



Hic sunt leones: Strategic risks and security threats for Europe

European View
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DOI: 10.1177/17816858261444210
journals.sagepub.com/home/euv


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The age of hard power has returned. The brutal logic of power politics is once again asserting itself, in a development that clashes with the intuitions and experiences of Westerners born after the Cold War. For all its prosperity and political achievements, Europe can no longer assume that it stands above these dynamics, nor that it is guaranteed a place at the table.

The autumn 2022 issue of the *European View* was dedicated to ‘Contemporary regional threats and challenges in Europe’. In it we confronted the consequences of a full-scale war on our continent, one which threatened not only the sovereignty and independence of Ukraine but the very existence of the EU. We could not have imagined that this was just the beginning. Since then conflicts have multiplied across our increasingly interconnected world, in which instability in one region rapidly reverberates across others. Compounding the situation is the precarious state of the transatlantic relation and the rules-based liberal order. They used to underpin Europe’s security, but now they themselves are under threat.

The EU must equip itself with both the knowledge and the strategic compass required to chart a course through these newly turbulent waters. It must venture into geopolitical oceans long neglected, regions once left to the purview of more powerful allies or global institutions, places that on old maps might have been marked simply as *hic sunt leones*.¹

Against this backdrop, the current issue of the *European View* brings together experts from a wide range of disciplines and perspectives to offer the reader a clearer view of the forces and threats surrounding Europe. In this new Age of Exploration, their contributions seek to map the new strategic environment: the pressures that are emerging, the dangers which are approaching and the consequences that may follow if Europe does not take its destiny into its own hands.

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To the south, Europe's immediate neighbourhood has become one of its greatest sources of concern. Political fragmentation, weak governance and persistent conflict are generating instability that is spilling over directly onto European shores through migration pressures, energy insecurity and regional turbulence. These troubled waters are increasingly being navigated by other powers, notably Russia and China, which are seeking to expand their influence along Europe's southern flank. The Mediterranean itself has re-emerged as a central geopolitical theatre: across both its western and eastern basins, competition is intensifying over maritime routes, energy resources and regional influence.

Further east, the Black Sea has become one of the principal battlegrounds shaping Europe's strategic environment. The war against Ukraine and the threat Russia constantly poses to Georgia and Moldova have underscored the centrality of the region when it comes to connectivity, maritime access and the wider balance of power across Eurasia. At the same time, the Western Balkans remain a fragile frontier where frail institutions and unresolved tensions provide fertile ground for external influence and instability.

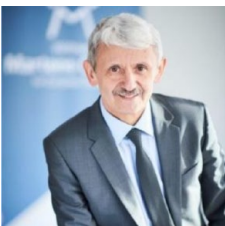
Beyond these immediate horizons, new strategic theatres are emerging. As climate change opens new maritime routes and economic opportunities, the Arctic and the High North are becoming areas of growing competition. Meanwhile, global rivalries are increasingly extending into Europe's surrounding regions and even further afield, linking Europe's security to developments as distant as the Indo-Pacific.

Navigating these waters will require clearer direction, greater unity and a renewed grasp of the geopolitical currents shaping the world. Beyond offering a deeper understanding of the threats gathering around Europe, we hope to provide a tentative framework for thinking about how the Union might navigate, and ultimately shape, this more turbulent geopolitical landscape. Throughout the pages, the reader will detect tones of hope that, if Europe can respond with unity, clear strategy and bold actions, it may yet turn this renewed era of hard-power politics into an opportunity to reclaim its place at the table of great powers—not to impose our will, but to protect our interests and values. After all, when the Romans marked *hic sunt leones* on their maps, they were indicating not only unknown challenges but also untapped new opportunities.

Note

1. The phrase *Hic sunt leones* (Here be lions) was used by ancient Roman and medieval cartographers to denote uncharted and unexplored regions.

Author biography



Mikuláš Dzurinda is president of the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and a former prime minister of Slovakia (1998–2006). He has also held the positions of minister of transport and minister for foreign affairs.