

WILL EUROPE REBUILD OR DIVIDE?

The Strategic Implications of the
Russia-Ukraine War for Europe's Future

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About This Report

This report examines the effects of the Russia-Ukraine war on how the United States' European allies understand and pursue their security. To assess whether the conflict is likely to drive long-lasting changes in European security priorities, investments, and relations, this report focuses on the conflict's effect on (1) European attitudes toward relations with Russia; (2) European collective security strategies, institutions, and resources; and (3) prospects for increased integration with Ukraine. It assesses the likely durability of changes observed since 2022 and highlights implications and recommendations for the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Department of Defense, and the U.S. government.

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Summary

Issue

The Russia-Ukraine war has moved fundamental questions regarding European security and defense back to the fore. The fighting has compelled European leaders to consider the realities of modern interstate conflict and the tools available to manage the current emergency and defend against future threats. Since the war began, European nations working collectively through the European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and sub-regional coalitions have come together to oppose Russia's invasion and defend Ukraine's sovereignty. However, it is unknown whether the war will drive broader changes in understandings of the threats to Europe's collective interests and what is required to ensure their collective defense.

Approach

This report examines the consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war for how U.S. allies in Europe understand and pursue their security. To assess whether the conflict is likely to drive long-lasting changes in European security priorities, investments, and relations, we analyzed the conflict's effect on (1) European attitudes toward relations with Russia; (2) European collective security strategies, institutions, and resources; and (3) prospects for increased integration with Ukraine. We consider the likely durability of changes observed and offer implications and recommendations for the U.S. Air Force (USAF), U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), and the U.S. government.

Key Findings and Implications

- **The European shift away from engagement with Russia is likely irreversible absent a significant change in Russian leadership, domestic politics, or external behavior.** The scale and longevity of European restrictions and progress toward reducing energy dependencies have reduced incentives to restore prewar economic engagement. Some countries may use bilateral relations with Moscow as leverage in negotiations with Brussels, but the European majority has demonstrated the ability and resolve to maintain a more confrontational approach.
- **The war has energized Europeans to improve their operational flexibility, but any movement toward strategic autonomy from the United States is likely to be limited.** The war has motivated member states to empower the EU to promote defense integration, yet NATO's resurgence since 2022 underlines that Europeans—particularly Central, Northern, and Eastern Europeans—continue to view the transatlantic alliance as critical to ensuring their

security. Rather than develop an alternative architecture, European members are seeking to integrate the EU and NATO.

- **Europeans have recognized the need to improve their ability to act with reduced U.S. support but are likely to still depend on the U.S. security role in the medium term given the scale of their existing production and capability gaps.** The multiyear increases in European defense spending and increased political attention to building national and collective defenses marks a significant departure from pre-2022 trends. Yet disagreements among European countries over whether to prioritize indigenous production or speed of procurement are likely to continue, potentially contributing to inefficiencies and hampering efforts to advance defense integration.
- **Although the EU has sought a greater defense role, the substantial reforms that would enable Brussels to direct collective military action are unlikely because of national differences and the immaturity of existing proposals.** European, EU, and NATO leaders have taken steps to strengthen existing institutions by developing new capabilities, institutionalizing novel procedures and relationships, and adapting existing funding and coordination mechanisms to support collective defense goals, but novel organizations largely operate within existing institutions.
- **European engagement with Ukraine is generally one-directional and falls short of standards for de facto defense integration.** To meet Ukraine's warfighting needs, Europeans have extended unprecedented aid and built new frameworks to sustain support. These wartime interactions can advance European-Ukrainian interoperability and familiarity, but how Ukraine may or can contribute to European defenses is untested.
- **Ukraine's formal integration through the EU and NATO is unlikely in the near term.** EU membership negotiations are likely to highlight practical challenges and differences among EU members.

Recommendations

For the U.S. government:

- **Expand U.S. consultations and coordination with the EU on defense matters.** Increase coordination with the EU to demonstrate U.S. commitment to the principle of complementarity and redress allies' concerns that investments in EU defense capability will alienate the United States.
- **Encourage the creation of an EU fund to support member states' implementation of NATO resilience initiatives.** Hardening allied critical infrastructure benefits U.S. forces operating in the theater by ensuring access to critical off-base resources.
- **Continue to encourage economic and industrial cooperation between U.S. allies in Europe and the Pacific through non-NATO frameworks.** Given the EU's budgetary and regulatory powers, EU initiatives may be better suited to developing cross-regional cooperation.

For DoD:

- **Increase and regularize dialogues with the European Defence Agency and other EU institutions to encourage the interchangeability of new systems and equipment,** particularly munitions, developed through new European joint development and procurement programs.

- **Identify and communicate where European producers may be best suited to address U.S. gaps.** Interoperability goes both ways, and new EU defense initiatives may provide novel solutions for meeting U.S. stockpiling and prepositioning needs.
- **Work through NATO forums to identify high-return investments useful for a variety of contingencies, including measures short of war.** Future terrorism or migration crises could divert attention or galvanize opposition to initiatives focused on large-scale conflict. To prepare for a variety of futures and preserve support, DoD can assist NATO in identifying “common denominator” requirements and communicate their usefulness for a variety of contingencies.
- **Continue to cooperate with the EU on regional and security issues beyond Russia.** This includes issues that preoccupy Southern members and those that could generate friction among European countries that weakens the consensus needed to advance European defense capacity and resilience initiatives.

For USAF:

- **Assess and communicate to European allies’ potential munitions, maintenance, and spare parts requirements that might differ from demand signals created by the Russia-Ukraine war.** Current European efforts to boost production focus on what’s needed to supply Ukraine or backfill donors’ inventories. However, a potential future NATO-Russia conflict likely would generate different demands, particularly for air forces.
- **Increase information-sharing on USAF operational requirements in other theaters, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.** Uncertainty about the future availability of U.S. forces contributes to tensions among Europeans and between the United States and its allies. Making U.S. policy and posture decisions more predictable by clarifying the rationale behind them can help right-size expectations, avert or reduce future tensions, and inform European force structure and acquisitions decisions.

Contents

About This Report.....	iii
Summary	v
Figures and Tables	ix
CHAPTER 1.....	1
The Russia-Ukraine War's Challenge to Europe.....	1
Understanding European Reactions to the War in Ukraine	1
Research Approach	2
Report Organization	4
CHAPTER 2.....	5
Will Europe Engage or Confront Russia?	5
Prewar Positions.....	5
Consequences of the Russia-Ukraine War, 2022–2024.....	16
Conclusion.....	24
CHAPTER 3.....	26
Will Europe Build Great Capability and Exercise Greater Strategic Autonomy?.....	26
Prewar Positions.....	27
Consequences of the Russia-Ukraine War, 2022–2024.....	35
Conclusion.....	46
CHAPTER 4.....	49
Will Europe Accelerate Ukraine's Integration?.....	49
Prewar Positions.....	49
Consequences of the Russia-Ukraine War, 2022–2024.....	55
Conclusion.....	61
CHAPTER 5.....	63
Charting Europe's Future Course	63
Findings and Implications	63
Factors That Could Alter This Analysis.....	64
Recommendations	75
Abbreviations	80
Bibliography	81

Figures and Tables

Figures

Figure 2.1. Favorable Views of Russia in the Six Most Populous European Union and NATO Countries	14
Figure 2.2. European Union-Russia Trade, 2013–2023	15
Figure 2.3. Imports of Russian Fossil Fuels as a Percentage of European Union Consumption	15
Figure 2.4. Positive Views of Russia in the European Union Countries.....	22
Figure 3.1. Defense Expenditures in 2014 and 2021 as a Share of Gross Domestic Product.....	31
Figure 3.2. Number of European NATO Members Meeting the 2 Percent Pledge.....	36
Figure 4.1. European Union-Ukraine Trade Balance, 2013–2022	53

Tables

Table 2.1. The European Union’s Mixed Approach to Russia, 2016–2021.....	9
Table 2.2. Summary of Trends in Europe’s Orientation Toward Russia.....	24
Table 3.1. Timeline of Major NATO Enhancements, 2014–2021	30
Table 3.2. Timeline of Major NATO Enhancements, 2022–2024	43
Table 3.3. Summary of Trends in European Autonomy Concepts and Policies	47
Table 4.1. Summary of Trends in European Positions on Ukrainian Integration	62

The Russia-Ukraine War's Challenge to Europe

This research was completed in November 2024. It has not been subsequently revised.

The Russia-Ukraine war has moved fundamental questions regarding European security and defense back to the fore. The fighting has led European leaders to reconsider the realities of modern interstate conflict and the tools available to both manage the current emergency and defend against future threats. In the two and half years since the war began, European nations working collectively through institutions like the European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as well as sub-regional coalitions have come together in opposition to Russia's invasion and in defense of Ukraine's sovereignty. It remains to be seen, however, whether the war in Ukraine will drive broader changes in European understandings of the threats to their collective interests and what will be required to ensure their collective defense.

In this report, we examine the consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war for how U.S. allies in Europe understand and pursue their own security. To assess whether the conflict is likely to drive long-lasting changes in European security priorities, investments, and relations, we focus on the conflict's effect on European attitudes toward relations with Russia; European collective security strategies, institutions, and resources; and prospects for increased integration with Ukraine. Based on research conducted between October 2023 and September 2024, we assess the likely durability of changes observed since 2022 and highlight implications and recommendations for the U.S. Air Force (USAF), U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), and the U.S. government.

Understanding European Reactions to the War in Ukraine

In the years since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began, many have assessed the European community's reactions and adaptations to the war. Some have sought to explain Europe's unexpected cohesion in responding to Russian aggression and to document the scale of assistance provided through the EU or individual countries to Ukraine. These efforts have included expert analysis of European sanctions packages and humanitarian aid, changes in European energy and migration policy, and proposals to increase military assistance or facilitate Ukraine's eventual reconstruction.¹ Other

¹ For examples of this approach, see Marie Jelínková, Michal Plaček, and František Ochraná, "The Arrival of Ukrainian Refugees as an Opportunity to Advance Migrant Integration Policy," *Policy Studies*, Vol. 45, Nos. 3–4, 2023; Daniel W. Drezner, "Lose-Lose: The Economic Sanctions of the Russo-Ukrainian War," in Hal Brands, ed., *War in Ukraine: Conflict, Strategy, and the*

analysts have taken an institutional approach to examine how the EU and NATO have adapted their strategies, policies, and investments to facilitate support to Ukraine, maintain political cohesion, and refocus on the threat of major conventional war in Europe, including by pursuing defense industrial base (DIB) reforms.² Within this literature, particular attention has been paid to recent and potential EU and NATO enlargement, including the debate over reforms that might be required to accommodate eventual Ukrainian membership.³

This report builds on these prior analyses, as well as the extensive international press reporting on the conflict, in examining whether—and to what extent—the fighting in Ukraine has altered major European actors’ strategic orientation. Although past research has documented policy changes since the war began, existing work is generally focused on specific countries, in particular France, Germany, and Poland; specific institutions, including the EU and NATO; or specific policy areas, such as industrial base reforms or military assistance to Ukraine.⁴ The war’s first- and second-year anniversaries also prompted analysis of broader trends, but additional updates are required to consider adaptations since.⁵ This study differs by taking a regional approach that seeks to identify areas of consensus or disagreement across major European powers as they operate through shared institutions and regional coalitions. And although analysts have mined the fighting for insights into the character of future warfare, less attention has been dedicated to understanding whether Europe’s adaptations to the war will translate into long-term changes in the regional security architecture, institutions, and resources.

Research Approach

This report evaluates whether the Russia-Ukraine war has driven lasting changes in how Europeans understand and pursue their own security through examination of three research questions:

Return of a Fractured World, Johns Hopkins University Press, April 2, 2024, pp. 273–287; and Samantha Gross and Constanze Stelzenmüller, *Europe’s Messy Russian Gas Divorce*, Brookings Institution, June 18, 2024.

² See, for example, the special editions and dedicated volumes of journals like the *Journal of European Integration* (Vol. 45, No. 3, 2023), *Policy Studies* (Vol. 45, Nos. 3–4, 2024), and the *Journal of Common Market Studies* (September 26, 2023); the Brookings Institution’s Talbott Papers on the Implications of the War on Ukraine; Hans Binnendijk, Daniel S. Hamilton, and Alexander Vershbow, “Strategic Responsibility: Rebalancing European and Trans-Atlantic Defense,” Brookings Institution, June 24, 2022; Luis Simón, “The Ukraine War and the Future of the European Union’s Security and Defense Policy,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 30, 2023; and Mark Leonard, “The European Union as a War Project: Five Pathways Toward a Geopolitical Europe,” in Hal Brands, ed., *War in Ukraine: Conflict, Strategy, and the Return of a Fractured World*, Johns Hopkins University Press, April 2, 2024, pp. 258–272.

³ For examples, see Ryhor Nizhnikau and Arkady Moshes, “The War in Ukraine, the EU’s Geopolitical Awakening and Implications for the ‘Contested Neighbourhood,’” *Policy Studies*, Vol. 45, Nos. 3–4, 2024, pp. 489–506; Theresia Töglhofer, *Widening Without Falling Apart: Germany’s EU Enlargement Policy*, Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, May 2024; Hans Kribbe and Luuk van Middelaar, “Preparing for the Next EU Enlargement: Tough Choices Ahead,” Brussels Institute for Geopolitics, September 2023; Kinga Brudzińska, “EU Enlargement and Reform (II): The Troubled Polish-Ukrainian Partnership. A View from Warsaw,” *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, September 28, 2023; and Sophia Besch and Eric Ciaramella, “Ukraine’s Accession Poses a Unique Conundrum for the EU,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, October 24, 2023.

⁴ For a notable exception reflecting on the war’s first year, see Max Bergmann, Ilke Toygür, and Otto Svendsen, *A Continent Forged in Crisis: Assessing Europe One Year into the War*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 2023.

⁵ See, for example, Bergmann, Toygür, and Svendsen, 2023.

1. Have European attitudes on the prospects for engagement or confrontation with Russia changed?
2. Has the war contributed to changes in European attitudes, resources, and policies on fostering European defense autonomy?
3. Has the war altered the prospects for Ukrainian integration into the European security architecture?

Taken together, these questions provide a basis to explore how the war has shaped dynamics *internal* to the European community, such as the role of the EU in shaping national defense policies, as well as the region's *external* policies toward its neighbors, rivals, and allies.

For the purpose of this study, we use the terms *Europe* and *European* to refer to the countries that comprise the European Union, as well as NATO members other than the United States and Canada. Our usage is intended to encompass the primary U.S. allies, partners, and institutions that set and resource Europe's strategic course. This usage is not intended to imply whether other countries or territories located on the European continent, including Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, and Belarus, possess related historical, cultural, or political affiliations.

To identify changes since the fighting in Ukraine began, we first sought to baseline European policies and projected trends prior to 2022. Next, we surveyed European responses and adaptations from February 2022 through July 2024 to identify areas of continuity and change. Notably, we did not attempt to produce a comprehensive history of European support to Ukraine or reactions to the resulting crisis. Rather, we examined whether and to what extent the war has led major European powers and institutions to revise their security and defense rhetoric, resources, and relationships.

Given that the war in Ukraine is ongoing, the national sensitivities regarding aid to Ukraine, and the complexity of European politics, a comprehensive account of specific countries' adaptations or internal EU and NATO deliberations is not feasible. However, national security and defense policies are by necessity debated publicly in European countries and institutions. To identify major initiatives and characterize ongoing deliberations, we conducted an extensive review of publicly available sources, such as national, EU, and NATO documents; think tank analyses; academic research; and news accounts. We relied heavily on analysis and press reports published by European research and media organizations but primarily consulted sources written in or translated into English.

After identifying changes in European rhetoric, policies, and resources, we next assessed the likely durability of these changes. To do so, we evaluated the extent to which changes had been institutionalized through the creation of new organizations, the articulation of new authorities, and the dedication of new funds or resources that could not be easily diverted to other purposes. We also considered the maturity of new initiatives or proposals, including the extent to which relevant actors have articulated a clear plan for implementation or agreed on next steps. For example, although EU member countries have agreed to open membership negotiations with Ukraine, they disagree over whether reforms are required to prepare the bloc before enlargement can occur (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 4). Finally, we assessed the broader implications for U.S. defense and security policy toward Europe.

Report Organization

In the next three chapters, we examine the war's consequences for European attitudes and policy toward Russia, concepts and capabilities for fostering European defense autonomy, and the prospect for integration with Ukraine. Chapter 5 concludes by highlighting the implications for European countries' future orientation toward Russia, the United States, and their regional community and draws recommendations for the Department of the Air Force (DAF), DoD, and other U.S. policymakers. Because the war is still ongoing, the concluding chapter also highlights where identified trends may be conditional on factors that could change during the war or its immediate aftermath.

Will Europe Engage or Confront Russia?

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the establishment of the Russian Federation, Europeans have viewed Russia, with its vast resources, large population, and military potential, as a both a potential partner and a probable threat. Perceptions of the severity of the Russian challenge—and the potential benefits of efforts to deepen relations—have varied among European countries and over time. Differences in countries' geographic proximity, strategic cultures, and historical experience, among other factors, have contributed to differing preferences for whether Europe should seek to *engage* Russia by expanding trade relations, promoting people-to-people ties, and seeking to accommodate Russian security interests or *confront* Russia by conditioning future cooperation on significant behavioral changes and adopting a more assertive defensive posture.

Will the Russia-Ukraine war drive lasting changes in European countries' orientation toward Russia? The full-scale invasion challenged European conceptions of their security environment and raised new concerns about Russia's ambitions. This chapter examines how European states perceive Russia in the wake of the invasion and assess whether the conflict has altered preferences for adopting policies based on confrontation and engagement with the country. To assess the extent to which the Russia-Ukraine war has contributed to changes in European attitudes or policies, we first describe European policies following the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 through the end of 2021. Next, we examine whether and how European attitudes toward Russia have changed since the February 2022 full-scale invasion and describe how European states—both individually and collectively through institutions like the EU and NATO—have altered their policies to date.

Prewar Positions

Since the early 1990s, European countries have differed in their approach toward Russia. By and large, Western European countries perceived the new Russia as a potential economic partner and sought opportunities to improve communication; accommodate Russian concerns; and expand social, political, and economic linkages.⁶ In contrast, Central and Eastern European countries, many of which experienced Russian or Soviet invasion and occupation, were comparatively suspicious of the country's ambitions.⁷ Even then, however, Central and Eastern Europeans differed in their perception of the

⁶ See, for example, European Council, "Madrid European Council Presidency Conclusions—Annex 8: European Union's Strategy for Future EU/Russia Relations," December 15–16, 1995.

⁷ Andrei Zagorski, ed., *Russia and East Central Europe After the Cold War: A Fundamentally Transformed Relationship*, Human Rights Publishers, 2015.

immediacy and severity of the Russian threat and their willingness to adopt confrontational policies. Some former Warsaw Pact members, such as Poland, prioritized NATO and EU memberships and implemented policies aimed at lowering existing dependencies, especially on oil and natural gas imports.⁸ Others, such as Bulgaria, maintained close ties with Russia for cultural and economic reasons.⁹

Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and subsequent destabilization of eastern Ukraine signified a potential watershed moment for Europe. Prior to Russia's de facto annexation of Crimea, many Europeans had come to believe that Russia's gradual integration into the global economy, paired with persistent European attempts at engagement and cooperation, would encourage a moderation in its policies. Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 had underlined Moscow's continued willingness to punish states on its periphery that appeared to be moving too close to the West, but it had not spurred a fundamental reorientation in Europe's approach.¹⁰ Now, the bloody conflict unfolding on the EU's doorstep raises the prospect of a collapse in relations—and challenges Europe to develop new concepts for how to restore stability and avert an expansion of the conflict. In the immediate aftermath of the Russian annexation, popular sentiments toward Russia soured significantly compared with pre-annexation baselines. A Pew Research Center survey of global attitudes based on interviews held from March to June 2014 found that more than 60 percent of European respondents reported unfavorable views of Russia, an increase of 27 percentage points in Poland, 24 points in the United Kingdom (UK), 23 points in Spain, 19 points in Germany, and 18 points in Italy.¹¹

Yet the 2014–2015 crises had also caught European capitals off guard, forcing them to scramble to devise a response.¹² Although European leaders, working through NATO and the EU, sought to convey their opposition to Russian actions and deter future attacks, national disagreements about what the crisis revealed about Russia's medium-term ambitions—and the potential benefits of continued engagement with Moscow—limited the extent and cohesiveness of their response.¹³ Russia's strategy of circumventing the EU to engage European countries bilaterally exacerbated regional tensions and helped to inhibit the formation of a coherent and consistent European policy to either its annexation of Crimea or the subsequent violence in eastern Ukraine.¹⁴ By and large,

⁸ Christopher S. Chivvis, Raphael S. Cohen, Bryan Frederick, Daniel S. Hamilton, F. Stephen Larrabee, and Bonny Lin, *NATO's Northeastern Flank: Emerging Opportunities for Engagement*, RAND Corporation, RR-1467-AF, 2017, pp. 67–93; Kamil Lipiński, *Secure Gas Supplies for the Winters to Come: European Path from Crisis to Independence*, Polish Economic Institute, June 2023.

⁹ Stephen J. Flanagan, Anika Binnendijk, Irina A. Chindea, Katherine Costello, Geoffrey Kirkwood, Dara Massicot, and Clint Reach, *Russia, NATO, and Black Sea Security*, RAND Corporation, RR-A357-1, 2020, pp. 81–85.

¹⁰ Ivan Krastev and Mark Leonard, "Europe's Shattered Dream of Order," *Foreign Affairs*, April 20, 2015.

¹¹ Pew Research Center, *Russia's Global Image Negative amid Crisis in Ukraine: Americans' and Europeans' Views Sour Dramatically*, July 9, 2014.

¹² Krastev and Leonard, 2015.

¹³ The difference between common and individual responses reflects a longer historical pattern. As one Dutch diplomat wrote about the 1999 Common Strategy on Russia: "The final result proved to be neither very common, nor really strategic. . . . [I]t was the lowest common denominator on which consensus could be reached." Tony van der Togt, *In Search of a European Russia Strategy*, Atlantisch Commissie, 2020, p. 38.

¹⁴ This preference has been attributed to Moscow's lack of appreciation for the principle of the EU, where smaller countries' interests have to be taken into account—and in fact, represented—by larger members. Stefan Meister, "A Paradigm Shift: EU-Russia Relations After the War in Ukraine," Carnegie Europe, November 29, 2022.

European policy toward Russia after 2014 was a mix of engagement and confrontation, with a strong preference among key European players for the former. Although European leaders generally agreed that a firm demonstration of opposition to Russian actions was required, they proved reluctant to abandon engagement and supported policies to maintain some high-level, existing channels of communication with Russia.

Within NATO, European members joined the United States in denouncing “Russia’s aggressive actions against Ukraine”; suspending all practical cooperation, including through the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) with Moscow; and, in a public reaffirmation of their commitment to the principle of collective defense, pledging to strengthen the alliance’s deterrence and defense posture (see Chapter 3).¹⁵ Even though NATO “continue[d] to aspire to a cooperative, constructive relationship with Russia,” it acknowledged that such a relationship would not be possible without a “change in Russia’s actions that demonstrates compliance with international law and its international obligations and responsibilities.”¹⁶ The lack of conditions that would allow the “return to ‘business as usual’” was noted during all NATO summits between 2014 and 2022.¹⁷ At the same time, NATO sought to preserve some existing communication channels, including at the ambassadorial level and above in the NRC and certain military-to-military lines of communication “to avoid misunderstanding, miscalculation, and unintended escalation, and to increase transparency and predictability.”¹⁸ The NRC’s meetings resumed in 2016 and until 2022; the NRC met 11 times to exchange views (albeit with little genuine dialogue) on key issues of European security, including the crisis in Ukraine, arms control, military activities, transparency, and risk reduction.¹⁹

For its part, the EU enacted punitive measures intended to demonstrate support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity, “increas[e] the costs of Russia’s actions . . . and to promot[e] a peaceful settlement of the crisis,” as a Council of the European Union regulation underlined.²⁰ First, members imposed travel bans and froze assets of individuals identified as “responsible for actions threatening Ukraine’s territorial integrity.”²¹ Between March 2014 and the year’s end, the list swelled from 21 to more than 130 individuals and almost 30 entities; by the end of 2021, 187 individuals and 48 entities were

¹⁵ NATO, “Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales,” press release, September 5, 2014, updated July 4, 2022h.

¹⁶ NATO, 2022h; NATO, “Warsaw Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8–9 July 2016,” press release, July 9, 2016, updated July 1, 2022g.

¹⁷ NATO, 2022h; NATO, 2022g; NATO, “Brussels Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 11–12 July 2018,” press release, July 11, 2018, updated July 1, 2022f; NATO, “Brussels Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 14 June 2021,” press release, June 14, 2021, updated July 1, 2022e.

¹⁸ NATO, “NATO-Russia Relations,” fact sheet, February 2022b; Kadri Liik and Merle Maigre, “NATO-Russia Dialogue and the Future of the NATO-Russia Council,” European Council on Foreign Affairs, July 5, 2016; NATO, 2022g.

¹⁹ There were no meetings in 2014 and 2015. Three meetings took place in 2016, three in 2017, two in 2018, two in 2019, and one in January 2022. NATO, “NATO-Russia Council,” webpage, updated July 25, 2024h.

²⁰ Council of the European Union, *Council Regulation (EU) No 833/2014 of 31 July, 2014 Concerning Restrictive Measures in View of Russia’s Actions Destabilising the Situation in Ukraine*, July 31, 2014g.

²¹ Council of the European Union, *Council Regulation (EU) No 269/2014 of 17 March 2014 Concerning Restrictive Measures in Respect of Actions Undermining or Threatening the Territorial Integrity, Sovereignty and Independence of Ukraine*, March 17, 2014b; Council of the European Union, *Council Decision 2014/145/CFSP of 17 March 2014 Concerning Restrictive Measures in Respect of Actions Undermining or Threatening the Territorial Integrity, Sovereignty and Independence of Ukraine*, March 17, 2014a.

listed.²² In addition, the EU adopted in June 2014 a set of measures restricting economic relations with Crimea and Sevastopol.²³ These were followed in July by new economic sanctions prohibiting new arms sales between the EU and Russia, restricting Russian access to services and technologies used in oil production and exploration, banning the export of certain dual-use goods for military use or military end users, and limiting certain Russian companies and banks' access to EU capital markets.²⁴ Demonstrating the extent of EU discontent, leaders have continually voted to extend these restrictive measures every six months since 2014.²⁵

However, the extent of EU economic sanctions was limited as Brussels and individual European countries sought to preserve avenues for engagement with Russia.²⁶ The EU's mixed approach toward Russia is exemplified in the "Guiding Principles" the European Commission promulgated in 2016.²⁷ In an effort to establish a more coherent and comprehensive policy toward Russia than the reactive sanctions-based policy launched after the annexation, Brussels adopted five guiding principles for EU-Russia relations, which it relabeled in 2021 as a threefold approach (see Table 2.1).²⁸ First, the EU directed that member states, collectively and bilaterally, would push back against Russia's violations of human rights, anti-democratic policies, and international law violations by conditioning the removal of sanctions to full implementation of the Minsk agreements aimed at a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine crisis. Second, the EU sought to constrain Russia by strengthening relations with the former Soviet republics in the EU's Eastern partners and increasing EU resilience against Russian hybrid threats in energy, cyber, and information areas.²⁹ Finally, the EU sought to continue engaging Russia on select areas of common interest, such as public health and climate change, while supporting people-to-people contacts.³⁰

²² Council of the European Union, 2014b.

²³ Council of the European Union, *Council Regulation (EU) No 692/2014 of 23 June 2014 Concerning Restrictions on the Import into the Union of Goods Originating in Crimea or Sevastopol, in Response to the Illegal Annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol*, June 23, 2014d; Council of the European Union, *Council Decision 2014/386/CFSP of 23 June 2014 Concerning Restrictions on Goods Originating in Crimea or Sevastopol, in Response to the Illegal Annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol*, June 23, 2014c.

²⁴ Council of the European Union, 2014g; Council of the European Union, *Council Decision 2014/512/CFSP of 31 July 2014 Concerning Restrictive Measures in View of Russia's Actions Destabilising the Situation in Ukraine*, July 31, 2014f.

