia and Libya.

The Sudano-Sahelian countries have faced a myriad of issues, including extreme poverty, social and political tensions, institutional and governance challenges, environmental degradation and exposure to climate change. These have contributed to frequent food crises, fragile governments, illegal trafficking, radicalisation and violent extremism, including links with international terrorist groups.

The EU has long been worried about development in the region and perceives the rising poverty there as a catalyst for instability, extremism and government fragility, which have undermined the ability to create viable economic and security conditions for inhabitants. This has had consequences reaching far beyond the region. The 2011 European External Action Service's Strategy on the Sahel (defined as Mali, Mauritania and Niger) noted that security and development in the region are interlinked and that contributing to both is in the interest of the EU's citizens. The strategy emphasised the importance of tackling extreme poverty and creating conditions for grass-roots economic and human development.

This article argues that at the centre of many issues lies land degradation, which is rooted in unsustainable land-use practices, which need to be addressed to enable sustainable peace and development. By concentrating the framing of the issues on land degradation, we open up a menu of impactful, community-focused and community-led interventions that the EU can support, increasing local agency and ownership of climate solutions. The article will give an overview of the EU's engagement with the Sahel, and discuss the links between local environmental degradation and issues often attributed to climate change, the best potential solutions for tackling them and how the EU could support their implementation.

The EU's Sahel strategy

Since the Sahel Strategy was adopted, two new frameworks have been developed: the Regional Action Plan 2015–2020 and the 2021 Integrated Strategy in the Sahel.

While continuing the commitments of the Sahel Strategy, the Regional Action Plan focused on addressing violent extremism and radicalisation, and improving the conditions for youth, migration, and mobility and border management. It also added Burkina Faso and Chad as core countries (Council of the EU 2015, 6).

The 2021 Integrated Strategy reinforced the importance of a solid and long-term partnership between the EU and the Sahel (Council of the EU 2021a). The EU's Sahel strategy links with the Comprehensive Strategy with Africa, the most recent initiative to build a new partnership. Its focus is on multilateralism, peace, security and stability, sustainable and inclusive development, and sustainable economic growth (Council of the EU 2020, 2).

The policy prescriptions and activities have been many, including capacity building and training, civil-society development, the promotion of religious dialogue, livelihoods projects, social safety nets, rule of law development and so on. However, despite the efforts, referred to as ‘all instruments at [the EU’s] disposal, from humanitarian aid to support for defence and security forces, through stabilisation and support for sustainable development, at all levels of cooperation’, and a doubling of the budget since 2014, the profound security and development crisis in the region continues (Council of the EU 2021b, 5).

Indeed, acute issues in all spheres are evident. In 2021, three of the four successful military coups in Africa occurred in the Sudano-Sahelian region (Chad, Mali and Sudan), with that which occurred in Guinea also in the close vicinity (Durmaz 2021). In multiple Sahel countries, conflict, food insecurity and displacement have been increasing in recent years, with resources to tackle the issues lacking (*The New Humanitarian* 2019). The conditions in the region continue to radiate to neighbouring areas, as well as to the wider international community in the form of humanitarian need, security threats and displacement.

Environmental degradation in the Sahel

One under-discussed issue that we believe to be at the core of the continued instability is land degradation. As a semi-arid region bordering the Sahara, the Sahel is from the outset more vulnerable to degradation, with desertification an ever-present threat. A study found that the Sahara has expanded in the Sahel by 10% in terms of annual rainfall measurements and by up to 18% if measured seasonally (Thomas and Nigam 2018, 3349). As early as 1992, the UN Environment Programme classified the Sahel as among the regions most affected by land degradation (UNEP 1992).

Environmental issues have only become explicitly enshrined for the Sahel in the most recent EU strategy, which notes that it will ‘encourage countries in their efforts to achieve *sustainable and inclusive development*, including habitat protection, preserving biodiversity and combating desertification.’ ‘[L]ong-term prospects for sustainable social, environmental and economic development’ are noted alongside military involvement and short-term stabilisation (Council of the EU 2021b, 14, 10).

It is heartening to see environmental issues emerging in EU strategy documents on the Sahel. Up to 70% of the population in the region relies directly on the land for their livelihoods through agriculture and pastoralism (Ickowicz et al. 2012, 261). In such a context, sustainable solutions for either development or security cannot emerge when the land in the area is becoming degraded. Environmental restoration is a necessary component of a meaningful response.