²⁵ Clara Portela, Paulina Pospieszna, Joanna Skrzypczyńska, and Dawid Walentek, "Consensus Against All Odds: Explaining the Persistence of EU Sanctions on Russia," *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 43, No. 6, 2021; Maria Shagina, "Friend or Foe? Mapping the Positions of EU Member States on Russia Sanctions," European Leadership Network, June 28, 2017.

²⁶ Jan Hanousek and Matěj Bělín, "Making Sanctions Bite: The EU-Russian Sanctions of 2014," Center for Economic Policy Research, April 29, 2019; Matěj Bělín and Jan Hanousek, "Which Sanctions Matter? Analysis of the EU/Russian Sanctions of 2014," *Journal of Comparative Economics*, Vol. 49, No. 1, March 2021.

²⁷ European Parliament, "Five Principles Guiding the EU's Policy Towards Russia," webpage, undated; European External Action Service (EEAS), "Remarks by the HRVP Federica Mogherini at the Press Conference Following the Foreign Affairs Council," February 6, 2017.

²⁸ European Commission, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the European Council and the Council on EU-Russia Relations: Push Back, Constrain and Engage," June 16, 2021b.

²⁹ For examples, see Andrew Radin, Alyssa Demus, and Krystyna Marcinek, *Understanding Russian Subversion: Patterns, Threats, and Responses*, RAND Corporation, PE-331-A, February 2020.

³⁰ European Commission, 2021b.

Table 2.1. The European Union’s Mixed Approach to Russia, 2016–2021

2016 “Guiding Principles” for EU-Russia Relations	2021 Threefold Approach to Russia
1. Implementation of the Minsk agreements as the key condition for any substantial change in the EU’s stance toward Russia	1. <i>Push back</i> against Russian human rights violations by raising Russian breaches of international law; reaffirming support to Ukraine and its territorial integrity, sovereignty, and independence; calling on Russia to fully implement the Minsk agreements; and continuing to respond to hybrid threats “in an appropriate manner.”
2. Strengthened relations with the EU’s Eastern partners and other neighbors, in particular in Central Asia	2. <i>Constrain</i> Russian attempts to undermine EU interests by developing EU cyber security and defense capacity and capabilities; improving coordination among members and with like-minded partners, such as NATO and the Group of Seven (G7); and increasing support to Eastern partners.
3. Strengthening the resilience of the EU	
4. Need for selective engagement with Russia on issues of interest to the EU	3. <i>Engage</i> on key challenges and areas of common interests, including public health, climate change, and conflict prevention and regional and global issues; increase technical engagement with the Russian government on “economic irritants”; and further people-to-people contacts.
5. Need to engage in people-to-people contacts and support Russian civil society	

SOURCES: Adapted from European Parliament, undated; European Commission, 2021b; European Commission, “EU-Russia Relations: Commission and High Representative Propose the Way Forward,” press release, June 15, 2021a.

NOTE: The G7 consists of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the United States.

In adopting a combination of measures to confront and engage Russia, the EU sought to satisfy disparate preferences among and within member states. After the initial wave of condemnations in 2014 and 2015, European capitals divided, as one expert has described, among those that advocated for the community to “accommodate and engage” Russia (for example, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, and Czechia, to varying degrees); those that wanted to “confront and contain” what they maintained was an active threat to European security and stability (for example, the UK, the Baltic and Nordic countries, and Poland); and those states that wished to pursue a middle path of “pressure and engagement” (for example, Germany and France).³¹

Europeans’ differing approaches toward Russia reflected broader disagreements over the nature and immediacy of the threat Russia posed to regional security and stability. For frontline countries like Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, Russian actions in Ukraine raised fears that the Kremlin might next seek to destabilize their pro-Western governments or even attempt to broach their borders. Highlighting their proximity to Russia, Poland and the Baltic states requested that NATO establish a permanent presence to ward off Russian incursions and expand defense

³¹ Axel Hellman, *How Has European Geostrategic Thinking Towards Russia Shifted Since 2014?* European Leadership Network, July 2019. For stances on sanctions, see Shagina, 2017.

cooperation with the Nordic countries.³² To a lesser extent, Norway, Sweden, and Finland also expressed concerns about Russia's renewed assertiveness and potential intent to either threaten or use military force to alter the European security order.³³ Amid increasing Russian military activity in the High North and North Atlantic, Norway in 2016 unveiled a new long-term plan for its armed forces that included substantial increases in defense spending to improve readiness and expand procurement of modern air defense and strike capabilities.³⁴

By contrast, Germany maintained that the EU should continue to preserve, and potentially expand, engagement with Russia. Germany strongly condemned Russia's policy toward Ukraine and, together with France, played an instrumental role in maintaining the sanctions regime and securing the Minsk agreements, which outlined steps to resolve the conflict and restore Ukrainian territorial integrity.³⁵ Nevertheless, German leaders were disinclined to publicly characterize Russia as an adversary, maintaining, as then-Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel stated in 2016, that "lasting security in Europe can only be achieved with, and not against, Russia."³⁶ German leaders supported efforts to bolster NATO's deterrence posture, worked within the EU to maintain a unified front on sanctions, pressed for Russia to end its military involvement in Donbas, and publicly acknowledged Russian violations of the NATO-Russia Founding Act. Yet German leaders maintained that continued engagement with Russia, in the form of political dialogue, economic cooperation, and trade, was necessary to alter Russia's strategic orientation without provoking further, unwanted escalation.³⁷ At the core of this policy was a belief that the same dynamics that had secured peace among Western European countries after World War II could be replicated to encourage economic, and ultimately political, reforms within Russia.³⁸ Crimea shook, but did not dispel, German expectations that Russia shared an interest in European stability and could become a partner in the future.

German policy also reflected the country's growing dependence on Russian energy. Between 2014 and 2021, Russian imports accounted for 45–68 percent of German natural gas consumption, 27–35 percent of crude oil refinery intake, and 5–7 percent of oil products supply.³⁹ At its peak in 2017,

³² Robin Emmott and Sabine Siebold, "NATO Agrees to Reinforce Eastern Poland, Baltic States Against Russia," Reuters, July 8, 2016; James Shotter, "Polish President Calls on EU to Step Up Sanctions on Russia," *Financial Times*, January 24, 2021.

³³ Stephanie Pezard, Andrew Radin, Thomas S. Szayna, and F. Stephen Larrabee, *European Relations with Russia: Threat Perceptions, Responses, and Strategies in the Wake of the Ukrainian Crisis*, RAND Corporation, RR-1579-A, 2017.

³⁴ Norwegian Ministry of Defence, "Long Term Defence Plan Adopted," November 18, 2016. A 2020 update reaffirmed Norway's commitment to increased defense spending and force modernization. Norwegian Ministry of Defence, *The Defence of Norway: Capability and Readiness*, 2020.

³⁵ Céline Marangé and Susan Stewart, "French and German Approaches to Russia: Convergence Yes, EU Compatibility No," Chatham House, November 2021, p. 33; Stefan Wagstyl, "Angela Merkel's Sanctions Balancing Act Outwits Putin, for Now," *Financial Times*, December 2, 2014.

³⁶ Angela Merkel, transcript of statement given at 183rd session of the German Bundestag, German Federal Government, July 7, 2016.

³⁷ Stefan Meister, *Reframing Germany's Russia Policy—An Opportunity for the EU*, European Council on Foreign Relations, ECFR/100, April 2014.

³⁸ Marangé and Stewart, 2021, p. 9.

³⁹ Eurostat, "Supply, Transformation and Consumption of Gas," database, last updated July 17, 2024c; Eurostat, "Imports of Natural Gas by Partner Country," database, last updated June 21, 2024a; Eurostat, "Supply, Transformation and Consumption of Oil and Petroleum Products," database, last updated July 17, 2024d; Eurostat, "Imports of Oil and Petroleum Products by Partner Country," database, last updated June 27, 2024b.

Germany imported more than 62 million cubic meters of natural gas, or more than 65 percent of its consumption.⁴⁰ Although imports declined after 2018, experts estimated that natural gas imports would increase as Germany began to implement plans to phase out nuclear and coal power.⁴¹ Despite protests from other allies and the United States, Germany did not seek to diversify its energy supply or reduce its dependence and defended its investments in the Nord Stream 1 and 2.⁴² “[I]f we even imported Russian gas during the Cold War . . . then I don’t know why the situation today should be so much worse that we can’t say that Russia remains a partner,” explained Chancellor Merkel in 2016.⁴³

France adopted similar policies toward Russia after 2014 and often worked closely with Germany to deepen EU cooperation with neighboring countries (see Chapter 4) and continue efforts to advance a negotiated settlement to the conflict in Donbas. Compared with Germany, French rhetoric toward Russia after 2014 placed a greater emphasis on establishing a “firm” European stance to deter future adventurism and coerce Russia to abide by the terms of the Minsk agreements.⁴⁴ Yet like their German counterparts, French leaders generally envisioned that Russia could be encouraged to moderate its policies and cooperate in building a mutually beneficial European strategic architecture. As French President Emmanuel Macron underscored in a joint conference with Russian President Vladimir Putin in 2017, “no essential issue can be addressed today . . . without dialogue with Russia.”⁴⁵ But whereas Germany’s preference reflected long-standing pacifist trends, France viewed engagement with Russia as a means for Europe to establish a foreign policy independent of the United States.⁴⁶ During the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw, then–French President François Hollande said, “Russia is not an adversary, is not a threat. Russia is a partner which . . . can sometimes . . . use force, and we condemned it when it came to Crimea.”⁴⁷

Between 2014 and 2021, French policy vacillated between engagement and confrontation with Russia. Within multilateral forums, France called for strong collective action and lent rhetorical support to NATO reforms and EU condemnations of Russia’s poisoning of Sergei Skripal, Yulia Skripal, and Alexei Navalny. On the bilateral level, however, preference was given to “renewed strategic dialogue.”⁴⁸ Newly elected President Macron welcomed President Putin as his first foreign visitor in 2017 and stressed the need for continued dialogue, although he also used the visit to publicly

⁴⁰ Eurostat, 2024c; Eurostat, 2024a.

⁴¹ International Energy Agency, *Germany 2020: Energy Policy Review*, February 2020, p. 148.

⁴² Kai-Olaf Lang and Kirsten Westphal, *Nord Stream 2 – A Political and Economic Contextualisation*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, March 2017; Kirsten Westphal, *Nord Stream 2 – Germany’s Dilemma*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, April 2021.

⁴³ Angela Merkel, transcript of address given at the 55th Munich Security Conference, German Federal Government, February 16, 2019.

⁴⁴ République Française, *Defence and National Security Strategic Review 2017*, 2017; François Hollande, transcript of press conference in Warsaw, Élysée, July 9, 2016.

⁴⁵ Emmanuel Macron and Vladimir Putin, transcript of joint press conference in Versailles, République Française, May 29, 2017.

⁴⁶ Tatiana Kastouéva-Jean, “France’s Policy Towards Russia: The Hard Art of ‘At the Same Time,’” in Kalev Stoicescu, *Dialogue with Russia: Russia Needs to Reset Relations with the West*, International Centre for Defence and Security, June 2021.

⁴⁷ Hollande, 2016.

⁴⁸ “Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words,” *The Economist*, November 7, 2019.

confront President Putin over evidence of Russian cyber and disinformation interference in the French elections.⁴⁹ When prompted by journalists to comment on the Russian state's disinformation campaigns, President Macron emphasized the long-standing Franco-Russian friendship and the continued need for cooperation on a wide set of issues.⁵⁰ Indeed, France sought to use its international position to break Russia's political isolation. In 2019, France restarted 2 + 2 meetings with Russia. Later that year, President Macron signaled his willingness to relay Russian concerns in international forums when he met with President Putin shortly before the G7 Summit.⁵¹ Reportedly, France supported the return of the Russian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, but its proposals for an EU summit with President Putin were rejected by other European leaders.⁵²

Meanwhile, other European countries, particularly in the south, questioned the importance of confronting Russia over Ukraine and sought instead to accommodate Russian interests and expand areas of cooperation. Although countries like Italy and Spain continued to support the EU's sanctions policy in a demonstration of solidarity, they sought to preserve opportunities for bilateral engagement with Russia on a host of issues, including migration, terrorism, and the conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Afghanistan, which they perceived the EU was neglecting and for which Russia could play a critical role in resolving.⁵³ For its part, Russia recognized that regional disagreements over migration, fiscal policy, and other topics endangered EU unity, and it sought to exploit emerging rifts by cultivating relations with a new generation of far-right and populist politicians that rose to power in countries like Italy, Austria, and Hungary. Already suspicious of Brussels and inclined to look to Russia for commercial gain, governments in these countries emerged as reliable advocates for renewed economic cooperation and critics of policies deemed overtly hostile to Russia.⁵⁴ For example, Italy pursued cooperative production of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine during the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic before it was approved by the European Medicines Agency.⁵⁵

The resulting disagreements among European capitals and within EU forums prevented the formation of a coherent approach. Rather than promote cohesion, the EU's ambiguous strategy allowed individual members to select elements that aligned with their national preferences.⁵⁶ For example, although the EU sought to increase people-to-people contacts by funding collaboration in

⁴⁹ Andy Greenberg, "The NSA Confirms It: Russia Hacked French Election 'Infrastructure,'" *WIRED*, May 9, 2017; Nicholas Vinocur, "Macron and Putin's Awkward First Date," *Politico*, May 29, 2017.

⁵⁰ Macron and Putin, 2017.

⁵¹ Susan Stewart, "Macron's Russia Policy: Already a Failure?" in Ronja Kempin, ed., *France's Foreign and Security Policy Under President Macron: The Consequences for Franco-German Cooperation*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, May 2021, p. 31.

⁵² Kastouéva-Jean, 2021, p. 11; Nikos Chrysoloras and Arne Delfs, "EU Rejects Merkel-Macron Call for Leaders' Talks with Putin," *Bloomberg*, June 24, 2021.

⁵³ Angelantonio Rosato, "A Marriage of Convenience? The Future of Italy-Russia Relations," *European Council on Foreign Affairs*, July 15, 2016; "Counting on Russia for G20 on Afghanistan—Di Maio-Lavrov," *ANSA English*, August 27, 2021; Leonid Bershidsky, "Putin Gets Love in Italy, but Not Much Else," *Moscow Times*, January 17, 2018.

⁵⁴ Andrew S. Weiss, *With Friends Like These: The Kremlin's Far-Right and Populist Connections in Italy and Austria*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 2020.

⁵⁵ Colleen Barry and Daria Litvinova, "Russia to Make Sputnik V Vaccine in Italy, a First in EU," *Associated Press*, March 9, 2021.

⁵⁶ European Commission, 2021b.

higher education and scientific research, supporting civil society in Russia, and promoting cross-border cooperation, Poland suspended visa-free local cross-border traffic with the Kaliningrad Oblast in 2016.⁵⁷ And although Poland prioritized energy resilience by investing in infrastructure, such as the liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal and the Baltic Pipe to Denmark, that diversified its natural gas imports, Germany continued to support construction of the planned Nord Stream 2 pipeline, which, once completed, would expand the flow of Russian gas to the country.⁵⁸ Although the EU was able to retain support for sanctions, disagreements among EU member states over the relative benefits of further restrictions and the distribution of costs limited their scale and precluded the possibility of stronger cost-imposition measures.⁵⁹ For example, countries with extensive trade ties to Russia, such as Germany and Italy, successfully blocked a UK-backed proposal to cut off Russian access to the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) system of financial transactions.⁶⁰ As a consequence of these disagreements, the capital access and dual-use goods trade limitations applied to very few companies. By 2022, the list contained only five banks, three arms producers, three oil and gas companies, and nine importers of dual-use technologies.⁶¹

Europe's ambiguous approach toward Russia was also emblematic of a second factor: Few believed Russia presented an imminent threat to European territorial security. For even those countries most concerned about Russia's intent, the most immediate concern was that Russia appeared to be seeking to influence their domestic politics and undermine their stability through cyberattacks, information campaigns, and irregular support to Russian minority populations in the Baltics. As a RAND study based on extensive interviews noted in 2017, "[w]hile Russia's neighbors see Russia as capable of and potentially willing to carry out a conventional attack against them, they do not necessarily see such an attack as likely."⁶² Accordingly, efforts to build momentum for new policies related to Russia were often superseded by debates over more urgent crises, including the UK's referendum to leave the EU; the surge in migration resulting from ongoing conflicts in Libya, Syria, and elsewhere; the rule of law crisis in Hungary and Poland; and the COVID-19 pandemic.

After the initial shock of Russia's annexation of Crimea and involvement in Donbas, European attitudes toward the country began to recover after 2016. As depicted in Figure 2.1, public opinion

⁵⁷ Russia's participation in the Erasmus+ program peaked in 2018. Martin Russell, *The EU's Russia Policy: Five Guiding Principles*, European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 614.698, February 2018, pp. 7–8; Martin Russell, *The EU and Russia: Locked into Confrontation*, European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 652.030, July 2020, p. 9; Dorota Bartyzel and Stepan Kravchenko, "Poland Keeps Russia Border Shut to Traffic amid Business Chagrin," Bloomberg, August 4, 2016; Kinga Dudzińska and Anna Maria Dwyer, "Small Border Traffic with Kaliningrad: Challenges, Opportunities, Threats," Polish Institute of International Affairs, October 2013.

⁵⁸ International Energy Agency, "Poland Natural Gas Security Policy," webpage, June 30, 2022; Martin Russell, *The Nord Stream 2 Pipeline: Economic, Environmental and Geopolitical Issues*, European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 690.705, July 2021.

⁵⁹ "EU Seeks to 'Balance the Pain' from Russia Sanctions," Euractiv, July 24, 2014; Andrew Byrne, "Hungary Questions EU Sanctions on Russia," *Financial Times*, October 16, 2014.

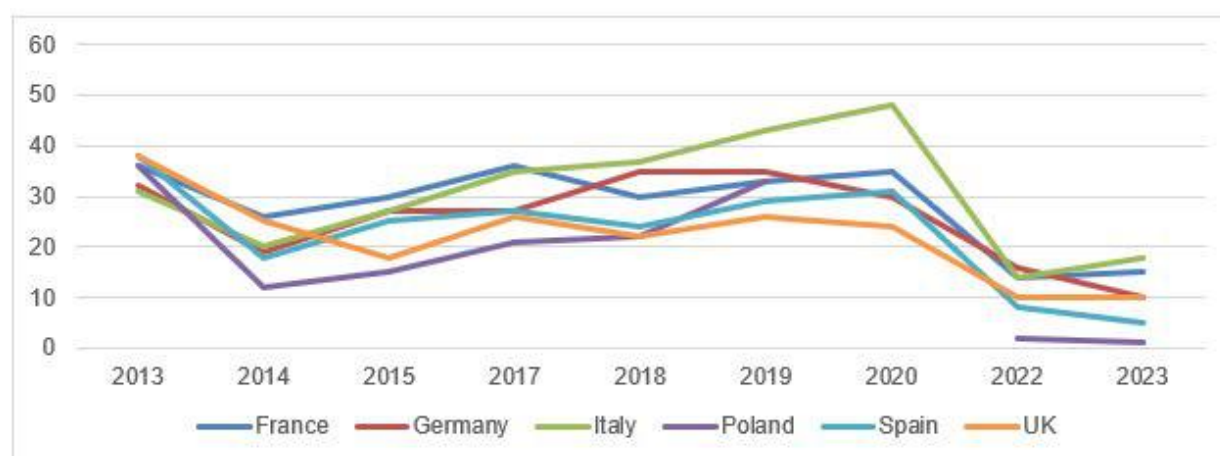
⁶⁰ Robert Hutton and Ian Wishart, "U.K. Wants EU to Block Russia from SWIFT Banking Network," Bloomberg, August 29, 2014; "The Pros and Cons of a SWIFT Response," *The Economist*, November 20, 2014. The measure was supported by a European Parliament resolution. European Parliament, "European Parliament Resolution of 18 September 2014 on the Situation in Ukraine and the State of Play of EU-Russia Relations," September 18, 2014.

⁶¹ Council of the European Union, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/52 of 13 January 2022 Amending Decision 2014/512/CFSP Concerning Restrictive Measures in View of Russia's Actions Destabilising the Situation in Ukraine*, January 13, 2022a.

⁶² Pezard et al., 2017, p. xi.

surveys demonstrated signs of a gradual improvement in popular sentiments toward Russia. Although regional differences contributed to different baselines, post-2014 trends follow similar patterns across Europe, possibly showing more compatibility than official statements would imply. Even in Poland, public attitudes toward Russia improved significantly between 2014 and 2019.

Figure 2.1. Favorable Views of Russia in the Six Most Populous European Union and NATO Countries



SOURCE: Features data from Pew Research Center, *Topline Questionnaire: Pew Research Center Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey*, June 27, 2023.

NOTE: 2016 and 2021 (and 2020 for Poland) data are missing.

Notably, European trade with Russia followed similar trend lines despite continued sanctions (see Figure 2.2). Multiple factors beyond EU sanctions and Russian countermeasures contributed to a steep decline in the value of EU-Russia trade after 2014, including an overall contraction of the Russian economy as a result of ruble depreciation, the global decline in oil prices, and high inflation.⁶³ But the country's trade with the EU began to recover as Russia's economic situation improved until the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic produced another plunge. Despite differences in Italy, France, and Germany's stated policy toward Russia, the countries' trade followed similar patterns. Even Poland, which continued to press the EU for tougher punitive measures and sharply criticized other states' economic engagement with Russia, saw periods of improvement. Similarly, natural gas imports from Russia did not decline significantly after 2014 (see Figure 2.3).

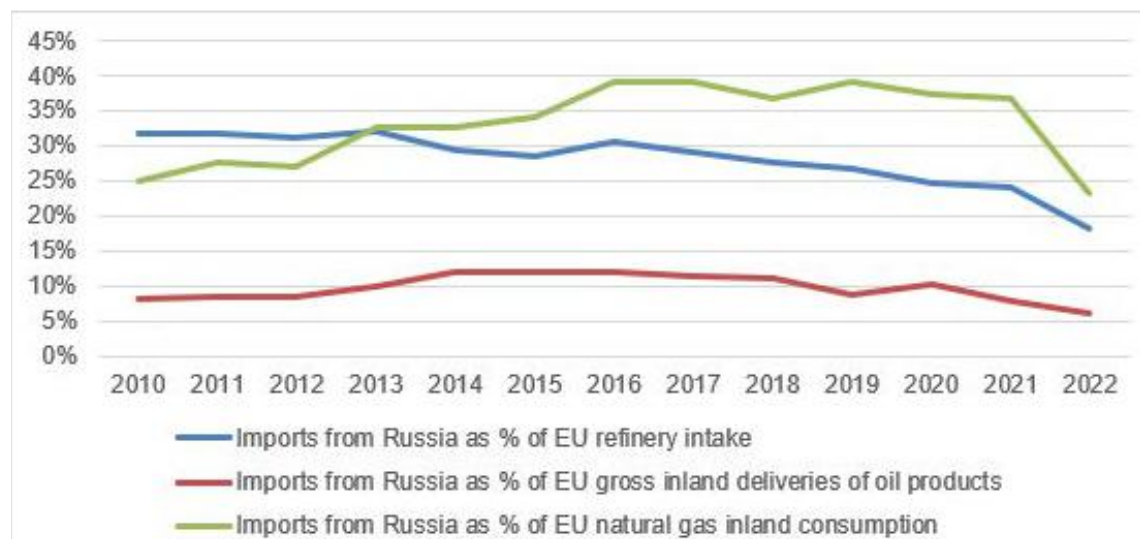
⁶³ Oliver Fritz, Elisabeth Christen, Franz Sinabell, and Julian Hinz, *Russia's and the EU's Sanctions: Economic and Trade Effects, Compliance and the Way Forward*, European Parliament, 2017.

Figure 2.2. European Union-Russia Trade, 2013–2023



SOURCE: Features data from United Nations, UN Comtrade Database, undated.

Figure 2.3. Imports of Russian Fossil Fuels as a Percentage of European Union Consumption



SOURCE: Features data from Eurostat, Energy, database, undated.

By the eve of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, no unified European policy toward Russia had emerged. The EU’s “push back, constrain, and engage” framework reflected general concerns about Russian behavior in Crimea, ongoing political interference in European countries, and deep disagreements among states about how best to prevent further Russian malign behavior. On the one hand, Russia’s actions have been described as causing a “radical shift” in some European countries’ policies toward Russia by putting into question many of the key assumptions underlying the pre-2014

policy of engagement and cooperation.⁶⁴ For the first time, European countries not only condemned Russia's actions in the common neighborhood but also took steps to counter them, in a stark contrast to the EU's response to Russia's recognition of Georgia's territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states in the aftermath of the 2008 war.⁶⁵ On the other hand, a general preference for cooperation persisted as NATO, the EU, and individual European countries—albeit to different degrees—sought areas of “selective engagement” and “constructive cooperation.”⁶⁶ For example, sanctions targeted mostly individuals, not the economy, and therefore have been described as “deliberately designed to send signals of disapproval to Russia rather than to significantly weaken it.”⁶⁷ With the recovery of public attitudes and the trends in EU-Russia trade, Europe proved unwilling to confront Russia.

Consequences of the Russia-Ukraine War, 2022–2024

That all changed when Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Over the following months, the majority of European countries united behind a new assessment of Russia, not as a “strategic challenge,” as the EU had characterized the country in 2016, but as a “long-term and direct threat for European security,” as articulated in the new EU *Strategic Compass for Security and Defence* approved just a few weeks after the start of the war.⁶⁸ In contrast to statements released in response to previous crises, EU documents now characterized the return of large-scale war to Europe as a “tectonic shift in European history.”⁶⁹ In a new strategic concept approved that summer, NATO member countries similarly designated Russia as “the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.”⁷⁰ The Washington summit declaration further added that the “all-domain threat Russia poses to NATO will persist into the long term.”⁷¹

As of September 2024, the EU has not defined a new formal Russia policy, but it has adopted a firm and unambiguous demand that Russia “immediately ceases military actions, unconditionally withdraws all forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine and fully respects Ukraine’s territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence.”⁷² According to the European Parliament, the EU’s approach to Russia since 2022 has been guided by the following six principles:

1. Russia must be internationally isolated and sanctioned to prevent further aggression.

⁶⁴ Marangé and Stewart, 2021, pp. 9–10.

⁶⁵ Leo Cendrowicz, “EU Talks Tough on Russia,” *Time*, September 1, 2008.

⁶⁶ Hellman, 2019.

⁶⁷ Carl Bildt, Gustav Gressel, Kadri Liik, and Nicu Popescu, *Push Back, Contain, and Engage: How the EU Should Approach Relations with Russia*, European Council on Foreign Relations, ECFR/384, March 25, 2021, p. 2.

⁶⁸ EU, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, June 2016, p. 33; Council of the European Union, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, March 22, 2022e.

⁶⁹ Council of the European Union, 2022e, p. 14.

⁷⁰ NATO, *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept*, June 29, 2022d, p. 4.

⁷¹ NATO, “Washington Summit Declaration Issued by the NATO Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Washington, D.C. 10 July 2024,” press release, July 10, 2024, updated July 15, 2024g.

⁷² European Council, “Joint Statement by the Members of the European Council,” February 24, 2022a.

2. Russia and its accomplices must be held accountable for violations of international law and war crimes in Ukraine.
3. EU neighbors and global partners must be supported to address the adverse consequences of Russia's war.
4. The EU must cooperate closely with NATO and global partners to defend the rules-based international order.
5. The EU must strengthen resilience in energy security and critical infrastructure and counter Russia's information, cyber, and hybrid threats.
6. The EU must support Russian civil society, human rights defenders, and independent media.⁷³

Together, these principles amount to a major shift in the EU's stance on Russia away from an approach that sought to combine elements of cooperation and confrontation to one intended to isolate Russia and roll back its gains in Ukraine. EU statements underscore that its sanctions are intended to increase the costs of its war in Ukraine and to pressure the Kremlin to enact significant changes in its foreign, domestic, and defense policies.⁷⁴ In expanding support to EU neighbors and, in the case of Ukraine, supporting further EU enlargement (see Chapter 4), Europeans have placed themselves in clear opposition to Russia's broader goal of reestablishing a sphere of influence and privileged interest in the post-Soviet space.⁷⁵ Similarly, the EU's efforts to deepen cooperation with NATO (see Chapter 3) represents a newfound willingness to reinforce the security architecture that Russia has opposed and which the Kremlin has accused of provoking its invasion of Ukraine.⁷⁶ Concurrently, the EU's emphasis on resilience and, in particular, reduced energy dependence, marks an implicit rejection of prewar efforts to use expanded economic integration as a lever to encourage Russian reform.

Indeed, the two most influential drivers of the EU's engagement with Russia prior to 2022 have adopted more-confrontational stances since the war began. In their official statements, national strategies, sponsorship of EU restrictions, and national policies, Germany and France have repeatedly demonstrated that productive engagement in Russia is no longer feasible. Although Chancellor of Germany Olaf Scholz has suggested that Europe's long-term security "cannot be achieved in opposition to Russia," he has maintained that "for the foreseeable future, Putin is jeopardizing this security."⁷⁷ In its first publicly released National Security Strategy, Germany characterized Russia for the first time as "for now the most serious threat to peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area" and directed a major military expansion and modernization program that places German foreign policy on more defense-oriented footing (see Chapter 3).⁷⁸ From the first days of war, Germany has emphasized

⁷³ Vanessa Cuevas Herman, "Russia," fact sheet, European Parliament, April 2024, p. 2.

⁷⁴ European Commission, "Sanctions Adopted Following Russia's Military Aggression Against Ukraine," webpage, undated-c; Delegation of the EU to the Russian Federation, "The European Union and the Russian Federation," webpage, November 23, 2022.

⁷⁵ Andrew Radin and Clint Reach, *Russian Views of the International Order*, RAND Corporation, RR-1826-OSD, 2017, pp. 9–14.

⁷⁶ Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber and Tom Balmforth, "Russia Demands NATO Roll Back from East Europe and Stay Out of Ukraine," Reuters, December 17, 2021.

⁷⁷ Olaf Scholz, "Policy Statement by Olaf Scholz," transcript of address given at the German Bundestag, German Federal Government, February 27, 2022a.

⁷⁸ German Federal Government, *Integrated Security for Germany: National Security Strategy*, June 2023, pp. 11–12.

that “nothing is off the table” when it comes to sanctions, and the country has stopped importing Russian pipeline-delivered natural gas and crude oil, severing its most important link to Russia and the foundation of its strategy of interdependence.⁷⁹ Although some German experts have suggested that policymakers in Berlin hold on to hopes for future reengagement and have under-resourced its defense commitments, Berlin’s response to date represents a major turnaround in German attitudes and policies—a commitment of political capital and institutional resources that would be difficult to reverse.⁸⁰ The same applies to France, which, under President Macron, went from seeking a new security architecture that would provide Russia with security guarantees to doing whatever it takes to prevent Russia from winning.⁸¹

Underlining this change has been a new characterization of Russia as a direct threat to European countries’ territorial integrity. In countries already concerned about Russian military intentions, such as Poland and the Baltics, the war has surfaced preexisting fears that the Kremlin might one day attempt to quickly seize territory and impose a *fait accompli* before NATO has time to respond. This shift in focus from countering Russian hybrid operations to territorial defense has driven a renewed effort to prepare national and NATO forces for a potential future large-scale conflict, as discussed further in Chapter 4. Yet even countries formerly skeptical of the notion that Russia might incite a war with NATO have revised their assessments. “We have to consider the possibility of Vladimir Putin attacking a NATO member one day or another,” German Minister of Defence Boris Pistorius said in early 2024, estimating that Russian reconstitution might enable such a scenario “within five to eight years.”⁸² Other German officials have underscored the importance of strengthening the Bundeswehr as part of a broader effort to bolster NATO defenses and deter Russian provocations. “If we don’t show that we are capable of defending ourselves, Putin will have no reason to back down from an attack on NATO,” explained Germany’s foreign intelligence chief in early 2024.⁸³

The change in European threat perceptions has driven adjustments in EU and bilateral defense policy (see Chapter 3), an expansion in EU sanctions, and a new focus on promoting national and regional resilience, particularly in the energy sector. As of July 2024, the EU has adopted 14 main sanction packages and several smaller packages to address disinformation and sanction evasion. In contrast to the years following Russia’s annexation of Crimea, during which the EU periodically updated its list of sanctioned individuals and entities but generally deferred from implementing new packages, the EU has continually added new restrictive measures over more than two and a half years of fighting. As of July 2024, over 1,700 individuals and 500 sanctioned entities have been listed for EU

⁷⁹ Scholz, 2022a; “Germany Says It Is No Longer Reliant on Russian Energy,” BBC, January 18, 2023; John Ainger, “Germany Wants EU Push to End Last 20% of Russia Energy Imports,” Bloomberg, May 28, 2024.

⁸⁰ Stefan Meister and Wilfried Jilge, *After Ostpolitik. A New Russia and Eastern Europe Policy Based on Lessons from the Past*, German Council on Foreign Relations, April 2023; Stefan Meister, “Germany and Russia’s War of Aggression Against Ukraine: The Third Year,” *Russian Analytical Digest*, No. 312, April 22, 2024, pp. 6–10; Susan Stewart, *Consolidating Germany’s Russia Policy: Refine Existing Approaches and Clarify Trade-Offs*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, June 2023; Maria Martinez, “German Defence Budget for 2025 ‘Significantly’ Less Than Sought, Minister Says,” Reuters, July 8, 2024; “Germany’s New National Security Strategy Is Strong on Goals, Less So on Means,” *The Economist*, June 15, 2023.

⁸¹ “Macron Says New Security Architecture Should Give Guarantees for Russia,” Reuters, December 3, 2022; Leila Abboud, “Emmanuel Macron Reaches for ‘Whatever It Takes’ on Ukraine,” *Financial Times*, February 27, 2024; Célia Belin, “Macron the Hawk,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 5, 2024.

⁸² Thomas Wieder, “Germany’s Rearmament Will Take Time,” *Le Monde*, February 18, 2024.

⁸³ Wieder, 2024.

sanctions, travel bans, asset freezes, and unavailability of funds measures related to the war in Ukraine. EU measures have targeted political parties; armed forces and paramilitary groups; banks and financial institutions; media organizations; corporations from the military, defense, energy, aviation, shipbuilding, machine building, IT, telecoms, and insurance sectors; and companies involved in sanctions circumvention. According to EU estimates, these individual sanctions amount to €28 billion in immobilized assets.⁸⁴

The scale of EU sanctions on the financial sector demonstrates the extent to which European countries have demonstrated a new willingness to de-integrate the European and Russian economies since the war began. Over 70 percent of Russia's banking system's assets have been sanctioned, and ten major Russian banks have been cut off from the SWIFT system and banned from using the alternate System for Transfer of Financial Messages.⁸⁵ The EU has prohibited dealings with securities and money market instruments issued by the Russian government and various financial entities, banned new loans and credits to these entities, and frozen Russian reserves in the EU by prohibiting transactions with the Central Bank of Russia. Additional measures include banning the trade of securities of Russian publicly controlled companies, supplying euro-denominated banknotes, providing crypto wallets, managing trusts for Russian beneficiaries, and accepting large deposits from Russian nationals, along with excluding Russia from public contracts and credit rating services in the EU. To further reduce Russia's access to capital, the EU has banned contributions to Russian Direct Investment Fund co-funded projects, as well as the investment in or provision of related financing and services to Russian energy, mining, and quarrying sector entities, and prohibited public financing or financial assistance for trade or investment in Russia.⁸⁶

EU trade restrictions now encompass 60 percent of prewar trade, per the European Commission.⁸⁷ Real trade with Russia has fallen from \$279 billion in 2021 to \$89 billion in 2023, or less than 2 percent of the EU's total foreign trade (see Figure 2.2). In addition to tightening prewar restrictions on arms and dual-use goods and technologies, the EU has enacted wide-ranging restrictions reducing or prohibiting interactions with sectors across the Russian economy. These include

- suspensions of political, cultural, and scientific cooperation programs with the Russian government and of the EU-Russia visa facilitation program
- bans on the sale, supply, or transfer of goods and technologies, as well as the provision of technical or financial assistance that might enhance Russia's military and industrial capacities or be used in the energy, aviation, and space industries or for maritime navigation
- bans on imports from Russia of gold, diamonds, iron and steel products, and other revenue-generating goods
- closure of EU airspace to Russian airlines and an entry ban on Russian-flagged vessels to EU ports and locks

⁸⁴ European Commission, "Achievements of the von der Leyen Commission: Solidarity with Ukraine," fact sheet, November 2024d, p. 5.

⁸⁵ European Commission, 2024d, p. 5.

⁸⁶ For details, exemptions, and derogations from the investment restrictions, see Council of the European Union, 2014g.

⁸⁷ European Commission, 2024d, p. 5.

- bans on most Russian and Belarusian freight road operations in the EU and restrictions on trucks with Russian trailers and semi-trailers
- suspension of broadcasting activities of 24 media outlets preparing for, supporting, or justifying the war in Ukraine and participating in manipulation, disinformation, and propaganda activities
- prohibitions on Russian citizens and residents holding any posts in the governing bodies of critical infrastructures and critical entities
- prohibitions on new investments in the Russian energy sector, including projects related to oil exploration and production
- a complete ban on the export of goods and technology used for oil and natural gas exploration and production or for oil refining and liquefaction of natural gas
- bans on the import of Russian coal, crude oil, and many petroleum products
- prohibitions on the trade, brokering, or transport to third countries of Russian crude oil exceeding the price cap
- bans on the sale or provision of tankers or natural gas storage capacity to Russian entities.⁸⁸

Since 2022, Brussels has continually refined its sanctions in an effort to close loopholes and offset Russian adaptations. For instance, the EU's 11th round of sanctions included a port ban on tankers engaging in ship-to-ship transfers of Russian oil at sea, a deceptive practice intended to circumvent prohibitions on the import of Russian crude and petroleum products into the EU or to enable sales of these products above the price cap agreed on by the EU. In an effort to harmonize disparate European policies and reduce opportunities for Russian exploitation, in April 2024, Brussels issued a directive criminalizing sanctions violations and establishing EU-wide minimum rules for sanctions enforcement.⁸⁹

The EU has also led its members in an unprecedented push to reduce their reliance on Russian fossil fuels. In addition to the restrictions described above, the EU's REPowerEU plan, adopted in March 2022, aims to accelerate the clean transition and diversify European energy sources to increase the supply of non-Russian hydrocarbons.⁹⁰ Under the plan, the EU has paired changes in existing laws and policies with expanded cooperation with alternate energy suppliers.

For example, the European Commission has committed to increase the capacity of Azerbaijan's Southern Gas Corridor to at least 20 billion cubic meters annually by 2027 compared with 8.1 billion cubic meters delivered in 2021.⁹¹ The EU also revised its Renewable Energy Directive, increasing the 2030 binding target for the share of renewables in the EU's overall energy consumption from 32

⁸⁸ For details, exemptions, and derogations from restrictions related to the energy sector, see Council of the European Union, 2014g, Articles 2–2d, 3, 3b, 3c, 3eb–ec, 3f–3i, 3k, 3m–n, 3o–q, 4, 5n, and 5p. Council of the European Union, “Council Adopts Full Suspension of Visa Facilitation with Russia,” press release, September 9, 2022h.

⁸⁹ European Parliament and Council of the European Union, *Directive (EU) 2024/1226 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 April 2024 on the Definition of Criminal Offences and Penalties for the Violation of Union Restrictive Measures and Amending Directive (EU) 2018/1673*, April 24, 2024.

⁹⁰ European Commission, *REPowerEU Plan*, COM(2022) 230 final, May 18, 2022a.

⁹¹ European Commission, “EU and Azerbaijan Enhance Bilateral Relations, Including Energy Cooperation,” July 18, 2022b.

percent to 42.5 percent.⁹² To prevent EU companies from outbidding each other when seeking to replace Russian natural gas, the European Commission launched a joint purchasing of natural gas at the EU level.⁹³ Individual EU countries have also launched efforts to decrease their reliance on Russian fossil fuels. Most notably, Germany canceled the Nord Stream 2 project and has invested in LNG terminals.⁹⁴ Consequently, in 2022 alone, imports of Russian natural gas as a percentage of EU natural gas inland consumption fell by more than 13 percentage points to 23 percent (see Figure 2.3). The 2023 data, when released, will likely show a further decrease.

Such far-reaching measures would not be possible without EU-wide political consensus on relations with Russia. Indeed, such consensus is indicated by the change in European Parliament voting records. In 2019, less than two-thirds of EU parliamentarians voted for a resolution stating that Russia “can no longer be considered a ‘strategic partner,’” despite having labeled Russia a “strategic challenge” three years prior.⁹⁵ In a vote a week after Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, 94 percent of parliamentarians voted to condemn “in the strongest possible terms Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine” and to demand tougher sanctions on Russia.⁹⁶ That November, 83 percent voted to approve a resolution recognizing Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism and calling on the EU to further isolate Russia internationally, including by reducing national diplomatic ties and EU contacts with official Russian representatives and state-affiliated institutions.⁹⁷

However, the EU’s adoption of a strong and consistently confrontational policy toward Russia belies broader variations in public sentiments toward the country. Favorable views of Russia have declined significantly compared with a 2018 baseline, but the extent of the decline—and the intensity of public sentiments—varies broadly by country. At one end of the spectrum sits Poland, where one poll found that only 2 percent of the population reported favorable views of Russia in 2022—and only 1 percent in 2023 (see Figure 2.1). Similar trends can be observed in Finland and Sweden, where the change in sentiment contributed to the countries’ historic decisions to seek admission to NATO. Yet almost 40 percent of citizens of Bulgaria and Cyprus still hold positive views of Russia, although attitudes in countries like Italy, Belgium, and Greece have begun to trend upward (see Figure 2.4).

⁹² European Parliament and Council of the European Union, *Directive (EU) 2023/2413 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 October 2023 Amending Directive (EU) 2018/2001, Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 and Directive 98/70/EC as Regards the Promotion of Energy from Renewable Sources, and Repealing Council Directive (EU) 2015/652*, October 18, 2023.

⁹³ European Commission, “EU Energy Platform: Commission Launches First Call for Companies to Jointly Buy Gas,” press release, April 24, 2023a.

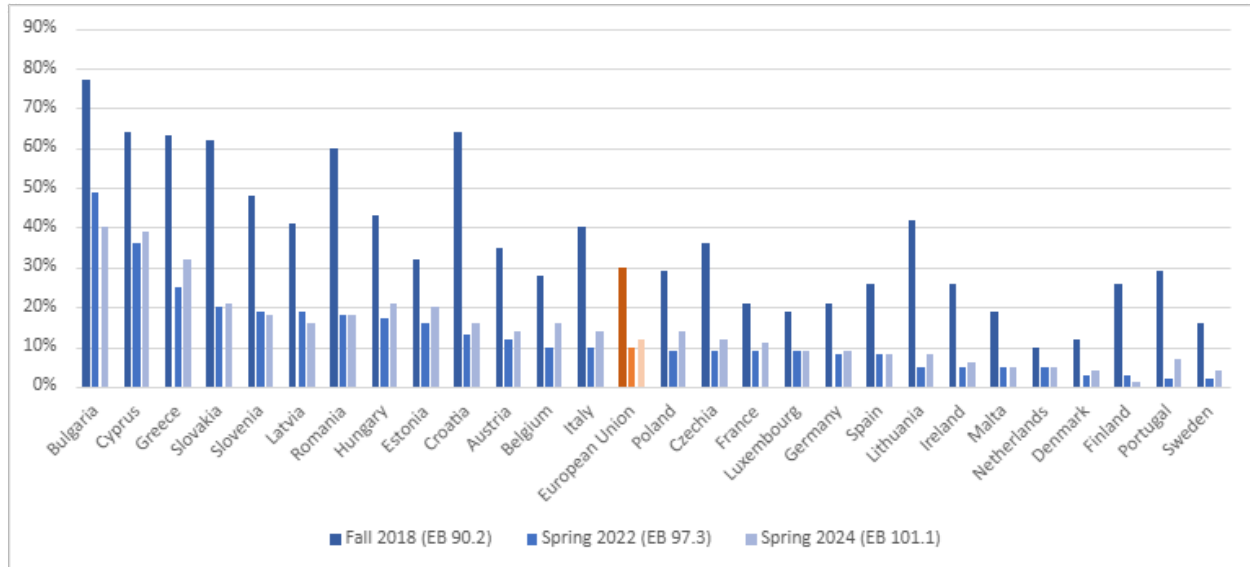
⁹⁴ For the overview of LNG investments, see Michał Kędzierski, “At All Costs. Germany Shifts to LNG,” Centre for Eastern Studies, April 28, 2023.

⁹⁵ Alexandra Brzozowski, “Russia Can’t Be Considered Strategic Partner of EU Anymore, MEPs Say,” Euractiv, March 13, 2019a.

⁹⁶ European Parliament, “Invasion of Ukraine: MEPs Call for Tougher Response to Russia,” press release, March 1, 2022a.

⁹⁷ European Parliament, “European Parliament Declares Russia to Be a State Sponsor of Terrorism,” press release, November 23, 2022b.

Figure 2.4. Positive Views of Russia in the European Union Countries



SOURCES: Features data from EU, “Special Eurobarometer EB045EP: EP Spring 2024 Survey: Use Your Vote - Countdown to the European Elections,” database, April 17, 2024; EU, “Special Eurobarometer EB041EP: EP Spring 2022 Survey: Rallying Around the European Flag | Democracy as Anchor Point in Times of Crisis,” database, June 22, 2022.

By and large, however, countries with the greatest sympathies for Russia—such as Bulgaria, Cyprus, and Greece—have not organized to challenge the EU’s approach or to preserve areas of engagement. In part, this may be because their populations are relatively small and, therefore, less influential, while at the same time, they are economically tied with the EU. For example, although 40 percent of Bulgarians reported in 2023 viewing Russia more as an ally or partner than a rival or adversary, Bulgaria holds only 17 seats in the 720-seat European Parliament.⁹⁸ Moreover, more than 60 percent of Bulgaria’s foreign exchange occurs within the EU (compared with less than 4 percent with Russia), and it receives 3.4 times more in EU funds than it contributes to the EU budget.⁹⁹ Consequently, Sofia may perceive little incentive to go to political war with Brussels over relations with Russia. In other countries where pro-Russian sentiments are strong, political leaders have sought to buck popular pressure and demonstrated new support for the EU. Since 2022, the formerly pro-Russian, Euroskeptic Italian government has transformed into a vocal advocate for assistance to Ukraine and reaffirmed Italy’s commitment to the EU and NATO.¹⁰⁰ Given the political capital invested in that firm position, reverting it now might be difficult to justify, even if the public sentiments slightly bounced back in 2023.

⁹⁸ Jana Puglierin and Pawel Zerka, *Keeping America Close, Russia Down, and China Far Away: How Europeans Navigate a Competitive World*, European Council on Foreign Relations, ECFR/499, June 2023, p. 11.

⁹⁹ European Commission, “EU Spending and Revenue: Data 2000–2022,” spreadsheet, July 31, 2023b; Eurostat, “EU Trade Since 1999 by SITC,” database, last updated November 18, 2024f.

¹⁰⁰ Teresa Coratella, “Italy’s Challenging Divorce from Russia,” European Council on Foreign Relations, March 9, 2022; Raimondo Lanza, *Putin’s Friends? The Complex Balance Inside Italy’s Far-Right Government Coalition*, French Institute of International Relations, November 28, 2022.

As of August 2024, Hungary is the main outlier. In the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Hungary joined other European states in voting for EU and United Nations condemnation of Russia's actions. Budapest has refused to allow arms shipments destined for Ukraine to transit Hungarian territory and demanded partial exemptions from some categories of EU sanctions.¹⁰¹ Even as the EU's assistance to Ukraine has expanded and it has enacted additional restrictions on trade and engagement with Russia, Hungary has spoken out against and blocked some aid, questioned sanctions imposed on Russia, and breached Russia's diplomatic isolation.¹⁰²

Hungary's stance toward Russia and insistence that it should "stay out of the war," as Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has pledged to his constituents, reflect both the country's long-standing tension with Brussels over rule of law and human rights issues as well as greater popular sympathies toward Russia.¹⁰³ A much larger share of Hungarians, relative to EU-wide averages, retain positive views of Russia (see Figure 2.4). In a 2023 Pew Research Center poll, for instance, only 33 percent of Hungarians surveyed stated that they believe Russia poses a major military threat to its neighbors, with over one-quarter of Hungarians maintaining that Russia is not a threat.¹⁰⁴ Yet Budapest's public position has been mostly symbolic or opportunistic; although Hungarian officials emphasize their disapproval of EU and other European policies and have called for greater diplomatic engagement with Russia, they have been unable to alter the general course of the EU's policy. Rather, Hungary has used the threat of a veto to extract concessions from Brussels but has ultimately fallen in line under pressure. The EU bypassed Prime Minister Orbán's resistance to Ukraine's application for membership in part because the Hungarian leader tacitly agreed to a compromise that allowed him to miss a critical vote.¹⁰⁵ Working with Slovakia, Hungary has blocked billions of partial reimbursements through the European Peace Facility (EPF) to EU member states for military aid sent to Ukraine. However, it has not succeeded in reducing the flow of weapons; to the contrary, in June 2024, EU foreign affairs ministers completed a deal to bypass Hungary by channeling funds from €210 billion of the Russian Central Bank's paralyzed assets.¹⁰⁶

Two and a half years since the full-scale invasion in 2022, the Russia-Ukraine war has caused a paradigm shift in European attitudes and policies. The significance of this change is apparent in the duration and scale of its trade restrictions and the depth of its reductions in Russian energy use.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Hungary used its status as a landlocked country to require and use exemptions from restrictions on Russian fossil fuels. See Kate Abnett, Jan Strupczewski, and Ingrid Melander, "EU Agrees Russia Oil Embargo, Gives Hungary Exemptions; Zelenskiy Vows More Sanctions," Reuters, May 31, 2022; Justin Spike, "Hungary Forces New Energy Deals with Russia amid Ukraine War," Associated Press, April 12, 2022.

¹⁰² Alexander Baunov, "Russia Sees Signs of Diplomatic Rehabilitation in Orbán Visit," Carnegie Politika, July 10, 2024.

¹⁰³ For an analysis of Hungary's "taking foreign policy decisions hostage" in the country's conflict with Brussels over the rule of law, see Patrick Müller and Peter Slominski, "Hungary, the EU and Russia's War Against Ukraine: The Changing Dynamics of EU Foreign Policymaking," in Claudia Wiesner and Michèle Knodt, eds., *The War Against Ukraine and the EU: Facing New Realities*, Palgrave Macmillan, April 30, 2024.

¹⁰⁴ Moira Fagan, Laura Clancy, Sneha Gubbala, and Sarah Austin, "Poles and Hungarians Differ over Views of Russia and the U.S.," Pew Research Center, October 2, 2023.

¹⁰⁵ Nicolas Camut, Hans Von Der Burchard, and Clea Caulcutt, "Orbán's Walkout Was Planned, Macron Says," Politico, December 15, 2023.

¹⁰⁶ Edit Zgut-Przybylska, "The Kremlin's Growing Influence in Orbán's Hungary," Politico, May 23, 2024; Jorge Liboreiro, "EU Bypasses Hungary to Send €1.4 Billion in Military and Industrial Aid to Ukraine, Borrell Says," Euronews, June 24, 2024.

¹⁰⁷ European Commission, 2024d, p. 5.

European policies have demonstrated an intent to pair symbolic gestures of opposition to the Kremlin's policies with meaningful changes in the economic, institutional, and people-to-people frameworks that sustained engagement with Russia prior to the war. Despite opposition from some European countries, the overall effect has been both the adoption of a confrontational stance in the near term and preparations to sustain this policy over the long term.

Conclusion

The war in Ukraine has upended decades of European policy toward Russia. Table 2.2 summarizes several novel elements of the European response to the war and compares them with a preconflict baseline. Between 2014 and 2022, European attitudes and policies toward Russia varied significantly and by region, leading the EU and NATO to adopt ambiguous policies intended to accommodate member states' differing preferences and preserve the flexibility to tilt toward greater engagement or confrontation as desired. Despite continued concerns over Russian policies toward Crimea and Donbas, European countries generally preferred to continue engagement and cooperation, as reflected in the gradual recovery of trade and public attitudes. This trend likely would have continued had Russia not chosen to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The war decisively tilted the balance in Europe toward a path of confrontation rather than engagement with Russia.

Table 2.2. Summary of Trends in Europe's Orientation Toward Russia

	2014–2021	2022–June 2024
Declared stance	• The EU identified Russia as a strategic challenge. • NATO conditioned a return to business as usual with Russia on a change in Russia's policy on Crimea.	• The EU declared Russia a long-term and direct threat. • NATO Strategic Concept identified Russia as "the most significant and direct threat." • The EU demanded Russia's unconditional withdrawal from Ukraine.
Policies and resources	• NATO increased deterrence activities but continued military-to-military engagement. • The EU enacted limited sanctions and unevenly implemented policies to push back, contain, and engage. • EU-Russia trade and public sentiments gradually recovered.	• The EU adopted 14 sanction packages of unprecedented scale. • The EU aimed to rapidly reduce dependence on Russian energy. • EU-Russia trade fell by two-thirds from 2021–2023, to less than 2% of EU foreign trade. • Public sentiments about Russia fell to historic lows.

SOURCES: NATO, 2022d, p. 4; European Commission, 2022a.

Will Europe's confrontational policy toward Russia last? As demonstrated by the fact that the EU has not published a formal policy to guide EU-Russia relations, European states have not articulated a clear vision for a future relationship. Although allies agreed at the Washington Summit to "develop recommendations on NATO's strategic approach to Russia," the alliance has yet to promulgate a new

policy.¹⁰⁸ However, the majority of European states have also not demonstrated an interest or confidence in the feasibility of engagement as a means to establish stable relations with Russia in the future.¹⁰⁹ Even countries like Hungary, Cyprus, Bulgaria, and Italy that harbor more favorable views toward Russia have not presented options to repair severed economic and political linkages and restore relations.¹¹⁰ Maybe even more importantly, EU countries' political and economic interests lie predominantly within the Union: Even before 2022, most of their foreign trade took place within the EU (above 60 percent in most cases), whereas trade with Russia was counted in the low single digits.¹¹¹ The political costs of reengaging Russia have only increased as the EU has sought to establish a collective framework for members' relations with the country and eastern member states have conveyed their determination to oppose defections. Although some Western European states like Portugal or Spain may be interested in reengaging Russia, the prospect of provoking a political clash at the EU level that could impose opportunity costs on their ability to pursue other priorities likely will disincentivize major challenges. Consequently, as long as the European mainstream is willing to confront Russia, the policy is likely to persist because the Russia sympathizers' incentives to derail it are weak. Meanwhile, German or French policymakers might still be grappling with the failure of their long-standing efforts toward a cooperative relationship with Russia, but they invested too much political capital in confronting the aggressor to backtrack without a dramatic shift in Russia's behavior.

As European efforts to reduce reliance on Russian energy continue and as alternate trade networks are established, the incentives to restore relations are likely to diminish further. Even if potential political shifts in Europe would lead to the weakening of sanctions and Russia's isolation, it is not certain that European companies would restore cooperative relations with Russia. The longer the EU sanctions regime is in place, the more stable the new equilibrium and the weaker the incentive to revert back to the old equilibrium. For example, sanctions and the REPowerEU plan force the EU countries to find new energy suppliers. Although pipeline-delivered hydrocarbons might always be cheaper than seaborne, there is value to the stability and security of supplies and a cost to changing suppliers. Without a radical change in Russia's behavior, concerns about prospective future EU sanctions likely will discourage European companies from going back to Russian fossil fuels. Furthermore, this push against Russian hydrocarbons complements the broader, long-standing EU effort to increase the share of green energy in the mix. Finally, the infrastructure and mechanisms that are currently developed to meet the EU demand would preclude the return of excessive dependency on Russian hydrocarbons. For their part, European capitals have underlined that they can still—and are prepared to—restrict relations further. Statements by European leaders suggest that the sanctions package adopted in May 2024, their 14th since the war began, will not be the last one.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ NATO, 2024g.

¹⁰⁹ Kadri Liik, *The Old Is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born: A Power Audit of EU–Russia Relations*, European Council on Foreign Relations, ECFR/476, December 2022, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Liik, 2022, p. 17.

¹¹¹ In 2021, only the neighboring Baltic states and Finland exceeded the 5 percent threshold for total foreign trade with Russia. See Eurostat, 2024f.

¹¹² Kateryna Hodunova, "Work on 15th Sanctions Package Against Russia to 'Start Immediately,' Finnish FM Says," Kyiv Independent, June 24, 2024.