However, clear solutions are not provided in these strategies. It is common for the issues to be framed as climate change. The UN Sahel Special Adviser described the region as ‘disproportionately affected by global warming’ and sees the root causes as ‘discrimination, human rights violations, weak governance, conflict, and the impact of climate change’ (Climate Centre 2018). The International Committee of the Red Cross

(2021), UNESCO (Werrell and Femia 2018), the US Institute of Peace (Blaine 2021), the World Bank (2020), the UN Human Rights office (UN Human Rights 2021, 4–5) and many others have published documents linking climate change with the issues faced by the people in the Sahel.

However, the root causes are more complex than this. The key form of environmental degradation in the Sahel is land erosion. Erosion occurs with the loss of plant life, root structures and organic matter from the soil, and is linked through a host of interconnected pathways to negative outcomes in the environmental, socio-economic, political and security sectors. The links between soil and rising temperatures and decreasing rains are well known. Plant life naturally cools microclimates by releasing water vapour, contributing to cloud formation that limits sunlight, and thereby lowering temperatures and increasing precipitation.

Soil erosion is also a massive contributor to climate change. There are 2,500 billion tonnes of carbon in the earth's soil, compared with 800 billion tonnes in the atmosphere and 560 billion tonnes in plant and animal life (Schwartz 2014). When land is degraded, carbon is released into the atmosphere. An estimated two-thirds of terrestrial carbon stores from soils and vegetation have been lost since the nineteenth century through unsustainable agriculture, forestry and other land use (IUCN 2015). In the period 2007–2016 they totalled an estimated 23% of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions (IPCC 2019, 8). Furthermore, biodiversity, from microbiomes to flora, fauna and the habitats they provide, has been severely weakened.

At the local level, eroded soils generate less food for people and livestock. This creates chronic stress with regard to food security and incomes. Eroded soils also make natural shocks, namely drought and flooding, more likely, as well as creating drier microclimates due to the reduced capacity of soils to absorb and retain water. This creates a feedback loop in which erosion continuously weakens the conditions for living matter to reproduce and thereby hastens further erosion.

The weakened and vulnerable livelihoods of the people living in these circumstances contribute to both poverty and competition over land between various users, particularly farmers and pastoralists. Conflict between these groups is a growing source of violence, further eroding already weakened mechanisms for conflict mitigation and resolution. From local-level disputes over land, 'pastoralism-related violence in the Sudano-Sahel has become increasingly intertwined with some of the most pressing security threats facing the world today' (Velturo 2020). The proliferation of small arms further increases violence. Pastoral groups are often blamed, despite the historical roots of the livelihood, centuries of collaborative coexistence and the importance of the livestock sector to national GDPs. Both weakening food security and increased conflict heighten pressures for migration.

To equate land degradation with climate change is neither an accurate nor a helpful framing. Climate change is a real global and regional issue. However, it is a separate, if interconnected, process. Human-induced factors, such as the excessive exploitation of firewood, charcoal production and unsustainable agro-pastoral practices, including

overgrazing and over-cultivation, are more immediate causes of soil erosion. Climate change does not necessitate that these processes take place, but it exacerbates their negative consequences.

What to do about it

This framing around unsustainable land-use practices enables the identification of issues that are specific and local. As global problems require global solutions, local solutions are available for local problems. It is multitudes easier to identify local drivers for deforestation and to design activities to address them than it is to solve global climate change, necessary as both are.

From the acute issues emerging in the Sahel, tremendous opportunities are also materialising. Nature-based solutions (NBS), working to make land-use practices more sustainable, especially in agriculture, pastoralism and forestry, provide a pathway to improve both local food production and the resilience of livelihoods to shocks, thereby decreasing conflict and migration pressures, and sequestering carbon in the soil. Actionable local strategies can be transformational at the local level, but also link to the global fight against climate change.

The technical solutions are well established and implementable, with many examples provided by Pasiiecznik and Reij (2020). The UN Convention to Combat Desertification (*UNCCD* n.d. (a)) estimates that soils could globally sequester up to three billion tons of carbon annually, while being enriched by it. The Convention (*UNCCD* n.d. (b)) also argues that better land management and rehabilitation will also lead to greater drought resilience.

Efforts are already underway to achieve this. The main programme aimed at ecosystem restoration in the Sahel is the Great Green Wall (GGW), an African Union initiative launched in 2007 to regreen degraded lands and stop desertification. Its ambition is to become the ‘largest living structure on the planet: a grown, not built, world wonder, stretching across the entire width of the continent of Africa’, restoring 100 million hectares of degraded land, sequestering 250 million tons of carbon and creating 10 million green jobs by 2030 (*UNCCD* 2020, 6). Both the European Commission and the European Investment Bank are partners.