Will Europe Build Great Capability and Exercise Greater Strategic Autonomy?

The convergence of European perceptions of Russia as a threat has revived old debates over how best to provide for Europe's collective security. Since NATO's formation in 1949 and the concurrent movement toward greater Western European economic, political, and military integration, European leaders and strategists have debated the extent to which national resources, authorities, and policies should be subordinated to multinational organizations. In seeking to articulate common interests, these discussions are often intertwined with debates over the extent to which European leaders should—and can—rely on U.S. defense commitments and the extent to which European and U.S. interests align. Advocates of greater strategic autonomy argue that Europe must prepare to act independently to ensure its interests are represented on the global stage and to hedge against uncertainty over the United States' future direction.¹¹³ These advocates have called for Europeans to develop bilaterally and through institutions like the EU a greater capacity for autonomous action by increasing defense spending and cooperation, coordination, and integration outside transatlantic frameworks like NATO.¹¹⁴ For others, the debate over European strategic autonomy appears either futile or misguided because they doubt European countries' ability or willingness to independently develop the military forces required to deter external aggression and because they view the United States as a vital partner in ensuring European interests are secured.¹¹⁵

In this chapter, we examine how the war in Ukraine has influenced European attitudes and policies related to strategic and operational autonomy. To capture the breadth of the debate, we define *operational autonomy* as the ability of European states to defend themselves with reduced or no U.S. assistance and *strategic autonomy* as the ability to pursue collective interests on the world stage.¹¹⁶ As in

¹¹³ For a compilation of commentaries, studies, and reports from international think tanks on the issue of European strategic autonomy before Russia's full-scale invasion, see Marcin Grajewski, "The EU Strategic Autonomy Debate," European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 690.532, March 30, 2021.

¹¹⁴ For the most significant articulation of this concept by a standing government official, see Élysée, "President Macron Gives Speech on New Initiative for Europe," September 26, 2017. For illustrative arguments for greater European defense autonomy, see Nick Witney, *Building Europeans' Capacity to Defend Themselves*, European Council on Foreign Relations, June 2019; Nicole Koenig, "Time to Go Beyond the Meta-Debate on EU Strategic Autonomy in Defence," Jacques Delors Centre, Hertie School, December 4, 2020.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, Hugo Meijer and Stephen G. Brooks, "Illusions of Autonomy: Why Europe Cannot Provide for Its Security If the United States Pulls Back," *International Security*, Vol. 45, No. 4, Spring 2021; Mariusz Błaszczak, "Europe's Alliance with the US Is the Foundation of Its Security," Politico, November 25, 2020; Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, "Europe Still Needs America," Politico, November 2, 2020; Pauli Järvenpää, Claudia Major, and Sven Sakkov, *European Strategic Autonomy: Operationalising a Buzzword*, International Centre for Defence and Security, October 2019.

¹¹⁶ For a discussion of the challenge of defining the concept, see Frédéric Mauro, *Europe's Strategic Autonomy: That Obscure Object of Desire*, Institut de Relations Internationales et Stratégiques, October 2021.

previous chapters, we compare the EU and member states' rhetoric and policies before and after the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. In particular, we examined official national and EU statements and guidance related to strategic autonomy, defense capability development, and responsibility sharing with the United States; the development of, and participation in, initiatives to increase defense cooperation outside the auspices of the transatlantic alliance; and trends in national defense spending and DIB policy. We compare trends in the years preceding and following the invasion in the section conclusion.

Prewar Positions

For most of the 1990s and 2000s, European defense policy was characterized by disinvestment and reliance on the United States. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse and the end of the Cold War, European capitals turned toward the task of stabilizing and re-integrating former communist countries and developing a pan-European project founded on soft power. Although the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, peacekeeping missions in Africa, and, after 2001, out-of-area operations in Afghanistan and in support of the U.S.-led Global War on Terror continued to generate demand for European military capabilities, defense expenditures declined precipitously and attention shifted from preparations for large-scale conventional conflict to peacekeeping, stability, counterterrorism, and counterinsurgency operations.¹¹⁷ Debates over whether Europe needed to retain an Atlanticist defense and foreign policy or whether it should establish a more independent, or Europeanist, strategy continued, but in practice European capitals relied on U.S. defense commitments to deter external threats.¹¹⁸

Yet even as the resources committed to European militaries declined, political efforts to strengthen the EU's role in continental defense and security policy continued. Over the 1990s and early 2000s, member states defined an array of military functions the EU could undertake under the umbrella of crisis management operations and codified a set of structures and tasks for what would become the bloc's Common Foreign and Security Policy and Common Security Defence Policy.¹¹⁹ The conflicts in the Balkans drew attention to the EU's deficiencies in conflict prevention, crisis management, and other security and defense issues and raised questions about the availability of NATO member countries' assets and capabilities in scenarios in which the Alliance was not directly engaged militarily. At the Cologne European Council in 1999, member states declared their intent to "give the European Union the necessary means and capabilities to assume its responsibilities regarding a common European policy on security and defence," set the goal of developing capabilities for autonomous military action, and established the new post of High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy to further the EU's ability to speak with "one voice" on security matters, among other

¹¹⁷ For changes in European military expenditures, see Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, undated.

¹¹⁸ Jan Techau, *The Politics of 2 Percent: NATO and the Security Vacuum in Europe*, Carnegie Europe, September 2015.

¹¹⁹ Robert E. Hunter, *The European Security and Defense Policy: NATO's Companion—or Competitor?* RAND Corporation, MR-1463-NDRI/RE, 2002.

initiatives.¹²⁰ Four years later, the European Council adopted the European Security Strategy, which, for the first time, defined the EU's security environment and identified security challenges and implications for the community.¹²¹ Notably, the United States strongly opposed strengthening the EU's defense capabilities out of concern that it could lead to a decoupling of European decisionmaking from NATO, duplication of efforts at a time of scarce resources, and potential discrimination against non-EU NATO members.¹²² Following the creation of the European Defence Agency and EU Battlegroup in 2004, the political momentum behind EU defense efforts also declined over the mid-2000s amid the European debt crisis and member states' infighting over revisions to the European Constitution and the Treaty of Lisbon.

European attitudes toward their collective defense obligations began to shift over the 2010s. Russia's annexation of Crimea revived dormant concerns about Moscow's ambitions and Europe's readiness to deter, and if necessary, defend against, hybrid and conventional threats—all at the same time that the emergence of the Islamic State, increase in migration from North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean, and growing evidence of Russian interference in European domestic politics and intrusions in national infrastructure heightened concerns about Europe's defense capability and capacity to respond to conventional and hybrid threats. Together, these trends highlighted countries' sense of vulnerability and prompted a reexamination of European capabilities and architectures for collective defense—all while the United States' efforts to rebalance its attention and resources to the Indo-Pacific region introduced new uncertainty about U.S. commitments.¹²³ But progress toward reviving European defense institutions and modernizing European armed forces continued to lag behind the rhetoric as European capitals disagreed over the urgency of the task, the nature of the pacing challenge, and the role of the United States.

After Russia's annexation of Crimea, European members joined the United States in reaffirming the principle of collective defense and strengthening NATO. In a strongly worded declaration released during the Wales Summit in September 2014, allies announced that "Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine," in conjunction with "growing instability in our southern neighbourhood," had "fundamentally challenged our vision of a Europe whole, free, and at peace" and reaffirmed the importance of security and defense cooperation.¹²⁴ During the summit, leaders approved a new NATO Readiness Action Plan, a package of measures to adapt and strengthen the alliance's posture; enhance the NATO Response Force; and improve the coherence of allied military exercises,

¹²⁰ Cologne European Council, *Annex III: European Council Declaration on Strengthening the Common European Policy on Security and Defence*, 150/99, June 4, 1999, p. 2. These decisions followed the 1998 St. Malo Declaration, in which the UK and France agreed on the need for the EU to develop the ability for autonomous decisionmaking and action, including the use of credible military force, in the event that international crises arose that threatened EU interests but for which NATO was not involved. Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom, "Joint Declaration on European Defence," December 4, 1998.

¹²¹ Council of the European Union, *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*, December 13, 2003.

¹²² See, for instance, Madeleine K. Albright, "The Right Balance Will Secure NATO's Future," *Financial Times*, December 7, 1998.

¹²³ For European reactions to the announcement of a U.S. "pivot" to Asia in 2011 and subsequent U.S. policy shifts, see Robert D. Blackwill and Richard Fontaine, *Lost Decade: The US Pivot to Asia and the Rise of Chinese Power*, Oxford University Press, June 11, 2014, pp. 107–108.

¹²⁴ NATO, 2022h.

investments, and operations, among other measures.¹²⁵ In recognition of the need to balance the costs among members, allies also pledged to spend a minimum of 2 percent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on defense by 2024, to dedicate more than 20 percent of their defense budgets on major equipment and related research and development costs, and to meet NATO readiness guidelines.

The 2014 Wales Defence Investment Pledge represented the first of several initiatives to strengthen the Alliance's posture along its eastern flank and to establish and track progress toward an improved ability to respond to a large-scale crisis or conflict in Europe (see Table 3.1). Yet European militaries' progress toward realizing NATO's capability goals often lagged behind the rhetoric and support for new crisis management, and cooperative security mechanisms remained mixed. In 2016, for instance, NATO declared a new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force operationally capable despite evidence of outstanding capability gaps. At the time, only the United States possessed the requisite enabling forces, and only seven allies—France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, Turkey, and the UK—were capable of leading the task force's land element.¹²⁶ Although average defense spending increased in the years following Russia's de facto annexation of Crimea, only eight allies reached the 2 percent spending guideline by 2021 compared with 3 percent when the pledge was announced in 2014, according to NATO estimates.¹²⁷ The United States, which comprised 51 percent of the Alliance's combined GDP, accounted for 69 percent of combined defense expenditures.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ NATO, "NATO's Readiness Action Plan," fact sheet, December 2014.

¹²⁶ Seth G. Jones, Rachel Ellehuus, and Colin Wall, *Europe's High-End Military Challenges: The Future of European Capabilities and Missions*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 2021, p. 8.

¹²⁷ NATO, *The Secretary General's Annual Report 2021*, 2022a, p. 42.

¹²⁸ NATO, 2022a, p. 42.

Table 3.1. Timeline of Major NATO Enhancements, 2014–2021

Date	Initiative
2014	At the 2014 Wales Summit, allies agreed to implement the Readiness Action Plan, a package of measures to increase military presence and activity in the territory of eastern allies and strengthen long-term military posture and capabilities. Under the plan, allies agreed to create a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, composed of approximately 5,000 forces, and to establish eight multinational NATO headquarters, known as NATO Force Integration Units, on the territory of eastern allies.
2015	The first six NATO Force Integration Units were activated in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Romania.
2016	NATO declared the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force operationally capable. Two additional NATO Force Integration Units were activated in Hungary and Slovakia. At the Warsaw Summit, allies agreed to establish a rotational-forward presence in the territories of eastern and southeastern member nations.
2017	NATO established four multinational battlegroups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland under a new Enhanced Forward Presence initiative. Allied defense ministers adopted a package of capability targets to guide investments.
2018	The NATO Readiness Initiative called for 30 heavy or medium maneuver battalions, 30 kinetic air squadrons, and 30 major naval combatants to be ready to use within 30 days. NATO defense ministers agreed to increase the NATO Command Structure by around 1,200 personnel.
2019	Allied chiefs of defence approved a new military strategy and recognized space as a new military domain. Allies agreed to adopt baseline requirements for resilient civilian telecommunications. In cooperation with the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation, NATO established the Rapid Air Mobility mechanism to ease air movement across national borders.
2020	The Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) presented a new strategic framework titled the <i>Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area</i> (DDA).
2021	The North Atlantic Council (NAC) approved a NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept to guide and focus allied investments and capability development.

SOURCES: Features information from NATO, 2014; NATO, “Defence Ministers to Agree NATO Readiness Initiative,” June 7, 2018, updated June 8, 2018a; NATO, “NATO Chiefs of Defence Discuss Future Alliance Adaptations,” May 22, 2019b; NATO, *NATO: Ready for the Future: Adapting the Alliance (2018–2019)*, 2019a.

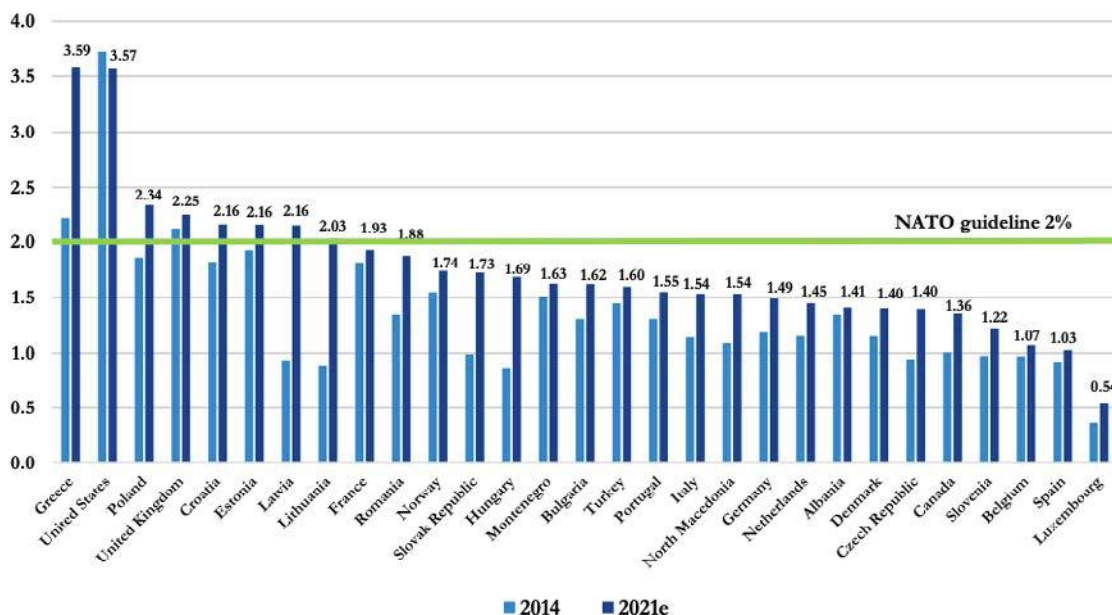
European defense spending and contributions to NATO remained low even as concerns about the United States’ commitment to the Alliance increased after 2016 (see Figure 3.1).¹²⁹ Fears of potential U.S. abandonment resurfaced after the first Trump administration declined to endorse NATO’s doctrine of collective defense, labeled the EU as a U.S. “foe,” imposed tariffs on European exports, and expressed sympathy for President Putin.¹³⁰ Even before the Russian annexation of Crimea, many

¹²⁹ Although some allies expressed private concerns after the Obama administration announced its intent to “pivot” to Asia in 2011, Washington’s vocal support for NATO enhancements and enlargement, its maintenance of a large military footprint in Europe, and its continued engagement on transatlantic issues reassured allies that a fundamental reduction in U.S. commitments was not forthcoming. Blackwill and Fontaine, 2014, pp. 107–114.

¹³⁰ Susan B. Glasser, “How Trump Made War on Angela Merkel and Europe,” *New Yorker*, December 17, 2018; Anna Dimitrova, “The State of the Transatlantic Relationship in the Trump Era,” Fondation Robert Schuman, February 4, 2020.

European publics had questioned the United States' commitment to their interests. In a survey conducted in 2013, 65 percent of EU member country respondents reported that they believed the United States took the interests of other countries like their own into account “not at all” or “not too much” when making decisions.¹³¹ By 2018, favorability toward the United States had slipped further. That year, over 76 percent of EU respondents reported similar sentiments. Among German and French respondents, the rate was 80 and 81 percent, respectively.¹³²

Figure 3.1. Defense Expenditures in 2014 and 2021 as a Share of Gross Domestic Product



SOURCE: Features data from NATO, “Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014–2021),” March 31, 2022c.
NOTE: Figures for 2021 are estimates.

European leaders divided over how to prepare for a potential reduction in U.S. assistance. Some, particularly those in countries that perceived the greatest threat from Russia, sought to accommodate new U.S. demands and to prioritize a bilateral relationship with the United States over cooperation in multilateral frameworks like NATO. For example, Poland offered up to \$2 billion in financial incentives to encourage the United States to station an armored division permanently on Polish territory, a move interpreted by some members as a potential test of the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act.¹³³ Yet others pushed for Europe to prepare to operate collectively but outside the transatlantic alliance. In a 2017 address, President Macron called on regional leaders to “re-establish a sovereign, united and democratic Europe” by, among other aims, building “a common intervention

¹³¹ Pew Research Center, *Pew Research Center’s Global Attitudes Project 2013 Spring Survey Topline Results*, July 18, 2013.

¹³² Pew Research Center, *Topline Questionnaire: Pew Research Center Spring 2018 Survey*, October 1, 2018.

¹³³ David M. Herszenhorn, “Warsaw to Trump: Let’s Make a Military Deal (Without NATO),” *Politico*, May 30, 2018; Zoya Sheftalovich, “US Considering Building ‘Fort Trump’ in Poland,” *Politico*, September 19, 2018.

force, a common defense budget and a common doctrine for action.”¹³⁴ In a controversial interview two years later, he urged Europe to “wake up” to the prospect of U.S. withdrawal from the continent and prepare to operate without transatlantic security guarantees.¹³⁵ Declaring NATO “brain dead,” he called for European leaders to accelerate the development of national defenses, elevate the EU as the primary forum for European defense policy, and assert a more independent role in international affairs to mediate between the United States and China and “stop the world from catching fire.”¹³⁶

Although few other European leaders joined the French call to develop a European alternative to NATO, a growing number of EU and European officials had begun to reevaluate the United States’ reliability—and, with this change, to also reconsider the EU’s traditional emphasis on soft power. “With friends like that, who needs enemies?” then–European Council President (and current Polish Prime Minister) Donald Tusk tweeted after U.S. withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal was announced. “But frankly EU should be grateful. Thanks to him [President Trump] we got rid of all illusions. We realise that if you need a helping hand, you will find one at the end of your arm.”¹³⁷ “The times in which we could rely fully on others—they are somewhat over,” Chancellor Merkel pronounced after a tense G7 meeting, adding “we Europeans must really take our fate into our own hands.”¹³⁸ A year later, Merkel surprised international observers by publicly endorsing a French proposal to establish a common European army through the EU.¹³⁹

European leaders’ anxieties about the United States’ future role in Europe lent momentum to an ongoing effort to expand the EU’s role in defense and security policy that were rekindled following the 2008 crisis in Georgia and accelerated after the 2014 annexation of Crimea. Determined to increase European capacity to defend European interests, the EU focused on building new mechanisms to leverage the institution’s regulatory and budgetary power to promote greater national military cooperation and integration. “As Europeans we must take greater responsibility for our security,” the EU’s 2016 global strategy directed, noting the need for improvements in capability, defense industrial production, exercises, and planning.¹⁴⁰ The following year, it established

- the European Defence Fund to support collaborative defense research and development and strengthen the European defense industry
- the Military Planning and Conduct Capability, a permanent military command and control structure to enable more rapid and coherent military responses by member states in crisis or conflict

¹³⁴ Élysée, 2017.

¹³⁵ “Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words,” 2019.

¹³⁶ “Emmanuel Macron in His Own Words,” 2019.

¹³⁷ Megan Specia, “E.U. Official Takes Donald Trump to Task: ‘With Friends Like That’...,” *New York Times*, May 16, 2018.

¹³⁸ Alison Smale and Steven Erlanger, “Merkel, After Discordant G-7 Meeting, Is Looking Past Trump,” *New York Times*, May 28, 2017.

¹³⁹ Maïa De La Baume and David M. Herszenhorn, “Merkel Joins Macron in Calling for EU Army to Complement NATO,” *Politico*, November 13, 2018.

¹⁴⁰ EU, 2016, pp. 11, 19–20.

- the Permanent Structure Cooperation (PESCO) on security and defense, a legal framework for joint military investment in equipment, research, and development.¹⁴¹

PESCO's passage in 2017 was all the more remarkable because it required overcoming Franco-German disagreements over the initiative's design that had stymied progress on the initiative since it was first introduced a decade earlier.¹⁴² Together with the other initiatives like the Common Annual Review of Defence, PESCO's passage reflected a new determination among EU member countries to "reinforce the E.U.'s strategic autonomy to act alone when necessary, and with partners whenever possible," as an EU public statement described.¹⁴³

But even as European leaders vowed to build a European capacity to defend European interests, funding for new military procurement, defense innovation, and military mobility initiatives remained modest and member states' participation in EU-led initiatives was uneven.¹⁴⁴ Differing attitudes toward Russia and differing preferences over how to prioritize among the challenges confronting Europe produced mixed support for new EU programs. The Central and Eastern European members most concerned about Russia proved skeptical of EU-led efforts, were less likely to participate in EU initiatives like PESCO than their Western counterparts, and were more likely to seek exemptions from EU regulations intended to discourage reliance on foreign arms suppliers.¹⁴⁵ In part, this reflected a greater desire to buy available, off-the-shelf, often U.S.-origin systems to redress known capability gaps instead of systems from Western European countries like France and Germany, which were already endowed with large defense industries that would also benefit from intra-EU collaborative projects. Poland, for instance, expressed concern that the EU's efforts to promote defense industry consolidation would advantage French and German competitors and harm Poland's own defense sectors.¹⁴⁶ Others feared that the shift toward promoting European strategic autonomy might reinforce protectionist trends that would benefit industrial powers like France and Germany while weakening the position of countries like Spain, Poland, and the Netherlands.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ EEAS, "Defending Europe: The European Defence Fund," fact sheet, undated-a; Council of the European Union, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2017/2315 of 11 December 2017 Establishing Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) and Determining the List of Participating Member States*, December 11, 2017; EEAS, "Permanent Structured Cooperation – PESCO: Deepening Defence Cooperation Among EU Member States," fact sheet, November 2021.

¹⁴² While Germany advocated for membership in PESCO to promote the broadest member involvement in the bloc's collective defense, France argued for resources to be concentrated among an "avant-garde" cohort of more-capable members that could deliver more quickly. Michal Baranowski and Martin Quencez, "An Inclusive PESCO Moves Forward Despite Remaining Concerns," German Marshall Fund of the United States, undated.

¹⁴³ Steven Erlanger, "E.U. Moves Closer to a Joint Military Force," *New York Times*, November 13, 2017; Jean-Claude Juncker, "State of the Union Address 2017," September 12, 2017.

¹⁴⁴ As of 2021, 20 of the then-46 PESCO projects had received no national financial resources. Jacopo Barigazzi, "EU Military Projects Face Delays, Leaked Document Shows," *Politico*, July 12, 2021; Stefan Lehne, "The Comeback of the European Commission," *Carnegie Europe*, April 24, 2023; Claire Mills, *EU Defence: The Realisation of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO)*, House of Commons Library, September 23, 2019, pp. 15–16.

¹⁴⁵ Jonata Anicetti, "EU Arms Collaboration, Procurement, and Offsets: The Impact of the War in Ukraine," *Policy Studies*, Vol. 45, Nos. 3–4, 2024, p. 444.

¹⁴⁶ Baranowski and Quencez, undated.

¹⁴⁷ José Ignacio Torreblanca, "Onwards and Outwards: Why the EU Needs to Move from Strategic Autonomy to Strategic Interdependence," European Council on Foreign Relations, August 24, 2023.

Although rattled by signs that the United States might disengage from the continent, many European leaders also remained hesitant to pursue reforms that could be interpreted as either discrediting NATO or distancing Europe from the transatlantic alliance.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, the EU itself continued to recognize NATO's primary role in collective defense and sought to improve coordination between the two institutions.¹⁴⁹ A first-ever EU-NATO declaration released in 2016 established a "transatlantic strategic partnership" and pledged to boost cooperation.¹⁵⁰ That December, EU and NATO ministers endorsed a package of 42 actions to advance interoperability through cooperation on developing defense standards; establish parallel and coordinated military exercises; and encourage the coherence and complementarity of EU and NATO defense planning processes, among other measures.¹⁵¹ Over subsequent years, NATO and EU ministers approved additional measures to expand cooperation on military mobility, counterterrorism, joint exercises and training, and promotion of the role of women in peace and security.¹⁵² Even then, some member states worked to ensure EU enhancements would not come at the expense of NATO's capacity or credibility. Although the Baltic states welcomed co-funding initiatives like the European Defence Fund, they pressed for the EU to include "third countries" like the United States and maintained that EU enhancements should not be viewed as alternatives to transatlantic cooperation.¹⁵³ As a 2018 joint communiqué by Poland, Czechia, Slovakia, and Hungary on PESCO stated, "We need to deliver by developing concrete capabilities in a timely manner that could meet NATO requirements as well."¹⁵⁴

In a speech to the Bruegel economic policy think tank in September 2020, European Council President Charles Michel declared that strategic autonomy would be the "aim of our generation."¹⁵⁵ But six years after the Ukraine crisis began, Europe had made little progress toward realizing this objective. Heightened concerns over Russian intentions, combined with frustration with the United States, provided an opportunity to expand the EU's role in shaping continental deterrence and defense policy and spurred new interest in the idea of building Europe's capacity to act without the United States. In so doing, the EU sought to transcend the traditional division of responsibility in which the EU assumed leadership of economic, social, and regulatory issues and NATO led matters of collective defense and deterrence. But even as allies took steps to increase their defense spending and promote greater European integration outside the transatlantic alliance, they proved unwilling to dedicate the resources required to execute their ambitions or to concentrate their attention and resources on alternatives to transatlantic cooperation. Member states fell short of EU benchmarks for collaborative

¹⁴⁸ Tania Łąci, *Understanding EU-NATO Cooperation: Theory and Practice*, European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 659.269, October 2020, pp. 10–11; Błaszczak, 2020; Kramp-Karrenbauer, 2020.

¹⁴⁹ Łąci, 2020, pp. 4–5.

¹⁵⁰ NATO, "Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," press release, July 8, 2016, updated December 5, 2017.

¹⁵¹ NATO "Statement on the Implementation of the Joint Declaration Signed by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," press release, December 6, 2016.

¹⁵² NATO, "NATO-EU Relations," fact sheet, July 2018b; Łąci, 2020, pp. 4 and 6.

¹⁵³ Anicetti, 2024, p. 448.

¹⁵⁴ Anicetti, 2024, p. 447.

¹⁵⁵ Charles Michel, "Strategic Autonomy for Europe: The Aim of Our Generation," transcript of speech given at Bruegel, European Council, September 28, 2020.

procurement initiatives and NATO goal posts for overall spending.¹⁵⁶ The migration crisis of 2015 and 2016, the rule of law backsliding in Hungary and Poland after 2015, Brexit, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and continued tensions with the United States precluded the consensus required to secure major institutional reforms and diverted the EU's discussion of strategic autonomy from defense matters to migration, public health, and economic and social issues.¹⁵⁷

Consequences of the Russia-Ukraine War, 2022–2024

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 rattled European leaders and lent new momentum to debates regarding Europe's responsibility and readiness to provide for its own defense. Confronted with the realities of a large-scale, high-intensity conflict in the region, European governments have committed new attention and resources to bolstering national defenses, enhancing coordination on defense production and procurement, and improving the capacity of existing multinational organizations to manage collective security needs. But even as the war has elevated voices calling for greater European *operational* autonomy, it has showcased the continent's continued reliance on U.S. security guarantees and cooperation. The result has been a general effort to improve Europe's readiness and capacity to defend against foreign aggression—and greater skepticism of prewar proposals to exercise *strategic* autonomy by shifting resources from transatlantic to European institutions and developing the EU's capacity to influence global developments independently.

European defense spending has surged since the start of the war in Ukraine. Within a month of Russia's invasion, six European countries—Belgium, Germany, Italy, Norway, Romania, and Sweden—unveiled plans to increase defense spending, with the majority of European countries following suit by year's end.¹⁵⁸ Reversing decades of policies that prioritized reductions in defense spending, Chancellor Scholz announced the creation of a new €100 billion (\$107 billion) special fund to expand and modernize the Bundeswehr, which is part of larger pledge to overhaul German defense policy and respond to what the chancellor characterized as a *Zeitenwende*, or an “epochal tectonic shift.”¹⁵⁹ Recognizing “the watershed moment that Russia's war of aggression signifies,” Germany's first-ever national security strategy, released in June 2023, affirmed Berlin's intent to strengthen the EU, “consolidate[e] the European pillar of NATO,” and increase German contributions to the security of the European continent.¹⁶⁰ Yet even countries already committed to high defense spending pledged to increase their contributions to collective defense. For example, new legislation in Poland mandated that the country spend 3 percent of GDP annually, exceeding the 2 percent threshold Warsaw had previously pledged to meet.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Bergmann, Toygür, and Svendsen, 2023, p. 11.