However, the GGW implementation has been lagging, with only 4% of the aims completed in the progress report (*UNCCD* 2020, 23). Furthermore, more than half of the progress has been made by Ethiopia alone, with 2.3 million hectares planted.

There have also been significant issues with the implementation of the GGW beyond slow progress. The report notes issues around tracking how money is spent and whether funding is being used for the desired activities. Questions have also been raised regarding how successful tree planting has been, as reporting lacks survival rates, let alone the impacts on the soil or socio-economic systems (Watts 2020). An instructive example arises

from Turkey in November 2019, when an effort to break the world record in planting the largest number of trees in one location in one hour led to 303,150 saplings being planted. After three months, however, up to 90% of the saplings were dead (Carleton 2020).

The concern around tree survival is exacerbated by the fact that the Sahel is not predominantly a forest ecosystem, but rather grass-predominated savannah. Over-reliance on trees as an NBS, especially if driven by carbon sequestration that incentivises quick-growing exotic trees, may even be harmful to the local ecosystems and particularly pastoral livelihoods. Rangeland, including the Sahel, is not, as some assumptions may imply, ‘degraded forests’, but ‘highly productive, biodiverse ecosystems that support many livestock and people’ (Scoones 2021). Furthermore, grasses can be an equal carbon sink to forests due to their extensive root systems (Carleton 2022). Similar concerns have been raised about the Bonn Challenge that aims to plant a trillion trees, where up to 80% of commitments involve monoculture plantations or limited tree mixes (Stanford University 2020).

Socio-economic factors have also been challenging, particularly as conserved areas become cut off from already economically deprived and marginalised populations, exacerbating poverty (Kelly et al. 2021). Similar issues and worse have been noted in many instances related to the Reduce Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD+) programme (Lang 2020). Monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV) was noted as a significant bottleneck for the progress of the GGW (UNCCD 2020).

The end result of this MRV capacity gap is that actual outcomes cannot be evidenced and communicated. Identifying successes and failures remains haphazard and is too often based on subjective storytelling. Best practices cannot be systematically established. Projects continue to be designed and implemented in a suboptimal way, and learning remains fractured. The issues are particularly acute for rangeland and soil-related projects, which are more challenging to monitor from a technical perspective than the above-ground biomass of trees.

Poor MRV feeds into the other major challenge in scaling ecosystem restoration activities—finance. Funding for green activities has increased exponentially in recent years, with various new orientations towards an environmentally sustainable future being implemented or prepared, including the European Green Deal, which is backed by an investment of €1.8 trillion (European Commission 2021).

Some additional funding is also reaching activities in the Sahel, with the GGW receiving a pledge of over \$14 billion in early 2021. However large this figure sounds, it is woefully insufficient, as is the ambition of planting 100 million hectares of land. The degraded rangeland in Sudan alone is estimated at 60 million hectares.

The growing carbon removal markets offer a potentially transformative new funding mechanism for ecosystem restoration. With all major corporations pledging to become net zero, the value of the market is on the brink of explosive growth of up to \$100 billion annually by 2030 (Toews 2021). The price of carbon per tonne is also rapidly rising, enabling the implementation of projects that were previously not financially viable.

Making sure that a substantial part of this money reaches the most vulnerable regions and populations is both a moral imperative and sound policy to avoid perpetual humanitarian emergencies with huge human and financial costs. Incentivising subsistence land users with direct cash payments based on carbon sequestration could enable immediate poverty reduction along with long-term habitat sustainability. Being the producers of an internationally desired product, carbon credits, would transform the position of poor communities from aid beneficiaries to service providers. In these areas, carbon-backed NBS offer the potential for programming that is environmentally, socially and financially sustainable.

The demand for carbon-financed environmental projects in the Sahel is present, the gap is in the supply. Suppliers able to design and certify projects for carbon-credit providers are few, despite many organisations implementing projects on ecosystem restoration. Furthermore, the high cost of accreditation can be prohibitive to all but the largest and most well-financed projects, restricting the ability of many in-need areas to take part. Ultimately, Sahelian carbon projects are few and far between.

Although carbon credits are controversial, with some branding them as greenwashing, this should be seen as a valid critique of some existing projects, not the concept itself. Zero emissions are not possible for certain sectors through reductions alone and some offsetting is required. Ensuring that offsets are (1) genuine with verifiable carbon impacts, (2) implemented in a socially sustainable manner, (3) contributing to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, (4) expensive enough to encourage efficiency, and (5) targeting the most in-need populations, is a better strategy than disregarding them altogether.