¹⁵⁷ Lehne, 2023; Suzana Anghel, Beatrix Immenkamp, Elena Lazarou, Jérôme Saulnier, and Alex Benjamin Wilson, *On the Path to “Strategic Autonomy”: The EU in an Evolving Geopolitical Environment*, European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 652.096, September 2020.

¹⁵⁸ Christina Mackenzie, “Seven European Nations Have Increased Defense Budgets in One Month. Who Will Be Next?” *Breaking Defense*, March 22, 2022.

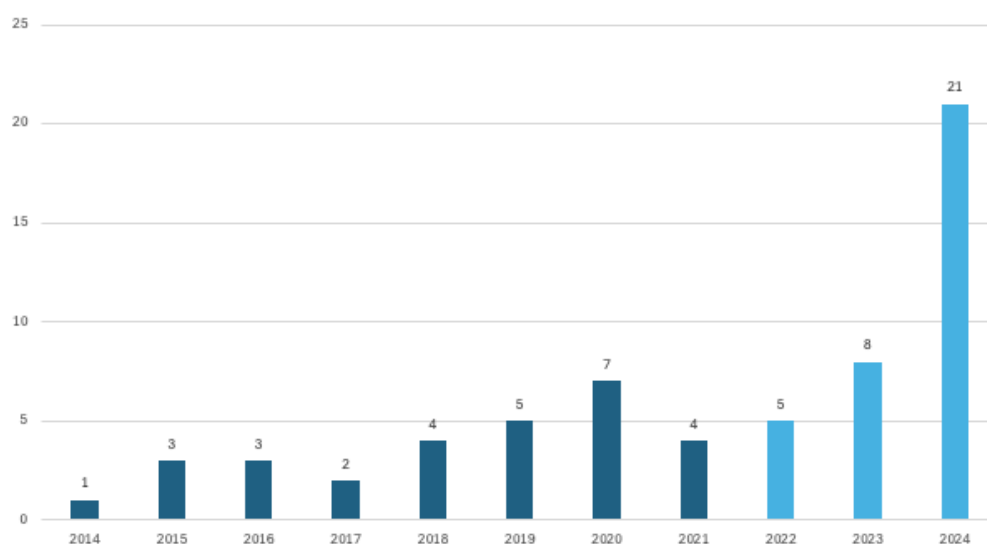
¹⁵⁹ Scholz, 2022a; Olaf Scholz, “The Global *Zeitenwende*,” *Foreign Affairs*, December 5, 2022b.

¹⁶⁰ German Federal Government, 2023, pp. 5–6.

¹⁶¹ Ana-Roxana Popescu, “Poland to Increase Defence Spending to 3% of GDP from 2023,” *Janes*, March 4, 2022.

Although countries' commitments have varied in terms of spending targets and projected implementation timelines, European defense spending has continued to grow. Of the 27 EU member states, 20 increased their defense expenditures in 2022—six by more than 10 percent.¹⁶² Although EU data for 2023 is not yet available, data collected by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute shows that regional defense and security outlays have increased by 16 percent from 2022 and 2023, driving the continent's spending to the highest levels observed since the end of the Cold War.¹⁶³ Concurrently, the number of European NATO members meeting the 2 percent of GDP threshold has climbed year over year, increasing over five times between 2021 and 2024 (see Figure 3.2). Although large Western European countries like the UK and Germany still make up the greatest proportion of total European defense spending, countries bordering or near Russia and Ukraine have experienced some of the most dramatic increases in spending as measured by percentage of annual GDP. For example, Lithuania state budget guidelines foresee spending of at least 3 percent through 2025 and Poland is reaching approximately 4 percent of GDP in 2024 and projected to reach 5 percent in 2025.¹⁶⁴

Figure 3.2. Number of European NATO Members Meeting the 2 Percent Pledge



SOURCE: Adapted from NATO, 2022c.
NOTE: Numbers for 2024 are estimates.

The shift in European defense spending has been accompanied by a new sense of urgency to rebuild defense capabilities, foster collective resilience, and promote European cooperation and integration on defense and security. At the Versailles Summit in March 2022, European leaders

¹⁶² European Defence Agency, *Defence Data 2022: Key Findings and Analysis*, 2023b, p. 5.

¹⁶³ Tamsin Paternoster, "Military Spending in Western and Central Europe Higher Than End of Cold War, Data Shows," Euronews, April 22, 2024.

¹⁶⁴ "Poland to Spend 5% of GDP on Defence in 2025, Says Foreign Minister," Reuters, July 13, 2024; "Lithuania Pledges to Spend at Least 3% of GDP on Defence," Reuters, March 21, 2024.

declared their intent to collectively rearm; reduce European defense, energy, and other resource dependencies; and increase the bloc's ability to act autonomously.¹⁶⁵ Although the Versailles Declaration affirmed that NATO "remains the foundation of collective defence for its members," it also charted a program to build "[a] stronger and more capable EU in the field of security and defence [that] will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security."¹⁶⁶ Toward this end, member states agreed to the following broad portfolio of activities:

- Increase defense expenditures "substantially" and develop capabilities within the EU "in a collaborative way."
- Develop incentives for collaborative investments in joint projects and joint procurement of defense capabilities.
- Strengthen the European defense industrial and technological base.
- Accelerate ongoing efforts to enhance military mobility.
- Phase out European dependency on Russian gas, oil, and coal imports.¹⁶⁷

That month, the Council of the European Union adopted the *Strategic Compass*, a joint strategy to strengthen the bloc's defense and security policy that had been under negotiation since 2019.¹⁶⁸ Quickly rewritten to account for the conflict, the final *Strategic Compass* omits earlier suggestions for selective engagement with Russia and instead echoes the Versailles Declaration in noting that a "more hostile security environment requires us to make a quantum leap forward and increase our capacity and willingness to act, strengthen our resilience and ensure solidarity and mutual assistance."¹⁶⁹ Although some member states, in particular France, had previously pushed for the document to outline the EU's global role, the final text refocuses attention on the continent and, in particular, its eastern flank.¹⁷⁰

To realize this ambition, the EU has adopted a more assertive stance in leveraging existing regulatory and budgetary powers to support defense objectives. This shift is exemplified in the EU's adaption of the EPF, an off-budget instrument for financing offshore military activities and assistance to EU partners originally designed to support African and African Union peace support operations.¹⁷¹ Within days of the invasion, EU ministers voted to reverse the existing "everything-but-arms" policy and use EFP funds to reimburse member states that supplied Ukraine with lethal military

¹⁶⁵ European Council, *Versailles Declaration*, March 11, 2022b.

¹⁶⁶ European Council, 2022b. For a similar statement affirming the EU's complementarity to NATO, see Council of the European Union, "A Strategic Compass for a Stronger EU Security and Defence in the Next Decade," press release, March 21, 2022d.

¹⁶⁷ European Council, 2022b.

¹⁶⁸ Council of the European Union, 2022e.

¹⁶⁹ For a discussion of the draft *Strategic Compass*' revision, see Nicole Koenig, *Putin's War and the Strategic Compass: A Quantum Leap for the EU's Security and Defence Policy?* Jacques Delors Centre, Hertie School, April 29, 2022, p. 2.

¹⁷⁰ Koenig, 2022, p. 2; Council of the European Union, 2022e, p. 9.

¹⁷¹ Daniel Fiott, "In Every Crisis an Opportunity? European Union Integration in Defence and the War on Ukraine," *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2023, p. 451.

assistance.¹⁷² In a similar effort to adapt existing mechanisms for new operational requirements, the EU has used EFP funding to establish its European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM). Built using frameworks developed for counterterrorism training missions in African countries, EUMAM is the EU's first-ever program to provide military training for the purpose of territorial defense.¹⁷³ (Notably, a similar proposal to train Ukrainian forces in 2014 had failed to secure sufficient EU member support).¹⁷⁴ Statements by EU officials underline that Brussels is seeking to expand its defense capabilities. "Europeans have been debating how to make the EU more security-conscious, with a unity of purpose and capabilities to pursue its political goals on the world stage," then–High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission Josep Borrell Fontelles wrote in March 2022, noting "[w]e have now arguably gone further down that path in the past weeks [since Russia's full-scale invasion] than we did in the past decade."¹⁷⁵

Likewise, the EU has taken a more active stance toward directing European defense research, development, production, and procurement. Under the EU's first-ever defense industrial strategy, the European Commission is seeking to incentivize member countries to collaborate and to buy European, setting the ambitious goal that at least 50 percent of member states' procurement budgets by 2030 (and 60 percent by 2035) will go to EU-based suppliers.¹⁷⁶ As member states' assistance to Ukraine has grown, and as European ammunition and equipment stocks have decreased, the EU has launched new initiatives to facilitate common procurement and incentivize member states to invest in long-term improvements in production capability, capacity, and resilience. In July 2022, the Commission put forward a proposal for a new regulation establishing the European Defence Industry Reinforcement Through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA), which the European Parliament and Council adopted in September and October that year and entered into force on October 27, 2023.¹⁷⁷ Described by one analyst as a "test balloon," EDIRPA represents an EU effort to use financial incentives to help fill capability gaps revealed by the war while encouraging joint procurement and promoting integration of the European defense industry.¹⁷⁸ Similarly, European difficulties in meeting Ukrainian requests for ammunition generated support for what became, in March 2023, the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), an EU regulation "[a]imed at enabling ramp-up of ammunition production capacity across Europe."¹⁷⁹

¹⁷² Council of the European Union, *Council Decision (CFSP) 2022/338 of 28 February 2022 on an Assistance Measure Under the European Peace Facility for the Supply to the Ukrainian Armed Forces of Military Equipment, and Platforms, Designed to Deliver Lethal Force*, February 28, 2022c.

¹⁷³ Elisabeth Johansson-Nogués and Francesca Leso, "Geopolitical EU? The EU's Wartime Assistance to Ukraine," *Journal of Common Market Studies*, April 17, 2024, p. 8.

¹⁷⁴ As cited in footnote 7 in Johansson-Nogués and Leso, 2024, p. 134.

¹⁷⁵ EEAS, "Europe in the Interregnum: Our Geopolitical Awakening After Ukraine," March 24, 2022.

¹⁷⁶ Sophia Besch, "Understanding the EU's New Defense Industrial Strategy," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 8, 2024.

¹⁷⁷ Sebastian Clapp, *European Defence Industry Reinforcement Through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA)*, European Parliamentary Research Service, PE 739.294, November 2023.

¹⁷⁸ Sophia Besch, "EU Defense and the War in Ukraine," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 21, 2022.

¹⁷⁹ European Commission, "ASAP: Boosting Defence Production," webpage, undated-a.

At the moment, both EDIRPA and ASAP are short-term funds, and analysts have suggested that their budgets are insufficient to close existing capability gaps on their own.¹⁸⁰ Yet these criticisms should not detract from the fact that the initiatives themselves demonstrate how far member states' attitudes toward Commission involvement in defense policy have shifted since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. Whereas prior EU attempts to coordinate members' DIB policies were derailed by allegations of institutional "overreach," Brussels' efforts to boost domestic production and encourage joint procurement now enjoy widespread support among member states.¹⁸¹ Even after the 2014 Crimea crisis, countries like Poland, Estonia, and Finland remained skeptical of EU defense procurement initiatives, which they alleged would benefit large defense firms concentrated in France, Germany, or Italy at their own, smaller defense sectors' expense.¹⁸² Yet since 2022, these same countries have called on the EU to play a larger role in joint military procurement and defense industry collaboration; even traditionally frugal states like Finland and Estonia went so far as to back financing proposals that would require issuing common debt.¹⁸³ A similar transformation is apparent in Italy, where Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and her governing coalition, once considered Euroskeptics, have emerged as vocal advocates for the EU to establish a strong common defense policy and pursue novel financing solutions to support its new defense initiatives.¹⁸⁴ "With these initiatives," one European analyst suggests, "the EU, conceived initially as a peace project, and technically forbidden to directly procure or deliver defense equipment, is breaking internal taboos and pursuing a new, creative approach to defense policy."¹⁸⁵

Yet the EU's defense policies are dependent on the consent of its member states, which remain divided over the benefits of delegating additional authorities to EU institutions and of expanding the EU's role in providing for collective security more generally. On the one hand, Europeans have demonstrated a new unity and commitment to rebuilding European defense capacity, and they have reached for EU tools to collectively tackle production and procurement challenges. On the other hand, the war has demonstrated that the EU is unready to mount a strong military response when external threats arise and is dependent on NATO and members' national capabilities to provide for the protection of its citizens.¹⁸⁶ Even then, European militaries lack the requisite command and control, strategic lift, sustainment, and other enabling capabilities required to project power and maintain

¹⁸⁰ Ester Sabatino, "EU's Grand Defence Industrial Plans Risks Fizzling for Lack of Money and Unclear Procedures," *International Institute of Strategic Studies*, March 18, 2024.

¹⁸¹ Aurélie Pugnet, "EU Defence Funding Plan Faces Uncertainty Ahead of Summit," *Euractiv*, June 25, 2024; Aurélie Pugnet, "EU Countries Team Up to Cancel Bloc's Ammunition Production Boost Plan," *Euractiv*, June 14, 2023; Sabatino, 2024.

¹⁸² Besch, 2022. Indeed, larger member states like Germany, France, Italy, and Spain "have been more successful than smaller ones in securing particularly large amounts of [EU] funding, and the largest ones have also participated in multiple consortia over time" (Francesco Giumelli and Marlene Marx, "The European Defence Fund Precursor Programmes and the State of the European Market for Defence," *Defence Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2023).

¹⁸³ Ben Hall and Richard Milne, "Hawkish Macron Finds Favour in NATO's Frontline States," *Financial Times*, March 30, 2024.

¹⁸⁴ Leonard, 2024, p. 269. See, for example, Donato Paolo Mancini, "Italy's Meloni Backs EU Bonds to Finance Defense Investments," *Bloomberg*, June 26, 2024.

¹⁸⁵ Besch, 2022.

¹⁸⁶ Jolyon Howorth, "The EU's Chair Was Missing at the Ukraine Table," *European View*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2022; Mitchell A. Orenstein, "The European Union's Transformation After Russia's Attack on Ukraine," *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 45, No. 3, 2023, p. 335.

operations over time—let alone to lead and conduct large-scale multinational operations without the United States.¹⁸⁷ The UK's withdrawal from the EU has exacerbated these shortfalls, although the country has pursued greater defense cooperation with the Union since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war.¹⁸⁸ European difficulties in equipping Ukrainian armed forces while rebuilding their own stockpiles have underlined the depth of existing production and capability shortfalls, raising doubts about whether even the historic increase in defense spending since 2022 is sufficient to overcome these gaps and meet new capability goals.¹⁸⁹ Even as they have generally supported EU efforts to promote defense cooperation, some frontline states in Northern and Eastern Europe have continued to express concern that EU initiatives could alienate the United States or undermine concurrent efforts to strengthen NATO.¹⁹⁰ Indeed, Washington has raised concerns about perceived EU defense protectionism and calls on Brussels to ensure EU efforts are “complementary to and interoperable with NATO.”¹⁹¹

Moreover, meeting the EU's ambitious objectives to increase member states' investment in European producers presents unwelcome challenges for its member states most concerned about the Russian threat. The EU's emphasis on building and buying European-origin systems requires member states to spend their funds on long-term capacity improvements rather than acquiring foreign-origin (often U.S.) systems that are either already available or are perceived as likely to deliver more quickly. And indeed, one study based on Stockholm International Peace Research Institute data has suggested that the war in Ukraine has increased member states' reliance on non-EU suppliers that either can provide off-the-shelf solutions or are perceived as faster and more predictable than European producers.¹⁹² Between February 2022 and June 2023, more than three-quarters of EU member state acquisitions were purchased outside the EU, with U.S. equipment representing 63 percent of

¹⁸⁷ Colin Wall and John Christianson, *Europe's Missing Piece: The Case for Air Domain Enablers*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 2023; Ben Barry, Henry Boyd, Bastian Giegerich, Michael Gjerstad, James Hackett, Yohann Michel, Ben Schreer, and Michael Tong, *The Future of NATO's European Land Forces: Plans, Challenges, Prospects*, International Institute of Strategic Studies, June 2023; Sean Monaghan, Eskil Jakobsen, Sissy Martinez, Mathieu Droin, Greg Sanders, Nicholas Velazquez, Cynthia Cook, Anna Dowd, and Maeve Sockwell, *Is NATO Ready for War? An Assessment of Allies' Efforts to Strengthen Defense and Deterrence Since the 2022 Madrid Summit*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 2024. The EU has recognized many of these shortfalls; see European Defence Agency, *The 2023 EU Capability Development Priorities*, 2023a.

¹⁸⁸ Luigi Scazzieri, *EU-UK Co-Operation in Defence Capabilities After the War in Ukraine*, Centre for European Reform and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, June 2023.

¹⁸⁹ See, for example, Aleksandar Djokic, “Europe's Defence Dilemma: How Much More Money Needs to be Spent?” Euronews, April 17, 2024; Daniel Michaels, “Europe Is Boosting Military Spending. It's Still Not Enough,” *Wall Street Journal*, February 14, 2024; John Paul Rathbone, “European Defence Spending ‘Lacks Urgency,’” *Financial Times*, February 13, 2024; Sarah White, “Dassault Chief Warns Europe's Defence Industry Will Take Decades to Build,” *Financial Times*, March 6, 2024.

¹⁹⁰ See, for example, “Poland's Foreign-Policy Priorities in the East and in the EU,” *Strategic Comments*, Vol. 29, No. 3, May 2023; Republic of Estonia Government, *Estonia's European Union Policy Priorities 2023–2025*, 2023.

¹⁹¹ White House, “U.S.-EU Summit Joint Statement,” October 20, 2023b. These conditions echo similar concerns raised following the creation of PESCO. See Alexandra Brzozowski, “Question Marks over Third Country Participation in EU Military Projects,” Euractiv, November 8, 2019b.

¹⁹² Anicetti, 2024, p. 451.

purchases.¹⁹³ Countries like Poland, Czechia, and the Baltic states have stressed the importance of building capability quickly over developing long-term continental production capacity.¹⁹⁴

Given these limitations, there has been a marked shift in discussions of European autonomy; these discussions have shifted away from creating European alternatives and instead moved toward building “a more European NATO in Europe,” as then–Finnish President Sauli Niinistö stated in a national address.¹⁹⁵ “I am convinced that greater European strategic responsibility is the best way to reinforce transatlantic solidarity,” explained Vice President Fontelles, “It is not either EU or NATO: It is both EU and NATO.”¹⁹⁶ In adopting the *Strategic Compass*, the European Council sidestepped the debate over strategic autonomy by committing to both “reinforce” cooperation with NATO and “boost” partnerships with the United States and other like-minded nations while recognizing that “wider geopolitical trends call for the EU to shoulder a greater share of responsibility for its own security.”¹⁹⁷ Although the strategy aims to “make the EU a stronger and more capable security provider” and proposed the creation of a new EU Rapid Deployment Capability for rescue, evacuation, and the “initial phase of stabilization operations,” it does not provide clear guidance on when or how the EU could conduct military operations independently and does not provide additional guidance on implementing the EU’s mutual defense assistance clause.¹⁹⁸ EU statements and documents published since 2022 have similarly stressed the importance of developing complementary capabilities and policies with NATO, as well as continued cooperation with the United States.¹⁹⁹

Compared with its prewar rhetoric, even France has moderated its criticism of NATO and reframed EU security initiatives as complements, rather than alternatives, to the transatlantic alliance. For Paris, the war has dispelled hopes of establishing a *modus vivendi* with Moscow and reinforced the importance of fostering European strategic autonomy to deter, rather than pursue, limited cooperation with Russia.²⁰⁰ In March 2022, President Macron declared the invasion of Ukraine the “start of a new era” necessitating a “renewed European effort to reduce its dependence on other continents and to be able to decide for itself.”²⁰¹ That October, France took a symbolic step toward realizing its vision for a pan-European security framework when 44 regional leaders, including both non-EU and non-NATO states, gathered for the first meeting of the European Political Community.²⁰² Yet, as the war in Ukraine has continued, French officials have adopted a new stance

¹⁹³ Besch, 2024.

¹⁹⁴ Anicetti, 2024, p. 444.

¹⁹⁵ Sauli Niinistö, “New Year’s Speech,” transcript, President of the Republic of Finland, January 1, 2024. For similar statements by a former Secretary General of the European Parliament, see Klaus Welle, Secretary General, European Parliament, transcript of interview with Alfredo Marini, Wilfried Martin Centre for European Studies, November 22, 2023.

¹⁹⁶ EEAS, 2022.

¹⁹⁷ Council of the European Union, 2022e, p. 4.

¹⁹⁸ Council of the European Union, 2022d; Koenig, 2022, p. 5.

¹⁹⁹ See, for example Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, signed at Brussels, Belgium, January 10, 2023.

²⁰⁰ David Cadier, “France and Central Europe Are Converging on Security,” Carnegie Europe, February 27, 2024.

²⁰¹ Emmanuel Macron, “Address to the Nation,” transcript of address, Élysée, March 2, 2022.

²⁰² Laurence Norman, “European Leaders Hold Summit to Test Out a Larger Political Community,” *Wall Street Journal*, October 6, 2022.

that stresses the importance of strengthening NATO by promoting greater unity of effort with the EU.²⁰³

Moreover, European members have dedicated new political attention and resources to realizing NATO's collective security aims. In what NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg described as amounting to "the biggest overhaul [of] our collective defense since the end of the Cold War," allies agreed at the June 2022 Madrid Summit to approve a new strategic concept and accelerate implementation of DDA by building more forward-deployed combat formations, increasing the readiness of NATO and national forces, and prepositioning more equipment, among other initiatives (see Table 3.2).²⁰⁴ Concurrently, NATO's new strategic concept has sought to reassert forward defense as the primary organizing principle for the alliance's defense strategy, posture, and planning, a point underlined by NATO officials' repeated statements that the Alliance will defend "every inch" of its territory.²⁰⁵ In 2023, allies continued the momentum by approving a new family of strategic, regional, and domain deterrence and defense plans and recharacterizing the 2 percent standard as a "minimum" target.²⁰⁶ As prior RAND analysis has noted, the regional plans "change NATO's approach from forward presence to forward defense," in a step toward realizing the Alliance's pledge to "protect every inch of NATO territory."²⁰⁷

European member support has enabled NATO to reassert its status as the continent's preeminent security framework. Since 2022, allies have certified the combat readiness of eight forward-deployed battlegroups, strengthened existing air and sea missions, and begun to realize their commitment to exercise emerging capabilities by convening Steadfast Defender, the largest NATO military exercise since the end of the Cold War.²⁰⁸

Yet implementing the new regional plans and realizing the Alliance's other ambitions may take years, if not decades. Delivering DDA objectives requires revising SACEUR's authorities to activate and deploy NATO forces precrisis. Although SACEUR can now initiate "enhanced vigilance activities" in the context of heightened tensions, reaching further agreement on whether and how to revise existing crisis authorities and transfer of authority protocols will likely require protracted negotiations to overcome allies' differing national preferences and risk tolerances.²⁰⁹ Although Finland

²⁰³ See, for example, Maïa De La Baume and Pauline De Saint Remy, "War in Ukraine Is 'Electroshock' for NATO, Says Emmanuel Macron," *Politico*, March 17, 2022; Ministère de L'Europe et des Affaires Étrangères, "EU-NATO—France Welcomes the Strengthening of EU-NATO Ties," January 11, 2023; Cadier, 2024.

²⁰⁴ Jens Stoltenberg, transcript of doorstep statement delivered at 2022 NATO Summit, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, June 29, 2022b; NATO, "Madrid Summit Declaration," press release, June 29, 2022.

²⁰⁵ NATO "Madrid Summit Declaration Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Madrid 29 June 2022," press release, June 29, 2022, updated July 22, 2022j; NATO, "Vilnius Summit Communiqué Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Vilnius 11 July 2023," press release, July 11, 2023; NATO, 2024g.

²⁰⁶ NATO, 2023.

²⁰⁷ Marta Kepe, "From Forward Presence to Forward Defense: NATO's Defense of the Baltics," *RAND Blog*, February 14, 2024.

²⁰⁸ Monaghan et al., 2024.

²⁰⁹ David A. Ochmanek, Anna M. Dowd, Stephen J. Flanagan, Andrew R. Hoehn, Jeffrey W. Hornung, Michael J. Lostumbo, and Michael J. Mazarr, *Inflection Point: How to Reverse the Erosion of U.S. and Allied Military Power and Influence*, RAND Corporation, RR-A2555-1, 2023, p. 154.

and Sweden have a long history of military cooperation with the Alliance and were assessed to be more interoperable with NATO than some existing members, it will take time to fully integrate the new members into the alliance.²¹⁰

Table 3.2. Timeline of Major NATO Enhancements, 2022–2024

Date	Initiative
February 2022	• NATO Response Force activated for the first time. • Highest-readiness element began deployment to Romania.
March 2022	• Allies announced plans to establish four additional enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) multinational battlegroups in Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria to “reinforce Allied deterrence and defense.”
May 2022	• The first of NATO’s new eFPs were established in Romania. • Finland and Sweden submitted applications to join NATO.
June 2022	• Allies agreed to transition to a New NATO Force Model composed of three tiers of forces held at graduated readiness, ranging from 10 to 180 days, to well over 300,000 personnel; to scale up existing multinational battlegroups to brigade-sized formations; and to pre-position military equipment, stockpiles, and facilities in frontline countries. • A new strategic concept was adopted.
October 2022	• Allies established a Resilience Committee, a senior advisory body responsible for establishing strategy, policy, planning guidance, and coordination of national and NATO resilience and civilian preparedness initiatives. It reports directly to the NAC.
February 2023	• A new initiative to strengthen space-based surveillance and intelligence for the Alliance was announced.
April 2023	• Finland became the Alliance’s 31st member upon depositing its instrument of accession to the North Atlantic Treaty with the U.S. Mission in Brussels.
June 2023	• 25 allied and partner countries concluded exercise Air Defender 2023, the largest multinational air force deployment in NATO history.
July 2023	• Allies approved the first comprehensive NATO defense plans since the end of the Cold War. • The Allied Reaction Force was established. • Improvements to NATO’s Integrated Air and Missile Defence posture were announced. • The headquarters of Multinational Division North in Ādaži, Latvia, declared full operational capability.
September 2023	• NATO Rapid Deployable Corps Italy was selected as the Allied Reaction Force’s interim headquarters.
October 2023	• Multinational Battle Group Slovakia was awarded combat-ready status.
January 2024	• Steadfast Defender 2024, a five-month exercise involving 90,000 forces from all 32 allied nations, began; it marked NATO’s largest exercise since the Cold War.
March 2024	• Sweden became the Alliance’s 32nd member upon depositing its instrument of accession to the North Atlantic Treaty with the U.S. government in Washington, D.C. • Headquarters Multinational Division Northeast in Elbląg, Poland, declared full

²¹⁰ Nicholas Fiorenza and Andrew MacDonald, “Milestone: Sweden Joins NATO,” *Janes*, March 19, 2024.

Date	Initiative
	operational capability.
May 2024	- The Latvian Military Base at Lielvārde was activated as the third NATO base to host allied fighter detachments conducting the Baltic Air Policing mission. - The newly established Maritime Centre for Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure reached initial operational capability.
July 2024	- Allies agreed to an Industrial Capacity Expansion Pledge to strengthen transatlantic defense industrial cooperation and restock arsenals amid continued Ukrainian need. - NATO announced plans to establish NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) to plan, coordinate, and arrange delivery of security assistance. - Allied Air Command declared a new U.S. ballistic missile defense site in Poland, dubbed “Aegis Ashore,” operational. - A new Allied Reaction Force stood up to replace the NATO Response Force and provide the SACEUR with all-domain rapidly deployable forces.

SOURCES: Features information from Monaghan et al., 2024; Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe Public Affairs Office, “NATO Allies Send Reinforcements to the Eastern Flank,” Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, March 13, 2022; Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe Public Affairs Office, “NATO Allies Complete Largest Multinational Air Force Deployment in NATO History,” Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, June 27, 2023; Tod D. Wolters, transcript of statement on the activation of the NATO Response Force, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, February 25, 2022; Allied Air Command Public Affairs Office, “Latvian Air Base Becomes Third NATO Air Policing Base in the Baltic Sea Region,” Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, March 2, 2024; NATO, “Allied Leaders Adopt New NATO Defence Industrial Pledge,” July 10, 2024, updated July 11, 2024e; NATO, “NATO Missile Defence Base in Poland Now Mission Ready,” July 10, 2024d; Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe Public Affairs Office, “Stand Up of Allied Reaction Force Marks a New Era for NATO,” Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, July 1, 2024.

The more substantial challenge facing allies, however, remains how to translate new political commitment into lasting improvements in allied force structure and capabilities. Prior research has found that NATO capability gaps extend across domains and include shortfalls in naval forces, air enablers, air defense, and “battle-decisive ammunition.”²¹¹ Although the creation of eight reinforced battalions represents a sizable improvement over prewar baselines, the achievement pales in comparison with the NATO force model’s objective of establishing 100 land brigades, 1,400 combat aircraft, and 250 large surface ships and submarines at high readiness.²¹²

Germany’s challenges are illustrative of the barriers European countries will need to surmount to meet national, EU, or NATO capability objectives. For Germany to continue meeting the 2 percent threshold, for example, Berlin will need to either create a new special fund or increase the annual defense budget—projected to be €52 billion in 2024—by an estimated €20–35 billion, a prospect that would in turn likely require revising the country’s constitutional limit on defense expenditures.²¹³ Under pressure to fund other priorities, including the net zero energy transition, and constrained by Germany’s constitutional debt limit for defense expenditures, German political leaders are divided

²¹¹ Monaghan et al., 2024; Barry et al., 2023.

²¹² Wojciech Lorenz, “NATO Regional Defence Plans Key to Credibility of Deterrence,” Polish Institute of International Affairs, September 26, 2023.

²¹³ Wieder, 2024; Jana Puglierin, “Turning Point or Turning Back: German Defence Policy After Zeitenwende,” European Council on Foreign Relations, March 19, 2024.

over how to replace the current fund. The decision will likely be postponed until after the 2025 election.²¹⁴

Even if a budget solution is reached, German military leaders and parliamentarians caution that the Bundeswehr is unlikely to meet the initial goal of ensuring the military's combat readiness by decade's end.²¹⁵ Although nearly 70 percent of the special fund has already been allocated, the majority of orders will not be delivered until the late 2020s.²¹⁶ Even then, German defense analysts estimate that the majority of current spending will cover fixed costs, with an additional €100 billion of spending required by 2028 to address major inventory shortfalls.²¹⁷ Then there remains the problem of manning an expanded force. In 2023, the Bundeswehr *shrunk* as retirements and resignations outpaced recruitment efforts.²¹⁸ After a more ambitious plan to reestablish compulsory service encountered opposition from military leaders and left-leaning elements of the governing coalition, German officials announced in 2024 the country would soon reintroduce a "selective form of military service based on a voluntary principle but containing obligatory elements if necessary."²¹⁹

Governments across Europe are confronting similar challenges. Despite increased defense spending, Czechia, France, Italy, Romania, the UK, and other countries have missed recruiting targets since 2022 and seen the overall size of their militaries shrink, continuing a trend begun before 2013.²²⁰ In an effort to recruit more forces and boost retention, they have offered new retention and conscription incentives that increase overall personnel costs and could divert resources from other readiness and modernization initiatives.²²¹ To address their force deficit, other countries like the Netherlands and Denmark are considering easing standards or implementing new forms of conscription.²²² Poland, which expects to meet its recruitment goals for 2024 early as it seeks to effectively double the size of the land forces, may be an exception, although the extent of its planned growth and modernization in and of themselves poses an array of challenges.²²³

European capitals also continue to disagree over the best way to implement proposals to increase cooperation and bolster European defenses. France's advocacy of an increasingly assertive policy

²¹⁴ Sabine Siebold and Maria Martinez, "Infighting over Budget Imperils Germany's Defence Upgrade," Reuters, June 10, 2024.

²¹⁵ Siebold and Martinez, 2024.

²¹⁶ Wieder, 2024.

²¹⁷ Siebold and Martinez, 2024.

²¹⁸ Laura Kayali and Joshua Posaner, "Europe's Soldiers Keep Quitting, Just When NATO Needs Them," Politico, March 18, 2024.

²¹⁹ Guy Chazan and Sam Jones, "Germany to Launch Limited Military Service in Push to Be 'War Ready,'" *Financial Times*, June 12, 2024.

²²⁰ Sam Jones and John Paul Rathbone, "Wanted: New Soldiers for Europe's Shrinking Armies," *Financial Times*, June 25, 2024.

²²¹ Kayali and Posaner, 2024; Michael Kahn, "Eastern Europe's Armies Struggle to Enlist Young People with War Not Far Away," Reuters, August 9, 2024.

²²² Jones and Rathbone, 2024.

²²³ In July 2024, the Polish government raised recruitment limits for 2024 to 44,550 because it expected to meet an original 34,550 target by the end of the third quarter of the year (Wojciech Kubik, "Wiecej Polaków pójdzie w kamasze. MON szykuje zmianę przepisów," *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, May 31, 2024; Rada Ministrów, *Rozporządzenie Rady Ministrów z dnia 17 lipca 2024 r. zmieniające rozporządzenie w sprawie określenia liczby osób, które w 2024 r. mogą być powołane do czynnej służby wojskowej, oraz liczby osób, które mogą pełnić służbę wojskową w rezerwie w ramach odbywania ćwiczeń wojskowych*, Sejm of the Republic of Poland, July 23, 2024). For discussion of challenges, see Robert Czulda, *Poland's Military Modernisation—Still Many Challenges Ahead*, Casimir Pulaski Foundation, March 6, 2023.

toward Russia has brought the country closer with Poland and other Eastern European states, even as it has placed the country out of step with Germany's priority of averting further escalation. French and German leaders have traded barbs over the adequacy of the other's military support and the prospect of committing ground forces to Ukraine.²²⁴ France, on one side, and Germany, Poland, and the Baltics on the other have also publicly quarreled over the extent to which European countries should prioritize investments in the European DIB over the speed of procurement, with France disapproving of decisions to procure U.S., Israel-, and South Korea-origin equipment.²²⁵

In contrast to the period 2014–2022, Southern European countries generally have accepted, even supported, efforts to prioritize the Russian threat to the EU and NATO. Yet as the war in Ukraine has continued, some member states have begun to raise concerns that the EU's Southern neighborhood could become underfunded, and they have pushed for reassurances that frameworks like the EPF will be used "in a manner that preserves the global geographical scope of the Facility."²²⁶

Concerns about the United States' long-term commitments to Europe remain high, driven both by evidence of protectionist movements within the United States and European countries' heightened awareness of their dependence on U.S. security contributions. European leaders reacted strongly to a statement by then-U.S. President Donald Trump claiming that he would, if re-elected, "encourage" Russia to do "whatever the hell they want" to any NATO members who did not spend enough on defense.²²⁷ Likewise, delays in funding for U.S. military assistance to Ukraine have raised concerns that congressional opponents could restrict any future president's ability to deliver on security obligations.²²⁸ At the fourth summit of the European Political Community in July 2024, UK and EU leaders from across the continent "discussed how Europe can muster the unity and military muscle to check Russian aggression and keep Ukraine afloat" should the United States reduce its role on the continent.²²⁹

Conclusion

In her State of the Union address in September 2023, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen declared that the world had "seen the birth of a geopolitical Union – supporting Ukraine, standing up to Russia's aggression, responding to an assertive China and investing in partnerships."²³⁰ Indeed, the Russia-Ukraine war has created a new consensus among European

²²⁴ Philippe Ricard and Thomas Wieder, "On Ukraine, France and Germany Can't Agree to Speak with One Voice," *Le Monde*, March 11, 2024.

²²⁵ Besch, 2022.

²²⁶ Łukasz Maślanka, "An EU War Chest: The Success and Uncertain Future of the European Peace Facility," Centre For Eastern Studies [Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich], July 10, 2023.

²²⁷ Kate Sullivan, "Trump Says He Would Encourage Russia to 'Do Whatever the Hell They Want' to Any NATO Country That Doesn't Pay Enough," CNN, February 11, 2024; "Trump's NATO Remarks Met with Biden, EU Backlash," *Deutsche Welle*, February 11, 2024.

²²⁸ Giovanna De Maio and Céilia Belin, "Europe's America Problem," *Foreign Affairs*, August 23, 2024; Jill Lawless, "European Leaders Discuss Ukraine, Concerns About Direction of U.S. at U.K. Summit," PBS News, July 18, 2024.

²²⁹ Laurence Norman and Max Colchester, "Prospect of Trump's Return Hangs over European Security Summit," *Wall Street Journal*, July 18, 2024.

²³⁰ Ursula von der Leyen, "2023 State of the Union Address," September 13, 2023.

countries over the need to rebuild European defenses and cooperate in strengthening collective defense capabilities and institutions. The war has highlighted the scale of existing capability gaps and spurred sustained increases in European spending on a scale not observed since the end of the Cold War. Europe's awakening has created an opportunity for the EU to assert greater influence and leverage its regulatory powers to shape European defense cooperation, particularly by creating incentives for joint production and procurement.

Table 3.3 summarizes several novel elements of the European response to the war and compares them with a preconflict baseline. The war has not spurred the development of new defense concepts or the creation of an alternative architecture for the defense of Europe. Likewise, even as Europeans have affirmed the need to build resilience and develop greater indigenous capacity, no unifying vision to achieve greater strategic autonomy has emerged. Europeans remain divided over the extent to which they should pursue defense policies independently of the United States, even as they agree that U.S. commitments cannot be assumed indefinitely. In practice, however, a general awareness that even the largest and most capable European militaries likely will continue to struggle to respond to external challenges without significant U.S. assistance has contributed to a general reticence to investment in defense policies that could be perceived as supplanting NATO prerogatives or that might alienate Washington. The EU has relied primarily on existing frameworks, institutions, and funding mechanisms, in part because member states have coalesced around the idea that the EU should seek to complement NATO-led defense initiatives. As a result, any European movement to pursue operational or strategic autonomy from the United States is likely to be limited.

Table 3.3. Summary of Trends in European Autonomy Concepts and Policies

	2014–2021	2022–August 2024
Declared stance	• The EU recognized the need to improve its ability to “act autonomously.” • European NATO members pledged greater responsibility sharing. • France’s push to de-emphasize NATO gained little support.	• The EU declared Russia a “long-term and direct threat.” • The NATO Strategic Concept identified Russia as “the most significant and direct threat.”
Policies and resources	• NATO issued new authorities and strategic concepts, but low spending limited capability gains. • EU attention waned after the 2014–2017 push to improve defense production and cooperation.	• Defense spending has surpassed projections. • Divisions occurred over whether to prioritize procurement speed or indigenous production. • The EU asserted a greater role in coordinating national defense policy but has not enacted structural reforms.

SOURCE: Features information from Council of the European Union, 2022e; NATO, 2022d.

These limitations should not, however, obscure the significance of changes in European defense policy since 2022. Driven by change in attitudes toward Russia, fears of the prospect of an expansion of the war in Ukraine or future Russian recidivism, as well as the realization of the scale and severity of

European defense shortfalls, European capitals have mobilized to enact historic increases in defense spending and begin constructing the policies, institutions, and funding mechanisms required to sustain their rearmament, promote integration and cooperation, and advance the capabilities required to mount a collective defense.

Will Europe Accelerate Ukraine's Integration?

The war in Ukraine has compelled European countries to reconsider the region's boundaries and its relations with former Soviet republics like Ukraine that have not been fully integrated into the political or security architecture. Whereas Ukrainian attitudes toward the EU and NATO have fluctuated since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia's full-scale invasion has decisively shifted the country in a pro-European and pro-Western direction. Since 2022, Ukrainian leaders have sought to reaffirm Ukraine's European identity and pushed for rapid accession into the EU and NATO.²³¹ At the same time, the conflict has dramatically underscored Russia's opposition to Ukraine's integration and elevated the stakes of any European decision.

Has the war changed European attitudes toward Ukraine's place within the European security architecture? In this chapter, we examine the war's consequences for Ukraine's relations with the EU and NATO and assess the implications for the country's integration into the existing European security architecture. Although other institutions like the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe exercise significant influence over the regional order, the EU and NATO remain the two foremost organizations responsible for managing collective economic, political, and security issues. Since their formation, the EU and NATO have operated as drivers of Europe's continued economic, social, and military integration and, after 1991, re-integration. By extension, examining their changing relations with Ukraine can provide insight into European attitudes on how best to promote stability and security in the broader region.

Prewar Positions

Deliberations over Ukraine's integration into European institutions well preceded the current conflict. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the reunification of Germany, the European community embarked, in concert with the United States, on a program to reform and enlarge the EU and NATO. Through political, economic, and, in the case of NATO, military integration, the United States and its European allies sought to encourage post-communist states to implement democratic and economic reforms that might foster stability and growth along Europe's eastern flank.²³² During the 1990s, the EU enacted treaty, budgetary, and policy reforms to prepare for

²³¹ See, for example, "Ukraine's Zelenskiy Issues Fresh Plea for Patriots, EU Accession, NATO Entry," Reuters, April 28, 2024.

²³² An assessment of whether NATO and EU enlargement contributed to the current conflict is beyond the scope of this study.

enlargement and, in 2004, welcomed ten new Central, Eastern, and Southern European members.²³³ Concurrently, NATO underwent two waves of enlargement and established the Membership Action Plan (MAP), a mechanism to help aspiring members prepare for admission without prejudging their eligibility or committing to their accession.²³⁴

With their expansion eastward and southward, the EU and NATO gained new neighbors and confronted new questions about how to engage post-Soviet states like Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova that Russia considered part of its historical zone of influence.²³⁵ In July 1994, Ukraine became the first former Soviet republic to sign a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU, which established an institutional framework for the relationship that included regular ministerial-level meetings, parliamentary exchanges, and working-level committees tasked with issues spanning from nuclear nonproliferation to legal reforms and economic development.²³⁶ Although Ukrainian popular support for NATO and EU accession remained mixed, the Ukrainian government in 1996 declared its intent to pursue full membership in the EU and began to explore legislative reforms required to align with EU standards.²³⁷

Despite Ukrainian overtures, EU officials and member states harbored reservations about bringing Ukraine into the bloc. In 1999, the EU upgraded its relations with Ukraine by publishing a Common Strategy to strengthen the “strategic partnership” and define prerequisites for “Ukraine’s successful integration into the European economy [that] will also help Ukraine assert its European identity.”²³⁸ Yet Ukraine’s democratic regression over the late 1990s and early 2000s raised concerns that the country was unready to implement the political and economic reforms required to meet the formal criteria for membership. Some members also worried that the large, populous, but relatively poor country would absorb a significant portion of the EU’s development funds, diverting resources from other members and restricting funding for other priorities.²³⁹ As part of a broader program to stabilize neighboring countries and stave off crises that might spill over its borders, the EU continued to encourage reforms that might help Ukraine and other former Soviet countries Georgia and Moldova evolve into credible candidates for membership. It settled on a policy of “integration, not accession”

²³³ Finland and Sweden joined NATO in 2023 and 2024, respectively. An earlier wave of enlargement had occurred in 1995 with the accession of Austria. Poland, Czechia, and Hungary joined in 1999, and Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined in 2004.

²³⁴ NATO, “Membership Action Plan (MAP) Approved by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council,” press release, April 24, 1999, as updated July 27, 2012.

²³⁵ Radin and Reach, 2017.

²³⁶ European Commission, “EU/Ukraine Partnership and Cooperation Agreement,” June 21, 1994.

²³⁷ Paul Kubicek, “The European Union and Democratization in Ukraine,” *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2005, pp. 275–276; Roman Solchanyk, *Ukraine and Russia: The Post-Soviet Transition*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000, p. 94. Throughout this period, elite and popular sentiments toward both the notion of European identity and EU membership remained divided (Stephen White, Ian McAllister, and Valentina Feklyunina, “Belarus, Ukraine and Russia: East or West?” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, Vol. 12, No. 3, August 2010).

²³⁸ European Council, *European Council Common Strategy on Ukraine*, December 11, 1999.

²³⁹ Kubicek, 2005, p. 283.

that left open the possibility of eventual membership negotiations but did not commit the bloc to a specific path.²⁴⁰

European members were similarly divided over whether to extend an invitation for Ukraine to participate in NATO's MAP. Although the United States reportedly debated admitting the country to the Alliance as early as 1993, NATO had generally settled on a policy of engagement without membership intended to enable discussions and cooperation with Ukraine on major security issues of mutual concern, such as the presence of nuclear weapons on Ukrainian soil, and demonstrate the principle that any democratic European state should be free to choose its affiliation, but without committing to a path that might further isolate Russia.²⁴¹ In 1994, Ukraine became the fifth country to join NATO's Partnership for Peace program, and in 1997, the Alliance established mechanisms like the NATO-Ukraine Charter on a Distinctive Partnership, the NATO-Ukraine Commission, the International Peacekeeping and Security Centre in Yavoriv, and the NATO Information and Documentation Center in Kyiv to promote cooperation and understanding of the Alliance's purpose, activities, and requirements for membership.²⁴² In addition to its active participation in Partnership for Peace activities, Ukraine formed and deployed a combined Ukrainian-Polish peacekeeping battalion to Kosovo and, in 2000, hosted Cooperative Partner, the then-largest ever exercise of NATO and partner forces held in a former Soviet state.²⁴³ But even after two additional rounds of NATO enlargement in 2004 and 2008 pushed the Alliance's boundaries to Ukraine's borders, many European countries—France and Germany, in particular—harbored reservations about Ukraine's ability to meet membership requirements and the potential negative ramifications for ongoing efforts to improve relations with Russia.²⁴⁴ Although many new Central and Eastern European allies joined the United States in arguing for consideration of Ukraine, NATO settled on a compromise solution.²⁴⁵ At the 2008 Bucharest Summit, the Alliance recognized Ukraine and Georgia's "Euro-

²⁴⁰ Commission of the European Communities, *Wider Europe—Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with Our Eastern and Southern Neighbours*, March 11, 2003; Gwendolym Sasse, "The European Neighbourhood Policy: Conditionality Revisited for the EU's Eastern Neighbours," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 2, March 2008.

²⁴¹ M. E. Sarotte, *Not One Inch: America, Russia, and the Making of Post-Cold War Stalemate*, Yale University Press, 2021, p. 160.

²⁴² Rebecca R. Moore, "Ukraine's Bid to Join NATO: Re-Evaluating Enlargement in a New Strategic Context," in James Goldgeier and Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shiffrin, eds., *Evaluating NATO Enlargement: From Cold War Victory to the Russia-Ukraine War*, Palgrave Macmillan, February 25, 2023. See also: Partnership and Co-operation Agreement Between the European Communities and Their Member States, June 14, 1994.

²⁴³ Stephen White, Julia Korosteleva, and Roy Allison, "NATO: The View from the East," *European Security*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2006, pp. 170–171. Ten NATO and six partner countries participated in the military exercise. Russia also attended as an observer.

²⁴⁴ Two of Ukraine's neighbors (Romania and Slovakia) joined NATO in 2004, while Poland and Hungary joined in 1999. The Partnership for Peace program offers participants a path for membership but neither commits partners to pursue this option nor guarantees their accession. NATO, "Signatures of Partnership for Peace Framework Document," March 27, 2024a; NATO, "Partnership for Peace: Invitation Document Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council," press release, January 11, 1994. On opposition to Ukrainian membership in NATO, see Dušica Lazarević, "NATO Enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia: Old Wine in New Bottles?" *Connections*, Vol. 9, No. 1, Winter 2009, p. 45. For examples of Russian threats, see Vladimir Putin, transcript of speech delivered at the Munich Security Conference, President of Russia, February 10, 2007; Luke Harding, "Putin Issues Nuclear Threat to Ukraine over Plan to Host US Shield," *The Guardian*, February 13, 2008.

²⁴⁵ Łukasz Jureńczyk, "Poland's Support for Ukraine's Aspirations to NATO Membership," *Security: Theory and Practice [Bezpieczeństwo: Teoria i Praktyka]*, No. 3, 2023; Lazarević, 2009, pp. 45–46.

Atlantic aspirations,” and issued an unprecedented declaration that the countries *would* become members in the unspecified future but declined to offer a MAP.²⁴⁶

The events of 2013 and 2014 tested the feasibility of continuing to encourage Ukraine’s cultural, economic, and political alignment with Europe without providing a path to formal membership into European economic or security institutions. First, the Euromaidan revolution, which erupted in response to then–Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych’s decision not to sign a political association and free trade agreement with the EU focused political attention within Ukraine and internationally on the country’s relations with Europe. The Russian annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbas strained the notion that the EU and NATO could promote stability in countries outside their borders and heightened anxieties about Russia’s aspirations in the common neighborhood. At the same time, the crises moved Ukraine to take a more assertive stance toward membership in both organizations. In 2014, the new Ukrainian coalition government signaled that securing an Association Agreement with the EU and a path to membership in NATO were its top foreign policy priorities.²⁴⁷ “There is no alternative to Euro-Atlantic integration,” then–Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko declared following a 2014 parliamentary vote to end Ukraine’s nonaligned status.²⁴⁸ In 2017, President Poroshenko announced Ukraine would seek a MAP with the ambition of fulfilling the Alliance’s criteria by 2020.²⁴⁹ Two years later, a constitutional amendment codified Ukrainian accession to the EU and NATO as a strategic goal.²⁵⁰

The EU responded by increasing engagement with Ukraine but resisted the pressure to reconsider the country’s readiness for membership. In a demonstration of solidarity with Ukraine, the EU expanded its financial and technical assistance to the country, increasing spending beyond the levels previously established for other nonmember states.²⁵¹ In a reflection of the new scale and breadth of the assistance provided, the EU Commission in 2014 established the Support Group for Ukraine, a novel organization of EU and national officials tasked with mediating between Kyiv and Brussels and coordinating EU, national, and international activities.²⁵² As prior analysis has noted, the Support Group for Ukraine had the secondary effect of building institutional knowledge about Ukraine; fostering new connections among the EU, Ukraine, and European donor countries; and mobilizing political support for reform within and outside Ukraine.²⁵³

²⁴⁶ NATO, “Bucharest Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest on 3 April 2008,” press release, April 3, 2008, updated July 5, 2022i.

²⁴⁷ David M. Herszenhorn, “Facing Russian Threat, Ukraine Halts Plans for Deals with E.U.,” *New York Times*, November 21, 2013.

²⁴⁸ Michael Birnbaum, “Ukraine Parliament Votes to Take Step Toward NATO, Angering Russia,” *Washington Post*, December 23, 2014.

²⁴⁹ “Poroshenko: Ukraine Seeking NATO Membership Action Plan,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, March 10, 2018.

²⁵⁰ “Ukraine President Signs Amendment on NATO, EU Membership,” Associated Press, February 19, 2019.

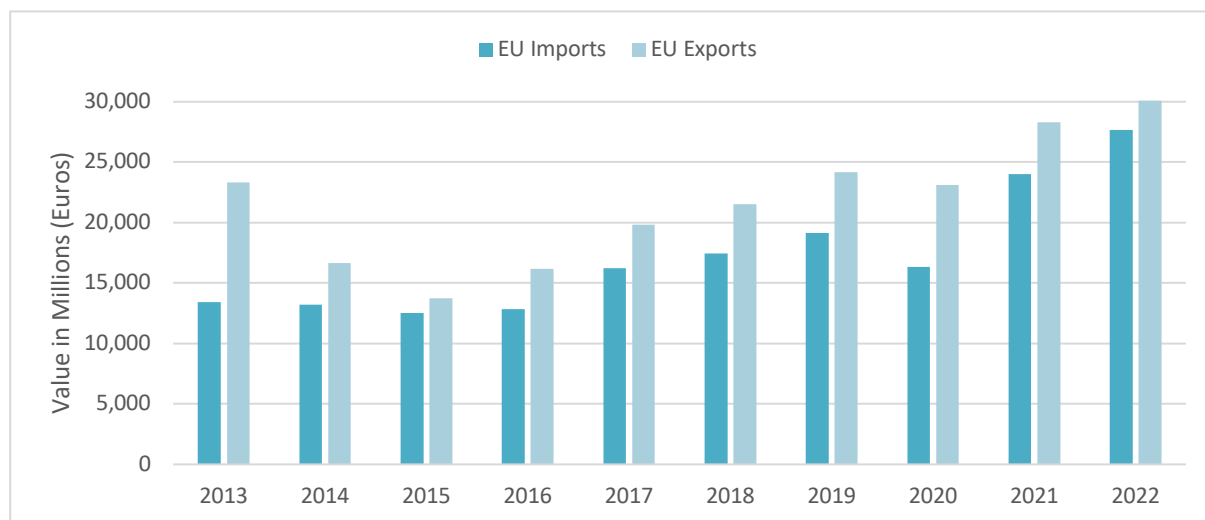
²⁵¹ For a comparison, see Kataryna Wolczuk and Darius Žeruolis, *Rebuilding Ukraine: An Assessment of EU Assistance*, Chatham House, August 2018, pp. 8–10.

²⁵² Wolczuk and Žeruolis, 2018, pp. 11–14; Kataryna Wolczuk, “State Building and European Integration in Ukraine,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 60, No. 6, 2019.

²⁵³ Maryna Rabinovych and Anne Pintsch, “From the 2014 Annexation of Crimea to the 2022 Russian War on Ukraine: Path Dependence and Socialization in the EU-Ukraine Relations,” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 62, No. 5, September 2024; Antoaneta L. Dimitrova and Rilka Dragneva, “How the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and Its Consequences Necessitated Adaptation and Drove Innovation in the EU,” *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 6, November 2023.

In addition to enacting these stabilization measures, the EU also took steps toward greater political association and economic integration. Under the Association Agreement signed in 2014, the EU recognized Ukraine as a European country; committed the parties to strengthening political, economic, and legal cooperation; and established a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area as well as regular ministerial, expert, and presidential summit meetings.²⁵⁴ Unlike the 1994 Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which identified areas for cooperation to promote Ukrainian reforms, the EU now provided for direct technical assistance in designing and implementing the country's reforms.²⁵⁵ Over the following years, the EU reduced tariffs on Ukrainian industrial and agricultural goods, extended macrofinancial and humanitarian assistance, and provided technical support for public administration reforms and state capacity building programs.²⁵⁶ Accordingly, trade between the EU and Ukraine grew steadily (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. European Union-Ukraine Trade Balance, 2013–2022



SOURCE: Adapted from European Commission, *European Union, Trade in Goods with Ukraine*, May 16, 2024c.

Even as the EU and member states sought to deepen economic and political relations with Ukraine, the bloc continued to deflect the question of eventual Ukrainian membership. The instability in Ukraine, which followed closely on the heels of crises in Libya, Syria, and Iraq, as well as the emerging migrant crisis, strained the EU's capacity and cohesion. Russia's increased assertiveness also heightened EU member states' sense of insecurity and contributed to a widespread perception that the bloc's policy toward neighboring countries was ill-suited to the challenges it now faced.²⁵⁷ As former

²⁵⁴ EEAS, "EU-Ukraine Association Agreement: 'Quick Guide to the Association Agreement,'" undated-b.

²⁵⁵ For the limits of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, see Paul J. Kubicek, "The European Union and Ukraine: Real Partners or Relationship of Convenience?" in Paul J. Kubicek, ed., *The European Union and Democratization*, Routledge, 2003, p. 156.

²⁵⁶ For the EU's efforts to tie state building and European integration after 2014, see Wolczuk, 2019.