Conclusion

The EU can play a leading role in bridging the existing gaps. The European Space Agency's satellite systems are already providing an invaluable service in the form of remote-sensing technologies that monitor changes in the soil. Many humanitarian and development aid projects are already carrying out ecosystem restoration but with insufficient tools and funding to measure its impacts. Funding direct study and MRV capacity to learn from these projects could generate important baselines for carbon levels and project impacts, helping with both learning and establishing an information base on which carbon-funded projects could be built, unlocking massive scaling potential. Pushing partners to report more robustly on environmental impacts alone may yield many improvements. This is particularly vital for ensuring that NBS beyond forestry can be scaled. The implementer networks are present but lack awareness of the opportunities in and capacity for project development, which are also things that the EU can support.

The EU should also widen its support to all actors engaged in ecosystem restoration. In providing such support the EU should also reform funding administration. The burden of managing a grant from the EU is prohibitively high, effectively excluding smaller actors. Lowering the barriers to partnership would enable innovative approaches,

improve equity and inclusivity, and promote local leadership of projects, thereby increasing local ownership and success. The US Agency for International Development has taken steps in this direction with its New Partnerships Initiative, including smaller grants and a reduction in the first-stage application form from 50 pages to two. Smaller, less burdensome grants may also enable grass-roots approaches that have greater variability and contextual sensitivity.

The newest EU strategy commits to ‘base its action on the nexus between humanitarian aid, support for sustainable development and support for peace’ (Council of the EU 2021b, 8). Although environmental restoration and NBS are not a panacea and a multitude of tools will be necessary to address the scale of the issues, they sit within this nexus while also contributing to the fight against climate change. Ignoring land degradation would be fatal to all of the EU’s goals. The time is ripe for leadership, and small actions building on prior EU programming can be leveraged for great impacts with strategic investments.

References

- Blaine, T. (2021). Climate change risks new violent conflict. How to respond? *United States Institute of Peace*, 19 July. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/07/climate-change-risks-new-violent-conflict-how-respond>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Carleton, E. (2020). The rush to reforest: When nature-based solutions end up doing more harm than good. *ILRI/CGIAR*. <https://www.ilri.org/news/rush-reforest-when-nature-based-solutions-end-doing-more-harm-good>. Accessed 25 February 2022.
- Climate Centre. (2018). UN: Sahel region one of the most vulnerable to climate change. 14 November. <https://www.climatecentre.org/981/un-sahel-region-one-of-the-most-vulnerable-to-climate-change/>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Council of the EU. (2015). *Council conclusions on the Sahel Regional Action Plan 2015–2020*. 7823/15, 20 April. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21522/st07823-en15.pdf>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Council of the EU. (2020). *Africa – Council conclusions*. 9265/20, 30 June. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44788/st_9265_2020_init_en.pdf. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Council of the EU. (2021a). Sahel: Council approves conclusions on the EU’s integrated strategy in the region. 19 April. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/pressreleases/2021/04/19/sahel-council-approves-conclusions-on-the-eu-s-integrated-strategy-in-the-region/>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Council of the EU. (2021b). *The European Union’s integrated strategy in the Sahel – Council conclusions*. 7723/21, 16 April. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7723-2021-INIT/en/pdf>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Durmaz, M. (2021). 2021, the year military coups returned to the stage in Africa. *Al Jazeera*, 28 December. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/28/2021-year-military-coups-return-to-the-stage-in-africa>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- EEAS (European External Action Service). (2011). *Strategy for security and development in the Sahel*. https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/africa/docs/sahel_strategy_en.pdf. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- European Commission. (2021). A European green deal: Striving to be the first climate-neutral continent. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en. Accessed 22 February 2022.

- Green, J. K., Konings, A. G., Alemohammad, S. H., Berry, J., Entekhabi, D., Kolassa, J., Lee, J.-E., & Gentine, P. (2017). Regionally strong feedbacks between the atmosphere and terrestrial biosphere. *Nature Geoscience*, *10*, 410–414.
- Ikowicz, A., Ancey, V., Corniaux, C., Duteurtre, G., Chapuis, R. P., Touré, I., Vall, E., & Wan, A. (2012). Crop-livestock production systems in the Sahel: Increasing resilience for adaptation to climate change and preserving food security. In Meybeck et al. (eds.), *Building resilience for adaptation to climate change in the agricultural sector* (pp. 261–94). Proceedings of FAO/OECD workshop 23–4 April.
- International Committee of the Red Cross. (2021). Climate change and conflict. <https://www.icrc.org/en/what-we-do/climate-change-conflict>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- IPCC. (2019). Summary for policymakers. In P. R. Shukla, J. Skea, E. Calvo Buendia, V. Masson-Delmotte, H.-O. Pörtner, D. C. Roberts, P. Zhai, R. Slade, S. Connors, R. van Diemen, M. Ferrat, E. Haughey, S. Luz, S. Neogi, M. Pathak, J. Petzold, J. Portugal Pereira, P. Vyas, E. Huntley . . . J. Malley (eds.), *Climate change and land: An IPCC special report on climate change, desertification, land degradation, sustainable land management, food security, and greenhouse gas fluxes in terrestrial ecosystems*. https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/4/2020/02/SPM_Updated-Jan20.pdf. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature). (2015). Land degradation and climate change. *IUCN Issues Brief*, November. https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/import/downloads/land_degradation_issues_brief_cop21_031215.pdf. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Kelly, L., Butscher, J., & van der Werf, M. (2021). Scaling the Great Green Wall? *Independent Evaluation Group, World Bank Group*, 21 January. <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/blog/scaling-great-green-wall>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Lang, C. (2020). Global Forest Coalition: ‘Has REDD been worth the money?’ *REDD*, 3 September. <https://redd-monitor.org/2020/09/03/global-forest-coalition-has-redd-been-worth-the-money/>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Pasiecznik, N., & Reij, C. (eds.). (2020). *Restoring African drylands*. Wageningen: Tropenbos International.
- Scoones, I. (2021). Tree planting schemes can destroy rangelands and damage pastoral livelihoods. *PASTRES*. <https://pastres.org/2021/09/10/tree-planting-schemes-can-destroy-rangelands-and-damage-pastoral-livelihoods/>. Accessed 1 March 2022.
- Schwartz, J. D. (2014). Soil as carbon storehouse: New weapon in climate fight? *Yale School of the Environment*, 4 March. https://e360.yale.edu/features/soil_as_carbon_storehouse_new_weapon_in_climate_fight. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Stanford University. (2020). When planting trees threatens the forest: Poorly designed tree-planting campaigns could do more harm than good. *ScienceDaily*. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2020/06/200622133012.htm. Accessed 1 March 2022.
- The New Humanitarian*. (2019). The Sahel in flames. 31 May. <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/in-depth/sahel-flames-Burkina-Faso-Mali-Niger-militancy-conflict>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Thomas, N., & Nigam, S. (2018). Twentieth-century climate change over Africa: Seasonal hydroclimate trends and Sahara Desert expansion. *Journal of Climate*, *31*(9), 3349–70.
- Toews, R. (2021). These are the startups applying AI to tackle climate change. *Forbes*, 20 June. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/robtoews/2021/06/20/these-are-the-startups-applying-ai-to-tackle-climate-change/>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- UNCCD (UN Convention to Combat Desertification). (2020). *The Great Green Wall implementation status and way ahead to 2020*. 7 September. <https://www.unccd.int/publications/great-green-wall-implementation-status-and-way-ahead-2030>. Accessed 22 February 2022.

- UNCCD. (n.d. (a)). Land and climate change. <https://www.unccd.int/issues/land-and-climate-change>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- UNCCD. (n.d. (b)). Land and drought. <https://www.unccd.int/issues/land-and-drought>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- UNEP (UN Environment Programme). (1992). *World atlas of desertification*. Nairobi: UNEP.
- UN Human Rights. (2021). *Report: How climate change affects the human rights of Sahel region migrants*. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/ClimateChange/HR-climate-change-migration-Sahel.pdf>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Velluturo, M. (2020). The erosion of pastoralism in the Sudano-Sahel: Time to recognize a growing security threat? *Stimson.org*, International Order and Conflict Issue Brief. <https://www.stimson.org/2020/the-erosion-of-pastoralism-in-the-sudano-sahel/>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Watts, J. (2020). Africa's Great Green Wall just 4% complete halfway through schedule. *The Guardian*, 7 September. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/sep/07/africa-great-green-wall-just-4-complete-over-halfway-through-schedule>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- Werrell, C. E., & Femia, F. (2018). Climate change raises conflict concerns. *The UNESCO Courier*, 2018-2. <https://en.unesco.org/courier/2018-2/climate-change-raises-conflict-concerns>. Accessed 22 February 2022.
- World Bank. (2020). Where climate change is reality: Supporting Africa's Sahel pastoralists to secure a resilient future. 21 September. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/immersive-story/2020/09/21/where-climate-change-is-reality-supporting-africas-sahel-pastoralists-secure-a-resilient-future>. Accessed 22 February 2022.