²⁵⁷ Mark Furness, Thomas Henökl, and Tobias Schumacher, "Crisis, Coordination and Coherence: European Decision-Making and the 2015 European Neighbourhood Policy Review," *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 24, No. 4, December 2019,

Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt remarked, the union's "ring of friends" had become a "ring of fire."²⁵⁸ The overall effect was a reduction in the EU's ambitions. After a period of enlargement followed by indecision, a 2015 EU review of the bloc's European Neighbourhood Policy outlined a narrower model for engaging countries like Ukraine in which the EU and member states would focus on addressing core interests related to stability and security, such as border control and counterterrorism, while reducing cooperation on previous priorities like democratic reforms.²⁵⁹

The events of 2014 also highlighted the sharp distinction between NATO and non-NATO members. As discussed in Chapter 2, member states disagreed over whether Russia presented an active threat to Europe, as well as over whether and how to maintain some level of engagement with Russia. Although NATO officials continued to identify Ukraine as a "valued partner" and repeatedly characterized Russia's actions as a "fundamental challenge" to the Alliance's "goal of a Euro-Atlantic region whole, free, and at peace," they quickly clarified that NATO defense obligations did not extend to partner countries.²⁶⁰ Instead, NATO deepened its engagement with Ukraine after 2014 with a focus on bolstering the country's capacity to withstand external and internal threats independently. Among the new initiatives unveiled during the 2014 Wales Summit were a package of programs intended to strengthen the ability of Partnership for Peace countries like Ukraine to defend themselves against external threats and to work alongside NATO forces.²⁶¹ Working through established frameworks like Ukraine's Annual National Programme and new mechanisms like the Comprehensive Assistance Package, which was established in 2016, NATO also sought to increase joint training and exercises and establish new linkages with the Ukrainian defense and security sector, with the ultimate objectives of building Ukrainian capability, encouraging defense and security sector reforms, and improving interoperability with NATO forces.²⁶²

Although some member states—Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, in particular—pressed for greater support to Ukraine, entanglement concerns meant both NATO and the EU limited their assistance to nonlethal defense capabilities.²⁶³ For example, the EU declined a Ukrainian request to provide an armed police mission in the Donbas region and, instead, established the European Union Advisory Mission to advise and train the country's civilian security sector and build local capacity.²⁶⁴ However, growing interaction with Ukraine, combined with continued Ukrainian requests for membership, did lead NATO to clarify its stance on Ukrainian membership. In June 2021, NATO

pp. 449–450, 456–457; Nikki Ikani, "Change and Continuity in the European Neighbourhood Policy: The Ukraine Crisis as a Critical Juncture," *Geopolitics*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2019, p. 24.

²⁵⁸ Carl Bildt, "Europe Surrounded Not by a Ring of Friends—but by a Ring of Fire," Statesman Laureate Lecture delivered at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, April 29, 2015.

²⁵⁹ European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, *Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy*, November 18, 2015.

²⁶⁰ Moore, 2023, p. 383.

²⁶¹ NATO, 2022h.

²⁶² Moore, 2023, pp. 383–386.

²⁶³ For example, Henry Foy, "Poland Ready to Back a US Move to Arm Ukraine," *Financial Times*, February 9, 2015.

²⁶⁴ Council of the European Union, *Council Decision 2014/486/CFSP of 22 July 2014 on the European Union Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform Ukraine (EUAM Ukraine)*, July 22, 2014e.

declared that Ukraine would eventually join the Alliance through the MAP process, although it did not propose a timeline.²⁶⁵

Consequences of the Russia-Ukraine War, 2022–2024

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has spurred the EU and NATO to deepen cooperation with Ukraine and to reconsider the prospect of formal integration into the region's political and security institutions. Whereas the 2014 crisis reinforced the line between member and nonmember countries, the EU has since 2022 provided Ukraine unprecedented access to funds and other support previously reserved for member countries. Within days of the Russian invasion, the EU ministers activated the union's Integrated Political Crisis Response and authorized use of approximately 90 percent of funds from its EPF for members' purchase and delivery of lethal and nonlethal aid to Ukraine.²⁶⁶ As of April 2024, the EU has made \$12 billion in EPF funds available, as well as another \$2.2 billion for the joint procurement and delivery of artillery ammunition and \$535 million to strengthen EU defense industrial capacities in ammunition production.²⁶⁷ In addition, the EU has established new tools to sustain this assistance as the war stretches on, including

- the EU's Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine, which has trained approximately 52,000 Ukrainian soldiers as of May 2024
- the Ukraine Facility, a set of funding mechanisms to provide direct financial support, technical assistance, and incentives for other public and private investment in Ukrainian recovery, reconstruction, and development.²⁶⁸

Beyond this military support, the EU has mobilized existing funding instruments for economic and humanitarian aid to Ukraine. In March 2022, the EU for the first time activated its Temporary Protection Directive, an emergency provision that allows Ukrainian refugees to enter any EU member state and to access work, health care, and education without a visa or formal asylum request. By November 2023, an estimated 4.2 million people had registered for temporary protection under the mechanism, which has been extended until March 2026.²⁶⁹ To support member countries hosting Ukrainian refugees, the EU also relaxed restrictions on the use of its cohesion policy funds and identified approximately €17 billion in funds earmarked for cohesion and post-pandemic recovery that could be reallocated to support refugee housing, education, health care, and childcare.²⁷⁰ An April 2022 Council regulation granted access to another €420 million in remaining funds from prior home affairs funds and established a mechanism for member states, as well as public and private donors, to

²⁶⁵ NATO, 2022e.

²⁶⁶ Delegation of the EU to the United States of America, "EU Assistance to Ukraine (in U.S. Dollars)," April 24, 2024.

²⁶⁷ Delegation of the European Union to the United States of America, 2024.

²⁶⁸ EUMAM, "European Union Military Assistance Mission Ukraine," fact sheet, September 2024.

²⁶⁹ Council of the European Union, "Ukrainian Refugees: Council Extends Temporary Protection Until March 2026," press release, June 25, 2024c.

²⁷⁰ European Council and Council of the European Union, "EU Response to Russia's War of Aggression," webpage, December 13, 2024.

contribute to a new asylum, migration, and integration fund.²⁷¹ Additional financial, materiel, and industrial support followed. As of April 2024, EU financial institutions and member states had contributed over \$53 billion in financial, budgetary, humanitarian, and emergency assistance and nearly \$38 billion in military assistance.²⁷²

The expansion in EU assistance to Ukraine has been accompanied by new political support for Ukrainian candidacy. For many EU and European leaders, Russia's full-scale invasion highlighted the danger of the bloc's strategy of leaving potential members' status ambiguous and underscored the importance of developing a proactive strategy toward enlargement.²⁷³ For the first time, EU leaders began to characterize Ukrainian integration as a geopolitical necessity in the face of Russian regional aggression.²⁷⁴ EU and national leaders therefore moved quickly to clarify Ukraine's membership within the European community and to signal that the EU would not bow to Russian pressure. Ukraine "is one of us and we want them in the European Union," President von der Leyen told reporters shortly before Ukraine submitted its membership application on February 28, 2022.²⁷⁵ From Versailles the following month, the European Council affirmed it would "without delay" seek to "further strengthen our bonds and deepen our partnership to support Ukraine in pursuing its European path. Ukraine belongs to our European family."²⁷⁶ Behind the scenes, several Central and Eastern European member countries—in particular Poland, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, and Slovenia—lobbied Brussels to accelerate the process for considering membership requests to demonstrate solidarity and ease access to funds reserved for member countries.²⁷⁷

Support for Ukrainian membership built as the war progressed. Initially, the Netherlands, Germany, and France argued against the creation of new procedures for Ukraine, citing the importance of equitable treatment of all EU aspirants and concerns over potential Russian retaliation.²⁷⁸ "[J]oining the EU is not something that can be done in a few months, but . . . it involves an intensive and far-reaching transformation process," German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock cautioned in a press conference.²⁷⁹ But as Ukraine demonstrated its capacity to withstand the Russian invasion, French and German officials appear to have determined that unequivocal support for

²⁷¹ Council of the European Union, 2022g; Council of the European Union, "Ukraine: €17 Billion of EU Funds to Help Refugees," press release, April 4, 2022f.

²⁷² Delegation of the EU to the United States of America, 2024.

²⁷³ Sam Fleming and Henry Foy, "The 'Monumental' Consequences of Ukraine Joining the EU," *Financial Times*, August 5, 2023.

²⁷⁴ See, for example, Charles Michel, "Enlargement Then and Now: A Geopolitical Investment in Peace and Security," transcript of speech delivered for the 20th anniversary of the 2004 European Union Enlargement, European Council, April 29, 2024.

²⁷⁵ Méabh Mc Mahon, "Ukraine Is One of Us and We Want Them in EU, Ursula von der Leyen Tells Euronews," Euronews, February 27, 2022.

²⁷⁶ European Council, "Informal Meeting of the Heads of State or Government, Versailles, 10–11 March 2022," webpage, February 2, 2024.

²⁷⁷ See, for example, President of the Republic of Poland, "Support of Ukraine's Swift Candidacy to the EU," February 28, 2022.

²⁷⁸ "There Is No Fast Track Procedure for EU Membership, Dutch PM Says," Reuters, March 10, 2022; David M. Herszenhorn, "Leaders Rebuff Zelenskyy's Latest Pitch to Join EU," Politico, March 25, 2022; "Ukraine Bid to Join EU Will Take Decades Says Macron," BBC, May 9, 2022.

²⁷⁹ Victor Jack, "Ukraine's Zelenskyy Ups Pressure on EU with Plea for Immediate Membership," Politico, February 28, 2022.

Ukraine was necessary to deter future instability. Following a June 2022 visit to Ukraine, Germany pledged to back Ukraine's membership bid and to work to accelerate the candidacy of other aspiring members.²⁸⁰ In the country's first-ever publicly released national security strategy, Germany affirmed its support for "further EU integration, cohesion, and enlargement to include the Western Balkan states, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and, in the longer term, Georgia" while stipulating that concurrent reforms within the EU would be essential to deliver on the Union's promises.²⁸¹ Where French leaders had previously feared that enlargement would reduce the EU's cohesion and limit its aspirations, French officials began to characterize enlargement as an opportunity to advance internal reforms and build a more powerful and autonomous European bloc.²⁸²

In a historic step, European leaders voted in December 2023 to open accession talks with Ukraine after the European Commission reported that Ukrainian democratic and rule of law reforms had progressed.²⁸³ Demonstrating the extent of the wartime shift in attitudes toward Ukraine, supporters of Ukrainian membership cooperated to revise traditional procedures to suppress a Hungarian threat to veto the vote over concerns about Ukrainian treatment of Hungarian minorities and progress on anti-corruption reforms.²⁸⁴ Despite pressure from Ukraine and some member countries, however, the European Commission resisted pressure to accelerate the accession timeline, instead advising that a decision on when to start formal talks should be delayed until after Ukraine adopted laws on political asset declarations, lobbying, anti-oligarch measures, and guarantees protecting national minorities, part of a seven-step package to determine Ukraine's readiness for membership.²⁸⁵ In late June 2024, the European Council approved a negotiating framework, paving the path for the first accession conference to open on June 25, 2024.²⁸⁶

Yet outstanding questions about how to prepare EU institutions, policies, and budgets for eventual membership remain unresolved and could protract membership negotiations. If admitted, Ukraine would become the bloc's poorest member and its fifth largest population.²⁸⁷ The war's damages will increase the anticipated cost of its integration, potentially overwhelming the EU's budget and redistribution process and endangering other funding priorities. The country's large agricultural sector poses a particular challenge. If admitted, Ukraine likely would become the greatest recipient of

²⁸⁰ Töglhofer, 2024.

²⁸¹ German Federal Government, 2023, p. 13.

²⁸² Joseph de Weck, "Why Macron Is Now Embracing EU and NATO Enlargement," *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, June 29, 2023; Cadier, 2024; Emmanuel Macron, transcript of closing speech delivered at GLOBSEC 2023 Bratislava Forum, Élysée, May 31, 2023.

²⁸³ General Secretariat of the Council, "Council Conclusions on Enlargement," *General Affairs Council*, Council of the European Union, December 12, 2023; European Commission, *Ukraine 2023 Report*, November 8, 2023c.

²⁸⁴ Matina Stevis-Gridneff and Steven Erlanger, "Hungary Blocks Ukraine Aid After E.U. Opens Door to Membership," *New York Times*, December 14, 2023.

²⁸⁵ European Commission, 2023c.

²⁸⁶ European Council and Council of the European Union, "EU Opens Accession Negotiations with Ukraine," press release, June 25, 2024.

²⁸⁷ The war has complicated efforts to estimate Poland's population. According to United Nations estimates, the total population of Ukraine in 2024 is approximately 37.9 million. By contrast, the EU's five most populated countries in 2023 based on Eurostat data were Germany (84.4 million), France (68.2 million), Italy (58.9 million), Spain (48.1 million), and Poland (36.8 million). United Nations Population Fund, "World Population Dashboard: Ukraine," webpage, undated; Eurostat, "Population Change: Demographic Balance and Crude Rates at National Level," database, last updated November 8, 2024e.

Common Agricultural Policy funding, which currently encompasses nearly a quarter of EU expenditures, at the same time that it would remain a net beneficiary of EU funds.²⁸⁸ To balance the funding equation, other European countries would either have to accept a reduction in their payments or agree to increase the agricultural budget—raising secondary questions about whether to reduce other programs or increase member contributions. As one analysis of the financial challenges posed by EU enlargement summarizes, “either the pie grows and the overall budget for such support increases, or farmers each get a smaller slice of the pie.”²⁸⁹

Moreover, Ukraine’s national priorities and expectations for the EU will differ from past applicants. A postwar Ukraine will need to simultaneously rebuild destroyed infrastructure, revive industrial production of nonmilitary goods, and reconstitute its military forces simultaneously. Achieving these objectives will likely require persuading refugees that have resettled within the EU to return home, as well as potentially attracting additional immigrant labor. However, joining the EU will reduce legal barriers for Ukrainian nationals to either remain or seek work outside the country, potentially worsening the country’s demographic decline. Already, Ukraine reportedly has engaged in exploratory talks with EU officials on future migration rules designed to encourage citizens to return to the country.²⁹⁰

Although cooperation between the EU and Ukraine has grown rapidly, there is still no consensus among members about the implications of Ukrainian accession for the bloc’s governance structures or budgetary priorities. With the notable exception of Hungary, most EU and national leaders have expressed confidence in Ukraine’s ability to implement the reforms required to meet the EU’s accession criteria. However, recent debates over postaccession backsliding in Hungary and Poland have also contributed to calls for defining more-specific standards for enforcing economic and rule of law conditions that could exacerbate tensions among existing members. Similarly, Ukraine’s application has revived debates over the adequacy of European Parliament and Council procedures to preserve cohesion while ensuring equitable representation of all members. In one camp, France and Germany have conditioned support for Ukrainian membership on implementation of institutional reforms, such as reducing the number of commissioners and members of European Parliament and removing national vetoes, intended to increase the union’s capacity to act, promote political integration, and advance transparency and anti-corruption measures within EU institutions, among other objectives.²⁹¹ Although French and German officials argue such measures are necessary to preserve the Union’s legitimacy as its membership expands and diversifies, others allege that the reforms are intended to reduce the influence of new members. Poland, for instance, has led a coalition of Eastern and Central European countries concerned that the proposed reforms prioritize political integration over representation and could reduce newer and poorer member countries’ influence

²⁸⁸ In 2022, Common Agricultural Policy expenditures were 23.5 percent of the EU budget. European Commission, “CAP Expenditure,” webpage, undated-b.

²⁸⁹ Kribbe and Middelaar, 2023.

²⁹⁰ Barbara Moens and Jacopo Barigazzi, “Ukraine Wants EU’s Next Migration Rules to Encourage Returns,” *Politico*, January 24, 2024.

²⁹¹ Franco-German Working Group on EU Institutional Reform, *Sailing on High Seas: Reforming and Enlarging the EU for the 21st Century*, September 18, 2023.

within the EU.²⁹² Nordic member states, meanwhile, have continued to oppose treaty reforms out of concern for preserving national decisionmaking over taxation and fiscal policy.²⁹³ Notably, the Northern and Eastern states that traditionally have opposed treaty amendments represent some of the most vocal support for swiftly granting Ukrainian membership. In 2022, for instance, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Sweden, among other member states, publicly came out against proposals by President Macron, then-Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, President von der Leyen, and EU Parliament President Roberta Metsola to amend the EU treaties.²⁹⁴

Even vocal proponents of granting Ukraine membership have raised concerns about the implications for their own status within the EU. On the one hand, Ukraine's entry would shift the balance of power within the bloc in favor of Eastern European countries most concerned about Russian ambitions. However, these same countries are among those most likely to bear the consequences of any economic reshuffling required to absorb a new member, as well as an attending change in EU decisionmaking rules.²⁹⁵ For instance, Ukrainian accession would shift Poland's relative GDP rank within the EU, resulting in a reduction in the resources it receives under the Common Agricultural Policy and potentially transforming Poland from the largest net recipient of EU funds to an overall net payer.²⁹⁶ Franco-German proposals that would reduce individual members' power would also weaken Poland's ability to use its veto to influence EU decisions.

At present, the EU has not advanced significant proposals to account for the prospect that Ukraine might fulfill its membership criteria and has not agreed to current proposals for a phased integration into the EU without securing non-EU security guarantees. The EU has also never conducted membership negotiations with a country at war, let alone one that lacks NATO security guarantees.²⁹⁷ Under Article 42.7 of the Treaty of Lisbon, member states are obligated to "aid and assist" a fellow member to defend against external aggression "by all the means in their power."²⁹⁸ With the exception of neutral countries like Austria, Ireland, and Switzerland, enforcing this mutual defense clause in the event of a territorial conflict likely would require NATO involvement, an assumption in keeping with the bloc's traditional deference to the transatlantic alliance for questions of continental defense and deterrence to NATO.²⁹⁹ Ukraine therefore raises broader questions about member countries' willingness to expand and resource a greater EU role in continental defense and security.

By contrast, the war has not fundamentally altered NATO's stance on eventual Ukrainian membership. Russia's full-scale invasion altered the terms of the debate among allies but has not yet produced majority support for eastward enlargement. Since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, NATO leaders have maintained that the Alliance's foremost commitment remains to defend its own

²⁹² Virginie Malingre, "EU Enlargement: France and Germany Attempt to Control Discussion," *Le Monde*, September 19, 2023.

²⁹³ Nicolai Von Ondarza and Minna Ålander, *After the Conference on the Future of Europe: Time to Make Reforms Happen*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, August 2022.

²⁹⁴ Alice Tidey, "Explained: Why EU Countries Are at Odds over Treaty Changes," Euronews, May 11, 2022.

²⁹⁵ Ilke Toygür and Max Bergmann, "The EU Isn't Ready for Ukraine to Join," *Foreign Policy*, July 17, 2023.

²⁹⁶ Brudzińska, 2023.

²⁹⁷ When the EU admitted Cyprus in 2004, hostilities between Greece and Turkey had been suspended for three decades.

²⁹⁸ Official Journal of the EU, *Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union*, C 202, June 7, 2016, pp. 389–405.

²⁹⁹ Besch and Ciarrella, 2023.

members, and they have sought to prevent NATO from becoming a direct party to the conflict. At the same time, however, NATO has also refused to bow to Russian pressure to take the prospect of Ukrainian membership off the table. Over the two and half years since the war began, NATO statements have become more explicit in affirming Ukraine's right to choose its own association. In 2022, allies voiced support for Ukraine's "inherent right . . . to choose its own security arrangements" but declined to mention NATO membership directly.³⁰⁰ One year later, allies agreed in Vilnius that Ukraine's "future is in NATO" and affirmed that an invitation to join the Alliance would be extended once "Allies agree and conditions are met." In a demonstration of the uniqueness of the Ukraine-NATO relationship, allies also agreed to waive the need for a MAP on the grounds that "Ukraine has become increasingly interoperable and politically integrated with the Alliance, and has made substantial progress on its reform path."³⁰¹

Despite Ukrainian demands for greater clarity, individual NATO members largely have maintained the same rhetorical stance. Hungary and Slovakia have continued to express opposition, with both Hungarian and Slovakian leaders going so far as to publicly allege that admission would trigger a world war.³⁰² On the other end, the Central and Eastern European states most invested in enhancing the security of the Alliance's eastern flank have conditioned their support for eventual Ukrainian entry by calling for a pathway to membership "once conditions allow."³⁰³ And in the middle, former skeptics of NATO enlargement like Canada, France, Germany, and the Netherlands have publicly affirmed their support for eventual Ukrainian membership, albeit without stipulating conditions or a timeline for accession.³⁰⁴ The balance within NATO has tilted in favor of the principle of preserving NATO's flexibility to grant Ukraine's request for membership without reducing the Alliance's room to maneuver.

Nonetheless, the war has driven NATO to increase its support to Ukraine and to deepen areas of existing engagement. Between 2022 and 2023, the Alliance increased its delivery of nonlethal aid to Ukraine and established a multiyear program to help rebuild the country's security and defense sectors and promote adoption of NATO standards.³⁰⁵ Through NATO, European members have also sought to institutionalize the wartime relationship and to use crisis engagements to promote common standards and build Ukraine's long-term readiness for membership. In 2023, allies agreed to upgrade the NATO-Ukraine Commission into the NATO-Ukraine Council, in which Ukraine now sits as an equal participant.³⁰⁶ The enhanced joint body both facilitates crisis consultations between NATO and Ukraine and enables routine dialogue to assess and "support Ukraine's progress on interoperability as

³⁰⁰ NATO, 2022j.

³⁰¹ NATO, 2023.

³⁰² Seb Starcevic, "Kyiv's NATO Membership Would 'Guarantee WW3,' Slovak PM Says," Politico, July 11, 2024.

³⁰³ President of the Republic of Poland, "Statement by the Leaders of the Bucharest Nine," June 6, 2023.

³⁰⁴ Élysée, "Globsec Summit in Bratislava," June 1, 2023; Prime Minister of Canada, "Ukraine and Canada Joint Declaration," June 10, 2023; Philippe Ricard and Cédric Pietralunga, "France Resolves to Support Ukraine's NATO Membership," *Le Monde*, June 20, 2023; Embassy of Ukraine in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, "Political Dialogue Between Ukraine and the Netherlands," April 30, 2024; Agreement on Security Cooperation and Long-Term Support Between the Kingdom of Belgium and Ukraine, signed at Brussels, Belgium, May 28, 2024.

³⁰⁵ NATO, "Statement of the NATO-Ukraine Council Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council in Washington, D.C. 11th July 2024," July 11, 2024, updated July 15, 2024f.

³⁰⁶ NATO, "NATO-Ukraine Council," May 13, 2024b.

well as additional democratic and security sector reforms.”³⁰⁷ At the Washington Summit the following year, allies established NSATU to coordinate national donations and training and “place security assistance to Ukraine on an enduring footing, ensuring enhanced, predictable, and coherent support.”³⁰⁸ NATO statements have underlined that the Alliance is not changing its stance toward the conflict and will remain a nonparty to the conflict, although it will use the assistance framework to bring Ukrainian procurement in line with NATO best practices, continue to develop joint interoperability requirements, and advance progress toward eventual integration of Ukraine’s defense and security forces with NATO’s.³⁰⁹

Conclusion

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine presented the European community with a choice of one among four potential paths: (1) to abandon the prospect of Ukrainian integration; (2) to maintain the current approach of engagement without formal integration into collective political and security apparatuses; (3) to accelerate Ukraine’s integration by building a path to membership within one or both of the region’s primary organizations, the EU and NATO; or (4) to push for rapid EU and/or NATO enlargement.

Notwithstanding the EU’s decision to open accession negotiations with Ukraine, European rhetoric and policies since 2022 have hewed closer to the third option than the fourth. Table 4.1 summarizes the adaptation in European views on potential integration since the war in Ukraine began. In response to Russia’s invasion, Europeans have reevaluated the geopolitical implications of enlargement and provided Ukraine access to additional EU resources beyond those typically available to nonmember countries. Similarly, NATO’s assistance to Ukraine exceeds prewar models for support to Ukraine and other partners, although it has built on a foundation established in response to the 2014 Crimea crisis.

Despite growing defense cooperation, political, financial, and strategic factors likely will continue to disincentivize EU or NATO expansion to Ukraine. Within the EU, member countries do not agree on whether the bloc should revise or reprioritize its enlargement principles, as would be required to fast-track Ukrainian accession, and discussions for how to resolve outstanding procedural, legal, and budgetary questions are nascent. As the war drags on and the costs to Ukraine and donor countries accumulate, resolving the practical and budgetary realities of integrating may become more challenging. Although the majority of European leaders have voiced support for the principle of Ukrainian membership, actualizing this pledge will require careful diplomacy and sustained political attention to preserve EU unity and identify solutions that bridge members’ differing national interests.

³⁰⁷ NATO, 2024g; NATO, 2023.

³⁰⁸ NATO, 2024g.

³⁰⁹ NATO, 2024g; NATO, 2024f.

Table 4.1. Summary of Trends in European Positions on Ukrainian Integration

	2014–2021	2022–June 2024
Declared stance	• NATO affirmed an “open door” policy, but European members oppose Ukraine membership absent substantial reforms. • EU affirmed support for Ukrainian sovereignty.	• EU enlargement was characterized as a geostrategic imperative. • EU members displayed strong support for rapid Ukrainian accession. • NATO increased aid to “build a bridge” to membership.
Policies and resources	• NATO affirmed support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, but it did not move to establish a MAP. • The EU signed an association agreement with Ukraine and increased economic and social sector engagement.	• EU officials have resisted pressure to fast-track Ukrainian membership. • EU members were divided over the need for pre-expansion reforms. • NATO dropped the MAP requirement, but few members support Ukrainian ascension given entanglement concerns.

The shift in attitudes toward Ukrainian membership in the EU contrasts with the status of debates over NATO candidacy. The war has highlighted, rather than resolved, members’ escalation concerns. Whether NATO can and chooses to move forward with membership likely will depend on the outcome of the conflict and the conditions of a postwar settlement. In the interim, European states and supranational organizations have used alternative mechanisms to demonstrate support and coordinate policy, even as they have shied from formal integration.

Charting Europe's Future Course

In this report, we examined how Europe has responded to the war by recalibrating its approach toward Russia; developing new concepts and committing new resources to collective defense; and reassessing the costs and benefits of integrating Ukraine into regional security, political, and economic frameworks. Below, we summarize our primary findings and discuss their implications for Europe's strategic future—and, in turn, future opportunities and challenges for U.S. defense cooperation. Given the possibility that future events in Ukraine, Europe, and the United States could still alter the trends described in previous chapters, we also highlight nine plausible factors that would require reassessment of these implications.

The chapter ends with a list of recommendations for DAF, DoD, and the U.S. government stemming from our analysis.

Findings and Implications

Our research resulted in the following findings and implications:

- **The European shift away from engagement with Russia is likely irreversible** absent a significant change in Russian leadership, domestic politics, and external behavior. The duration of European restrictions, including ongoing efforts to expand and tighten sanctions, and progress toward developing alternatives to Russian energy have reduced incentives to restore prewar economic engagement. Although some countries may use their bilateral ties with Moscow as leverage in negotiations with Brussels, the European majority has demonstrated a consistent ability and resolve to suppress challenges and maintain their new, more confrontational approach. Although intra-European disputes may increase the political—and, for the EU, budgetary—costs of maintaining or expanding restrictive measures, a wholesale EU or cross-European normalization of relations is unlikely in the medium term.
- **The war has energized Europeans to improve their operational flexibility, but any movement toward strategic autonomy from the United States is likely to be limited.** On the one hand, the war in Ukraine has motivated member states to strengthen the EU's powers to promote defense integration among member countries. On the other hand, the war has also heightened European awareness of the importance of the United States and the transatlantic alliance and raised new questions about the prospect that Europe can, in the near term, build sufficient capability to defend their territory and citizens without the United States' support. NATO's resurgence since 2022 underlines that Europeans continue to view the transatlantic alliance as critical to ensuring their security and are unsure that Eurocentric alternatives are

necessary or can be constructed in time or at scale. Rather than develop an alternative architecture, European states have redoubled efforts to improve EU-NATO coordination and to leverage the EU's unique authorities and resources to address national deficiencies and support NATO priorities.

- **Europeans have recognized the need to improve their ability to act with reduced U.S. support but are likely to still depend on the U.S. security role in the medium term given the scale of their existing production and capability gaps.** The multiyear increases in European defense spending and increased political attention to building national and collective defenses mark a significant departure from pre-2022 trends. Yet disagreements among European countries over whether to prioritize indigenous production or speed of procurement are likely to continue, potentially contributing to inefficiencies and hampering efforts to advance defense integration.
- **Although the EU has sought a greater defense role, the substantial reforms that would enable Brussels to direct collective military action are unlikely in the medium term because of national differences and the immaturity of existing proposals.** The war has encouraged Europeans to pursue greater cooperation within existing frameworks, but it has not galvanized new defense concepts or the creation of an alternative architecture for the defense of Europe. Instead, European, EU, and NATO leaders have taken steps to strengthen existing institutions by developing new capabilities, institutionalizing procedures and relationships built over the course of the war, and adapting existing funding and coordination mechanisms to support collective defense goals. Novel organizations like the EU's EUMAM and NATO's NSATU represent creative adaptations of existing frameworks and largely operate within existing institutions.
- **European engagement with Ukraine is generally one-directional and falls short of standards for de facto defense integration.** To meet Ukraine's warfighting needs, Europeans have extended unprecedented aid and developed new frameworks and funding mechanisms to sustain support in the near term. These wartime interactions can advance interoperability and familiarity between European and Ukrainian forces. Given that Ukraine's resources must be committed to the present fight, the question of how Ukraine may or can contribute to its European partners' defenses—a key element for true integration—is untested.
- **Ukraine's formal integration through the EU and NATO is unlikely in the near term.** EU membership negotiations are likely to continue to highlight practical challenges and differences among EU members. However, defense cooperation with Ukraine is likely to continue to grow.