Author biographies



Eero Wahlstedt is a monitoring, evaluation and research expert with over eight years of experience working to improve the effectiveness of aid sector actors on issues related to humanitarian, development and peacebuilding activities in Africa.



Joona Mikkola is an agricultural and natural resource management expert with long-standing experience in farming, rangeland management, and food security in Africa, including working with subsistence farmers and herders on land management and developing sustainable food value chains.

The *Last Supper* by Vladimir Putin

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 110–111
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221089377
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv


George Pepios

The self-advertised theocratic credentials of Putin’s regime are no secret. The Kremlin never misses an opportunity to showcase to the rest of the world that its legitimacy is shored up by divine providence—probably the only break from the Soviet era’s state-sponsored atheism. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the table used for French President Macron’s and German Chancellor Scholz’s tête-à-têtes with Putin was so gigantic that it could have been used for the *Last Supper* (Claus 2022). An Italian craftsman’s claim to having manufactured the grotesque piece lends even more support to the speculation it was intended to seat Jesus and all his apostles—da Vinci style (France24 2022). For those who do not know what I’m referring to, it is ‘a gargantuan oval table, roughly five metres long and held up by three thick pillars’ (Holmes 2022). Little wonder, then, that it has broken the Internet, with netizens unleashing their mockery of the table via gratifying memes and humorous comments that call out Putin’s absurdity.

In a scene that could easily have been taken out of *Game of Thrones*, Putin and Macron sit facing each other like two medieval warlords. The only thing missing is a map of Europe carved up along the fault lines with miniature soldiers and tanks strategically placed opposite each other. For anyone who was in any doubt, the Westphalian order is alive and well, like an annoying pimple that simply will not go away. The image Russia has painted for itself is personified in its leader’s position in the scene: alone at the head of table, isolated from his interlocutor (officially, because of Putin’s Covid-19 paranoia), facing a changing world where old ‘friends’ have turned into perceived foes.

Corresponding author:

G. Pepios, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 20 Rue du Commerce, 1st floor, Brussels, 1000, Belgium.

Email: gp@martenscentre.eu

This paper was written before Russia’s decision to launch an unprovoked war against Ukraine on 24 February 2022.



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

The table has metastasised, assuming a life of its own with even art critics joining this online Cluedo game of deciphering the symbolism behind this piece of wood. One went as far as to interpret the online mockery and memeification as ‘a way of facing power, a small comfort and a smile’ (Gat 2022). But then again, Putin’s visual power game is not without precedent. It was only last year that another autocratic ruler, Turkey’s Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, reigning on the opposite shore of the Black Sea, employed similar tactics in the now infamous ‘Sofagate’ affair. The weapon of choice was again a piece of furniture (or lack of) as Commission President von der Leyen was left without a chair whilst European Council President Michel took a seat next to the Turkish president during a photo op (Eder 2021).

The recent Kremlin shenanigans showcase that this was not an unfortunate, isolated incident but akin to a secret agreement between authoritarian strongmen to pervert the customary use of state furniture. Therefore, I can only conclude with the remark that if a manual on how to spot dictatorships is ever drafted, it should include ‘degenerate use of furniture for power signalling purposes’.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank Niklas Nováky for the inspiration.

References

- Claus, P. (2022). The very long table of Russian president mocked online. *Greek Reporter*, 15 February. <https://greekreporter.com/2022/02/15/long-table-putin/>. Accessed 23 February 2022.
- Eder, F. (2021). Sofagate or Aidegate? Von der Leyen was nearly downgraded to Michel’s staff. *Politico*, 9 April. <https://www.politico.eu/article/sofagate-ursula-von-der-leyen-charles-michel-erdogan-turkey-europe/>. Accessed 23 February 2022.
- France24. (2022). Hoping for peace: Italian craftsman claims Putin’s table. 18 February. <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220218-hoping-for-peace-italian-craftsman-claims-putin-s-table>. Accessed 23 February 2022.
- Gat, O. (2022). Thumbelina politics: A seat at Putin’s table. *ArtReview*, 14 February. <https://artreview.com/thumbelina-politics-a-seat-at-putin-big-table/>. Accessed 23 February 2022.
- Holmes, O. (2022). Putin’s massive table: Powerplay or paranoia? *The Guardian*, 8 February. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/08/vladimir-putin-massive-table>. Accessed 23 February 2022.

Author biography



George Pepios was until recently the European View Research and Editor Intern at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies.

Democratisation in EU Foreign Policy: The Cases of Belarus, Turkey and Ukraine

European View
2022, Vol. 21 (1) 112–113
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221087509
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



**Lucie Tungul, Petr Hlaváček,
Tereza Soušková and Marek Ženíšek**

Three countries on the eastern border of the EU have caused significant political and economic challenges to the EU's accession policy (Turkey) and to the European Neighbourhood Policy (Belarus and Ukraine). All three have revealed some weaknesses of the intra-EU decision-making processes (especially the lack of flexibility and the unwillingness to apply 'hard' power politics) and the disunity of the EU member states' voices, which reflects their very divergent national interests. Still, the policies adopted by the EU with regard to these countries also represent an opportunity for the EU. The paper focuses on the key attributes that the EU needs to consider when drafting its policies, both bilateral and multilateral, towards these countries. We argue that the EU should form rules-based relationships that take a step-by-step approach. Individual member states could assume more active roles in promoting specific policy recommendations. This approach could bring together the differing interests of the EU member states and the EU institutions.

Author biographies



Lucie Tungul is Head of Research at the TOPAZ political institute and Assistant Professor in the Department of Politics and Social Sciences of the Faculty of Law, Palacky University, Czechia. She worked at Fatih University, Istanbul, between 2006 and 2016. She is a member of the executive board of the Czech Political Science Association.

Petr Hlaváček is a historian and philosopher, and currently a coordinator and an associate professor at the Collegium Europaeum of

Corresponding author:

L. Tungul, Charles University, Netherlands.
Email: gp@martenscentre.eu



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

Charles University and the Czech Academy of Sciences. He studied at Charles University in Prague, Czechia, and the University of Bern, Switzerland. He has worked as a researcher at the Leibniz Institute for the History and Culture of Eastern Europe in Leipzig.

Tereza Soušková is a political scientist at the Charles University in Prague, Czechia. She specialises in Russian foreign policy and democracy research in Ukraine, Belarus, Russia and the Caucasus. She is a research fellow at the Association for International Affairs and editor-in-chief of the journal *International Politics*, published by the Institute of International Relations Prague.

Marek Ženíšek is a political scientist, member of the Czech parliament, Vice-President of the Pilsen Regional Council and Executive Director of TOPAZ. He has held the roles of Deputy Minister of Justice and Deputy Minister of Health. A former lecturer at the University of West Bohemia and the Metropolitan University of Prague, he has written several books and scholarly articles on political systems and transitology.



The Transatlantic Perspective on Migration: Attuning Migration Policy to National Politics

European View
2022, Vol. 21 (1) 114–115
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221088658
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Henrik Larsen

The challenge of irregular migration has left policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic bewildered about how to respond coherently in a way that is effective and angers the fewest people. The migration surge on the southern border of the US has peaked at its highest level ever, at nearly 1.7 million encounters in one year. In the first 10 months of 2021, there were 184,000 illegal border crossings into the EU, mainly through the Central Mediterranean and the Western Balkans routes. This represents a 45% increase on the pre-pandemic year 2019. The difficulty of managing irregular migration is but the latest in a series of issues that have strengthened the nationalist tendencies which over the past decade have overwhelmed the political establishments in the EU and the US. Although not the only driver, the perception of uncontrolled migration adds strong fuel to the fire of the new nationalist parties and leaders that seek a fundamental revision of foreign policy. It has thus weakened the ability of the transatlantic community to act collectively on other strategic issues, such as how to deal with Russia and China. Irregular migration is closely related to the concept of ‘Westlessness’, as coined by the Munich Security Conference in 2020, which describes a divided and unconfident West that is having difficulties finding an international foothold. This paper aims to distinguish between three broad measures that could help policymakers on both sides of the Atlantic structure their response to irregular migration. These measures are (1) making deals with third countries, (2) enforcing sovereign borders and (3) adapting legal interpretations. Clarity about the pros and cons of each policy measure, and their combinations, could help decision-makers find a workable compromise that reaffirms both the sovereign right of

Corresponding author:

H. Larsen, Center for Security Studies, Haldeneggsteig 4, IFW B 47.2, Zürich, 8092, Switzerland.
Email: henrik.larsen@sipo.gess.ethz.ch



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

Ambitions Dashed: Why Sino-Russian Economic Cooperation Is Not Working

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 116
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221088657
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv


Vladimir Milov

Economic cooperation between Russia and China is widely seen as the backbone of an emerging global alliance between Moscow and Beijing. Since 2014 and the emergence of the current rift with the West over Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the Kremlin has been eager to promote the idea of strengthening economic ties with China as a viable alternative to strained relations with the West, and as a sign that a new, less West-centred global economic order is emerging. Concerns about this growing Sino-Russian economic activity have scared many Western politicians, who have rushed to appease Moscow to prevent its further integration with China. However, a cross-check of the implementation of the ambitious economic agenda set out in 2014 by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping shows that no real integration is happening and that fundamental problems lie behind this failure. This paper explains why Russia and China's economic cooperation plans have failed since 2014 and are not likely to succeed in the future.

Author biography



Vladimir Milov is a Russian opposition politician, publicist, economist and energy expert. He is a former deputy minister of energy of Russia, and is currently economic adviser to opposition leader Alexey Navalny.

Corresponding author:

V. Milov, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, 20 Rue du Commerce, 1st floor, Brussels, B-1000, Belgium.

Email: v_milov@freerussia.eu



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).



Climate Litigation vs. Legislation: Avoiding Excessive Judicial Activism in the EU

European View
2022, Vol. 21(1) 117–118
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/17816858221086723
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv



Anastas Punev

On 24 March 2021 the German Federal Constitutional Court issued a decision with far-reaching consequences. The court ruled that the lack of sufficient specifications for further CO₂ emission reductions from 2031 onwards in the German Climate Act ran contrary to the Constitution. In so ruling, the court narrowed the scope of action available to the legislator. Just a few weeks later a Dutch court went one step further, declaring that the oil and gas company Shell had violated its human rights obligations by failing to take adequate action to curb its contributions to climate change and global warming. These are just two examples of the approach to climate change that has been adopted by some courts in the EU. They coincide with the EU's very recent legislative initiatives to promote a uniform legislative package on climate change that could act as a vehicle for the European Green Deal. We are confronted with two mutually exclusive risks: regulative overreach and efforts that are too little, too late. This policy brief proposes a balance between them. It demands that the legislator on the European level take a proactive role, especially in a time when climate change litigation is growing exponentially. The gap between legislative intentions and actions has been left unfilled for too long, so the courts are stepping in. To tackle a contemporary issue such as climate change, we have to find a solution to the old problem of the EU's legitimacy and the extent to which member states have leeway in developing their own climate change policy.

Corresponding author:

A. Punev, Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski', 1504 Sofia, 15 Tsar Osvoboditel Blvd., Bulgaria.
Email: punev@uni-sofia.bg



Creative Commons CC BY: This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>) which permits any use, reproduction and distribution of the work without further permission provided the original work is attributed as specified on the SAGE and Open Access pages (<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/open-access-at-sage>).

Author biography



Climate Litigation vs. Legislation
Assessing Economic Judicial Activism in the EU
Anastas PUNEV

Summary
March 2021

On 28 March 2021 the German Federal Constitutional Court issued a decision with far-reaching consequences. The court ruled that the lack of climate specifications for further CO₂ emission reductions from 2028 onwards in the Climate Change Act was contrary to the Constitution. In so doing, the court reversed the scope of action available to the legislator. Just a few weeks later a Czech court set a new case before, arguing that fuel and gas companies should not extend to human rights obligations by failing to take adequate action to curb its contribution to climate change and global warming.

There are just two examples of the approach to climate change that has been adopted by some courts in the EU. They concern both the EU core environmental institutions to promote a uniform legislative package on climate change that could act as a vehicle for the European Green Deal. They are confronted with two relatively untested ideas: legislative oversight and effects that are too little, too late.

The policy implications of these decisions have been discussed by the legislator on the European level like a proactive role, especially in a time when climate change legislation is already in progress. The gap between legislative intentions and actions has been left unbridled for too long, so the courts are stepping in. To which consequences have such climate change actions led to date? A solution to the problem of the EU's legislative will and ability to which member states have to comply in identifying their own climate change policy.

Keywords: Climate change – Climate Change Regulation – European Climate Law – Judicial governance – CSR&E

Anastas PUNEV holds a Ph.D. in law and is a practicing lawyer in the field of civil and commercial law, and an Honorary Assistant Professor at Sofia University's faculty of law. His main interests are in the field of civil procedure, as well as in the new legal challenges posed by technological innovation.