Factors That Could Alter This Analysis

The findings discussed above reflect changes in European attitudes, policies, and organizations from February 2022 through July 2024. Because the war is still ongoing, it remains possible that changes in battlefield, regional, or international dynamics could still alter the trajectory of observed trends and require reconsideration of some of this study's findings. In particular, we highlight nine factors that could alter the Russia-Ukraine war's consequences for Europe's future strategic

orientation. To clarify similarities among specific factors, we organize them into three categories: (1) those related to the course of the war, (2) those related to the ending of the war, and (3) external diplomatic and political factors. Our approach to managing the uncertainty stemming from the future trajectory of the war is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 1 of the summary volume of this report series, *The Consequences of the Russia-Ukraine War*.³¹⁰

The Course of the War

Russia's Use of Nonstrategic Nuclear Weapons in Ukraine

Russian nuclear exercises and public statements have raised the specter of potential nonstrategic nuclear weapons use in Ukraine, although analysts disagree over the likelihood and pathways that could cause Moscow to break the nuclear taboo.³¹¹ Public reports suggest that U.S. officials have considered the prospect of Russian nuclear weapons use if Moscow perceived that its position in Ukraine is at imminent risk of collapse or a direct threat to the Russian state.³¹²

Russian detonation of a nuclear weapon or device, regardless of whether conducted as a demonstration or as part of broader attack on Ukrainian forces, would be a consequential event with global implications. For Europe, the resulting security dilemmas would underline the nuclear imbalance between EU member states and Russia and highlight long-standing disagreements about states' interest in assisting (and obligation to assist) the defense of nontreaty partners. The responding deliberations would underscore the reality of the EU's limited defense capacity and institutional experience, reinforcing NATO's role as the primary security institution on the continent and decreasing support for strategic concepts premised on reducing U.S. involvement. It may also encourage revisions in EU-UK collaboration on defense, given the UK's nuclear arsenal. Across Europe, the nonnuclear power majority would likely look to France, the UK, and the United States for leadership, shifting the balance away from the position of the countries close to Russia that have, since the start of the war, asserted increasing influence within the EU and NATO.

Whether such an unprecedented event would break or strengthen European unity is uncertain. In choosing to use nuclear weapons, Russia might calculate that fears of further escalation might induce the United States or its European allies to reduce their support to Ukraine or even to press Kyiv into accepting an early settlement favorable to Russia. Given differing national risk tolerances, strategic cultures, and perceived stakes in Ukraine, it is possible that a nuclear crisis would deepen fissures

³¹⁰ Bryan Frederick, Alexandra T. Evans, Mark Hvizda, Alisa Laufer, Howard Wang, Samuel Charap, Krystyna Marcinek, Howard J. Shatz, Krystyna Holynska, David A. Ochmanek, Omar Danaf, Brett Zakheim, and Kristen Gunness, *The Consequences of the Russia-Ukraine War*, RAND Corporation, RR-A3141-1, 2025.

³¹¹ For a dataset of Russian nuclear activities and threats during the Russia-Ukraine war's first 18 months, see Heather Williams, Kelsey Hartigan, Lachlan MacKenzie, and Reja Younis, *Deter and Divide: Russia's Nuclear Rhetoric, and Escalation Risks in Ukraine*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, undated. For examples of varied assessments of the probability of nuclear use, see Liviu Horowitz and Lydia Wachs, *Russia's Nuclear Threats in the War Against Ukraine: Consequences for the International Order, NATO and Germany*, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, April 2022; Bryan Frederick, Mark Cozad, and Alexandra Stark, *Escalation in the War in Ukraine: Lessons Learned and Risks for the Future*, RAND Corporation, RR-A2807-1, 2023.

³¹² Jim Sciutto, "Exclusive: US Prepared 'Rigorously' for Potential Russian Nuclear Strike in Ukraine in Late 2022, Officials Say," CNN, March 9, 2024.

among Europeans over whether the wisdom of continued confrontation with Russia and raise new pressures to accommodate Russian demands. However, it is also plausible that such an attack would harden European attitudes by reducing confidence in the feasibility of future cooperation with Russia. Confronted with a clear and imminent threat, Europeans might band closer together. This could induce Europeans to sever remaining ties with Russia, accelerate rearmament, and reconsider national and NATO nuclear posture.³¹³ However, how specific countries would react to such an unprecedented event is uncertain, as is whether nuclear use would reinforce existing regional factions or drive a reorganization along new political lines.

How the United States and NATO choose to respond to nuclear use in Ukraine would also shape the event's long-term ramifications. Since the start of the conflict, U.S. and European leaders have emphasized that Russian nuclear use will be met with "severe consequences" but have not committed to a specific response.³¹⁴

NATO Directly Intervenes in the Russia-Ukraine War

As discussed in previous chapters, NATO has sought to deter an attack on allied territory, improve the Alliance's capacity to respond if threatened, and enable individual members to continue providing bilateral assistance to Ukraine, while avoiding actions that might incite a Russian attack. Allies have consistently emphasized that NATO is a defensive alliance, although interpretations of what might constitute an armed attack have varied among members, and in March 2022, allies ruled out NATO troop deployments.³¹⁵ Nevertheless, several general pathways to direct NATO intervention are feasible, ranging from

- an inadvertent death of NATO officials or personnel in or operating near Ukraine
- a preemptive Russian operation arising from a misinterpretation of NATO activities
- a deliberate Russian decision to conduct limited attacks on NATO territory to pressure Western governments to end support to Ukraine or deliver Ukrainian concessions.³¹⁶

In theory, significant Russian escalation *within* Ukraine—potentially including nuclear or expanded chemical use—could also lead NATO member states to perceive that the situation within the country presented an intolerable risk to the security of allied territory or citizens. Indeed, some countries—including France, Poland, and the Baltics—already have raised the prospect of deploying national or

³¹³ Already, Russian nuclear threats during the war in Ukraine, including reported deployments of Russian nuclear weapons to the Kaliningrad region and Belarus, have led Poland to express new interest in hosting nuclear weapons under NATO's nuclear-sharing policy. "Poland's Bid to Participate in NATO Nuclear Sharing," Institute for Strategic Studies, September 2023.

³¹⁴ "NATO Warns Russia of 'Severe Consequences' in Case of a Nuclear Strike," Reuters, September 27, 2022.

³¹⁵ In communiqués following the Vilnius (2023) and Washington (2024) Summits, allies affirmed that "NATO does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia." NATO, 2023; NATO, 2024g. For earlier examples of NATO messaging, see Jens Stoltenberg, transcript of speech delivered at the Ottawa Conference on Security and Defence, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, March 9, 2022, updated March 12, 2022a; Alexandra Brzozowski, "NATO Rules Out No-Fly Zone over Ukraine," Euractiv, March 4, 2022. On NATO statements that it would not deploy air or ground forces to Ukraine, see Liz Sly and Emily Rauhala, "NATO Proposes a Major Force Expansion in Europe to Address the Long-Term Threat Posed by Russia," *Washington Post*, March 16, 2022.

³¹⁶ Frederick, Cozad, and Stark, 2023.

NATO ground forces to Ukraine, although they have faced strong opposition from other NATO members, including Germany and the United States.³¹⁷

The ramifications of NATO involvement for Europe's strategic orientation would vary depending on the circumstances surrounding the NAC decision, including European perceptions of alternative courses of action, the state of Russian military forces, the scale of European damage, and the course of the conflict. Each of these conditions would also have differing implications for the trajectory of European policies toward Russia, defense policy and spending, integration with the United States, and relations with Ukraine and would require reconsideration of these report's findings.

Nevertheless, several implications are likely. First, establishing the required NAC consensus would mean that European leaders had abandoned hope that engagement could promote regional security and stability. Current members that question the severity or immediacy of the Russian threat would therefore have either revised their stance or been disempowered. Depending on the scale and circumstances of the attack, some European leaders may push for simultaneous negotiations with Russia in an attempt to limit the conflict. However, their ability to mobilize European support for a negotiated settlement would be contingent on how the resulting conflict unfolds, including the severity of the fighting and NATO forces' operational success.

Given the scale of the resulting conflict and the risk of escalation beyond Ukraine's borders, NATO member countries would substantially increase resources and authorities for defense production, procurement, and stockpiling beyond observed levels and, through the transfer of authorities to NATO military command, vastly expand defense integration and cooperation. A Russia-NATO conflict would test existing frameworks for EU-NATO complementarity and likely require organizational and procedural adaptations. European relations with the United States would depend on the conflict's course and outcome, including the United States' ability to manage differences in risk tolerance and account for variations in damage incurred by different members.

NATO involvement in the conflict would render many of the political obstacles to Ukrainian integration into the military alliance obsolete. Whether the war would accelerate or ensure Ukraine's integration into the EU is less certain, however. The experience of common costs could encourage EU members to suspend or revise criteria for membership. Alternately, the costs of their own reconstruction could make European members more wary of admitting a new member that would require significant postconflict investment.

³¹⁷ Lipika Pelham and Lou Newton, "NATO Allies Reject Emmanuel Macron Idea of Troops to Ukraine," BBC, February 27, 2024; "Poland Should Not Rule Out Sending Troops to Ukraine, Says Foreign Minister," Reuters, May 27, 2024; Matthias Gebauer, Marina Korbaki, Christian Reiermann, Christoph Schult, and Konstantin von Hammerstein, "The Fear of the Great War" ["Die Angst vor dem großen Krieg"], *Der Spiegel*, May 26, 2024.

The Ending of the War

Ukraine Regains Internationally Recognized Borders

Since the start of the war, Ukrainian leaders have affirmed the aim of reestablishing the country's 2014 borders.³¹⁸ An assessment of the conditions that could enable Ukraine to reclaim its territory and defeat or evict Russian forces is beyond the scope of this study, but such an outcome likely would present new opportunities and dilemmas for European leaders beyond those discussed in this report. On the one hand, the defeat or substantial degradation in Russian military forces could soften European anxieties about provoking Russian retaliation and could expand or solidify support for Ukrainian membership in NATO. EU involvement in postwar reconstruction activities could also accelerate Ukraine's accession timeline by facilitating adoption of EU standards. Indeed, the joint EU-Ukraine-World Bank reconstruction planning efforts already emphasize opportunities to "transform [the] country on its path to the EU."³¹⁹ On the other hand, the practical and financial challenge of rebuilding Ukraine once the war ends could heighten debates among EU members over the Union's fiscal and budgetary readiness to absorb a new net-recipient country. European concerns about Ukraine's ability to fulfill obligations made during wartime, or even new European demands or expectations for Ukrainian reimbursement of major donors, could also strain relations between Brussels and Kyiv and prolong negotiations.

Whether European leaders attempt to repair relations with Russia likely would depend on whether the Kremlin renounces its claim to Ukrainian territory and adheres to the terms of any settlement. Since 2022, European leaders have consistently emphasized that any rapprochement would be conditional on changes in Russian behavior, and they would be predisposed to view postwar Russian rearmament as evidence of recidivist ambitions. Although European countries are likely to maintain at least aspects of their hard-line policies toward Russia, a historical sensitivity to the risks of imposing overly punitive policies against defeated countries could lead influential countries like Germany to argue for limited reengagement, particularly on trade and economic issues, even as other countries, such as Poland, the UK, and the Baltics, remain opposed.

Depending on the condition of Russian forces following a Ukrainian victory, political interest in sustaining high defense spending could decrease in some countries if European leaders assess that Russia would be incapable of threatening EU or NATO territory or if European populaces pressed their governments to rededicate attention and resources to other problems that have been subsumed by the emergency in Ukraine, such as migration and climate change. Differences in how countries perceive the scale and immediacy of the Russian threat, and the lessons they take from Europe's failure to follow through on its commitments after 2014, could produce new tensions within the EU and NATO. Although fears of Russian encroachment are likely to remain high in Eastern and Northern countries, Southern European countries like Spain and Italy are more likely to prioritize other national and EU issues.

³¹⁸ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, "Everything Started with Crimea and Will End With It—Liberation of the Peninsula from Occupation Is Necessary," transcript of speech delivered at the Second Crimea Platform Summit, President of Ukraine, August 23, 2022.

³¹⁹ European Commission, "Updated Ukraine Recovery and Reconstruction Needs Assessment Released," press release, February 14, 2024a.

Russian-Imposed Regime Change in Ukraine

A scenario in which Russia achieves a military breakthrough and establishes a new government in Kyiv would make many of the trends described in this report obsolete. The new government would almost certainly withdraw Ukraine's application for EU membership, denounce previous requests for NATO membership, terminate existing partnerships with both institutions, and challenge or deny its obligation to abide by the terms of repayment for any EU loans extended over the course of the war.

Would Europeans seek to repair relations with Russia and engage the new leadership in Kyiv? Russia's victory in Ukraine—and attending westward movement of Russian forces—would likely harden European's negative views and heighten preexisting concerns of Russian subversion in former Soviet states like Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.³²⁰ Fears that an emboldened Russia might next target other border countries, such as Moldova or Georgia, or even attempt a limited incursion into NATO territory would likely drive European states, particularly in Eastern and Northern Europe, to expand defense spending, accelerate DIB investments, and expand cooperation. This would follow the longer trend in Europe's response to Russian provocations: a consistent movement toward greater investment in resilience over time.³²¹

Outliers could emerge, but they would face strong pressure from other European countries to align with the regional majority and could risk significant economic and political repercussions. Countries like Slovakia and Hungary, which have refused to divest from Russian energy suppliers and have pushed the EU to reconsider their stance on negotiations, or Austria, which has not sent arms to Ukraine and maintains broad economic ties with Russia, might seek to reestablish prewar bilateral interactions or even push for a relaxation in EU sanctions.³²² Yet these outlier countries would also recognize that other EU countries, including major powers like France and Germany, would penalize their recognition of Russian de facto territorial gains.³²³ Similar to Hungary's current strategy, they might choose to lodge symbolic protests while providing tacit support for the European majority's hard-line preferences.

Ukrainian Government Accepts Cessation of Hostilities Without Territorial Settlement

The protraction of the fighting has underlined the possibility that neither Ukraine nor Russia may achieve their maximalist objectives and will instead be compelled to access a ceasefire without a comprehensive political solution. In such a scenario, Russian forces would likely remain on Ukrainian territory, but the intensity of the fighting would be reduced or intermittent. Such a scenario would test

³²⁰ "Macron Warns Europe That Putin Won't Stop with Ukraine and Urges Strong Response," Radio France Internationale, March 14, 2024; Richard Milne and Marton Dunai, "Russia Could Attack a NATO Country Within 3 to 5 Years, Denmark Warns," *Financial Times*, February 9, 2024.

³²¹ For example, the 2009 gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine accelerated EU energy diversification efforts (Commission of the European Communities, *The January 2009 Gas Supply Disruption To The EU: An Assessment*, July 16, 2009; Guy Chazan and Peter Spiegel, "EU Struggles to Wean Former Soviet Bloc Off Russian Energy," *Financial Times*, November 27, 2013). Similarly, after the 2007 Russia's cyberattack on Estonia, NATO established the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, "About Us," webpage, undated).

³²² Gabriel Gavin and Victor Jack, "Hungary Urges Ukraine to OK Russian Oil Loophole," Politico, August 22, 2024; Matthew Karnitschnig, "How Austria Became Putin's Alpine Fortress," Politico, June 5, 2023.

³²³ Gavin and Jack, 2024; Karnitschnig, 2023.

European leaders' commitment to sustaining high defense levels by reducing the urgency of producing sufficient equipment to meet Ukraine's current rates of expenditure while reviving debates over countries' willingness to sustain the costs indefinitely. Fatigued European publics could also press their governments to reprioritize other economic and social issues. Reactions to these domestic pressures are likely to vary among countries. Some may perceive a stalemated conflict as likely to drain Russian resources and slow its rate of reconstitution, reducing the urgency of European rearmament. Conversely, others may perceive an opportunity to outpace Russian modernization and sustain or even increase defense expenditures.

As discussed previously, Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO is unlikely while the conflict continues. Ukraine may seek immediate entry into the EU as part of broader negotiations with Russia and European intermediaries. Yet the Ukrainian government's inability to govern its full territory would introduce thorny challenges for EU membership negotiations that would likely prolong the process, although the continued risk of a new outbreak of fighting would exacerbate European concerns about direct entanglement in the conflict.

External Diplomatic and Political Factors

Extremist Victories in Elections of Key European Union States

The 2024 European Parliament elections demonstrate emerging challenges to the political center in Europe and a continued rightward shift in national and EU politics.³²⁴ Concurrently, some antimilitarist or Euroskeptic far-left parties, such as Germany's Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance, have organized to reduce European assistance to Ukraine, a position similarly championed by far-right parties like France's National Rally.³²⁵ Although Russia has fostered ties with far- and ultra-right parties sympathetic to its antiliberal vision, it historically has sought to exploit fissures within the European politics by supporting fringe elements on both ends of the political spectrum.³²⁶ The Kremlin would therefore likely see some benefits if, in future national or EU elections, European citizens voted to empower far-right or far-left parties.

If the political center crumbled, some of the trends described in this report may become less salient. Existing skeptics of continued European aid to Ukraine like Prime Minister Orbán and Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico might redouble their efforts to cut off European aid to Ukraine

³²⁴ Matina Stevis-Gridneff, "In E.U. Elections, the Center Holds, but the Far Right Still Wreaks Havoc," *New York Times*, June 9, 2024; Luke McGee, "Europe's Center Ground Is Shifting Further to the Right," CNN, June 9, 2024.

³²⁵ Guy Chazan, "Germany's Far-Left Disrupter Claims Credit for Limiting Aid to Ukraine," *Financial Times*, August 21, 2024; Joseph Ataman, "Marine Le Pen Promises French Far Right Will Rein in Aid to Ukraine, Slams Soccer Star Mbappé," CNN, July 5, 2024.

³²⁶ Mikhail Zygar, "Russia's War on Woke," *Foreign Affairs*, January 2, 2024; Ksenia Luchenko, "Conservatism by Decree: Putin as a Figurehead for the Global Far-Right," European Council on Foreign Relations, March 1, 2024; Alina Polyakova, Markos Kounalakis, Antonis Klapsis, Luigi Sergio Germani, Jacopo Iacoboni, Francisco de Borja Lasheras, and Nicolás de Pedro, *The Kremlin's Trojan Horses 2.0: Russian Influence in Greece, Italy, and Spain*, Atlantic Council, November 2017; Etienne Soula and David Salvo, "Russia Is Still Finding Willing Partners Throughout Europe," German Marshall Fund, February 13, 2024.

and press Kyiv to accept a negotiated settlement.³²⁷ Even within Poland, one of Ukraine's most vocal supporters, far-right and ultra nationalist politicians have called for Warsaw to block Ukraine's admission to the EU or to condition entry on exhuming Polish victims of the Volyn massacres.³²⁸ An expanded cadre of far-right leaders might also impose new conditions on humanitarian or economic assistance to the country. Likewise, far-left parties may press for reductions in military assistance and seek to refocus the EU's attention on economic, labor, and climate issues.

However, whether newly empowered far-left or far-right parties would fundamentally revise the EU's stance toward Russia is unclear. An "overwhelming" majority of parties explicitly condemned Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, although elements of both the far left and far right indicated qualified sympathy for Russian perspectives.³²⁹ Over the course of the war, favorable views of Russia and Putin have declined among the European right, and far-right leaders are divided over the degree to which they believe European security interests can be served through outreach to Russia.³³⁰ In Italy, for example, Prime Minister Meloni has emerged as a staunch advocate for support to Ukraine and, despite prewar tensions, sought to preserve Italy's relations with the EU. Similarly, analysis of far-left parties' foreign policy positions since the start of the war suggests increased support for more-assertive policies toward Russia, with parties affiliated with Radical New Left and Democratic Socialist parties expressing particular opposition to Russian policies on antifascist principles.³³¹ Although far-left leaders likely would press for a reduction in EU-NATO cooperation, cut national defense spending, and reexamine participation in joint procurement and other defense cooperation initiatives, far-right political leaders may increase defense spending and continue national DIB expansion.

Ukraine Receives Additional U.S. Security Guarantees Following the End of the War

Since the start of the war, Ukraine has called on the United States and other partners to provide legally binding security guarantees to deter and, if necessary, defeat future Russian attacks. In July 2023, leaders of the G7 countries issued a joint declaration describing a framework for negotiating new bilateral security cooperation and assistance commitments for Ukraine.³³² Since then, Ukraine has signed ten-year security agreements with 20 partners, including all G7 members and, as of July 2024,

³²⁷ Henry Ridgwell, "European Right-Wing Politicians Call for 'Preserving Nation-State in Europe' and End to Ukraine Aid," *Voice of America*, April 18, 2024.

³²⁸ Confederation of Liberty and Independence [Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość], "Admitting Ukraine to the European Union Is an Absurd Idea!" ["Przyjęcie Ukrainy do Unii Europejskiej to pomysł absurdalny!"], November 9, 2023; Martin Fornusek, "Polish Official: Ukraine 'Cannot Dream' of EU Without Resolving Volyn Victims' Exhumations," *Kyiv Independent*, November 7, 2023.

³²⁹ Andreas Fagerholm, "Sympathy or Criticism? The European Far Left and Far Right React to Russia's 2022 Invasion of Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 76, No. 6, 2024.

³³⁰ Moira Fagan and Laura Clancy, "Among European Right-Wing Populists, Favorable Views of Russia and Putin Are Down Sharply," Pew Research Center, September 23, 2022; Rosa Balfour and Stefan Lehne, *Charting the Radical Right's Influence on EU Foreign Policy*, Carnegie Europe, April 2024; Tony Barber, "Europe's Hard-Right Parties Differ in Important Ways," *Financial Times*, April 27, 2024.

³³¹ Adam Holesch, Piotr Zagórski, and Luis Ramiro, "European Radical Left Foreign Policy After the Invasion of Ukraine: Shifts in Assertiveness Towards Russia," *Political Research Exchange*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2024.

³³² White House, "Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine," press release, July 12, 2023a.

the United States.³³³ Under its ten-year bilateral security agreement, the United States has outlined plans to expand and routinize bilateral cooperation and committed to high-level consultations in the event of “a future Russian armed attack . . . to determine appropriate and necessary measures to support Ukraine and impose costs on Russia.”³³⁴ However, the U.S.-Ukraine agreement—and the other G7 bilateral accords—falls short of a binding mutual defense agreement, such as that enshrined in NATO’s Article 5. Analysts have suggested that in the future, Washington could outline more-specific goals, expand or institutionalize the agreement, or strengthen its legal basis.³³⁵ An expanded security commitment could be used to convey U.S. determination to outlast Russian hostilities or to induce Ukraine to participate in settlement negotiations.³³⁶ U.S. security guarantees could also be established to encourage Russian adherence to the terms of a ceasefire or postwar settlement.

The ramifications for Europe are difficult to anticipate and would likely vary depending on the extent of U.S. commitments, the military balance at the time, and the state of the European and Russian DIBs. Most notably, a U.S. security guarantee would represent an expansion in the United States’ security role and could thereby help reduce European anxiety about the strength of the United States’ commitment to the region. Given recent memories of the U.S. withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action and evidence of political resistance within the United States (see next section), such a demonstration may not be sufficient to dispel European fears that future U.S. presidential administrations would renege on U.S. commitments or that congressional opposition could stymie or delay assistance. Similarly, U.S. security guarantees would lower one obstacle on Ukraine’s path to EU membership but would not resolve other contentious issues likely to protract negotiations.

The United States Withdraws from European Alliance Commitments

The prospect that the United States might reduce its security commitments already looms over European debates over defense spending, strategic autonomy, and the war in Ukraine. President Trump’s ambivalent attitude toward NATO, combined with his repeated criticism of perceived European free riding, has raised concerns that he might either reduce U.S. commitments to NATO, condition U.S. assistance on evidence of Europe taking on an increased share of the burden, or take steps toward withdrawing the United States from the Alliance.³³⁷ Although polling suggests Americans continue to hold largely favorable views of NATO, annual Pew Research Center polls suggest that the number of U.S. adults who see a benefit to NATO membership has declined in recent years amid the resurgence of a protectionist thread in domestic political debates.³³⁸ As part of a

³³³ Mykhailo Soldatenko, “Getting Ukraine’s Security Agreements Right,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 8, 2024.

³³⁴ White House, “Fact Sheet: U.S.-Ukraine Bilateral Security Agreement,” fact sheet, June 13, 2024.

³³⁵ See, for example, Eric Ciaramella, *Envisioning a Long-Term Security Arrangement for Ukraine*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2023; Mykhailo Soldatenko, “What Will Security Commitments to Ukraine Look Like?” Lawfare, August 4, 2023; Soldatenko, 2024.

³³⁶ Ciaramella, 2023; Soldatenko, 2023; Soldatenko, 2024.

³³⁷ Michael Hirsch, “Trump’s Plan for NATO Is Emerging,” Politico, July 2, 2024.

³³⁸ Richard Wike, Moira Fagan, Sneha Gubbala, and Sarah Austin, *Growing Partisan Divisions over NATO and Ukraine*, Pew Research Center, May 8, 2024, pp. 19–21.

broad push for U.S. retrenchment, U.S. lawmakers have pressed for the United States to substantially resize its footprint and reduce or cut off funding for the Alliance.³³⁹ Competing interests in the Indo-Pacific region, defense budget constraints, and wider fiscal pressures could lead the United States to reconsider its security role in Europe.³⁴⁰

The United States' abdication would cast European militaries' shortfalls in stark light and present European leaders with a tough choice: attempt to reduce their insecurity by accommodating Russian demands or accelerate rearmament by dramatically increasing national and multinational spending, likely at the cost of social programs and longstanding fiscal policies. Some countries with more traditionally favorable attitudes toward Russia may attempt to bargain bilaterally with Moscow, undermining the cohesion required to maintain—let alone continue expanding—the EU's restrictions on relations with Russia and efforts to jumpstart European defense production and cooperation. Yet many other countries, particularly the frontline states that feel the most threatened by Russia, are likely to remain skeptical of engagement given the perceived incompatibility of their interests with Russia's. As during the period from 2016 to 2020, Eastern European countries may offer new economic inducements, such as offers to offset the cost of U.S. infrastructure or personnel, in an attempt to preserve elements of the U.S. presence in their countries.³⁴¹ They may also band together with other like-minded countries, such as the UK, Sweden, and Finland, to establish new multinational frameworks outside EU or NATO auspices. Although defense spending across the continent would likely be highly uneven, countries along Russia's borders might accelerate rearmament in an attempt to outpace Russian reconstitution and counter the perception that the United States' disengagement has created a new window of opportunity to settle old scores.³⁴²

The United States' withdrawal would validate those who have long called for Europe to exercise greater strategic autonomy. Yet European countries' differing responses would likely make developing consensus around a new security architecture extremely difficult, and it is unclear whether they would be able to establish the unity required to assert influence on the global stage. The implications for Ukraine's EU membership are also unclear and likely dependent on the state of Ukrainian forces and territory at the time of U.S. withdrawal. If Ukraine has withstood the Russian invasion, some members may push for rapid EU enlargement as a demonstration of resolve despite U.S. engagement. However, others may push for Brussels to husband its resources, leading to an inward turn for EU politics.

Destabilization of Russia

Since the start of the war, some analysts have cautioned that the conflict's accumulating human and economic costs could deepen regional fissures, galvanize popular discontent, or embolden challengers to the Putin regime.³⁴³ The short-lived mutiny led by Wagner Group leader Yevgeny

³³⁹ Giulia Carbonaro, "Full List of Republicans That Voted to Defund NATO," *Newsweek*, June 5, 2024.

³⁴⁰ For a discussion of potential paths, see Emma Ashford and MacKenna Rawlins, "American Roulette: Scenarios for US Retrenchment and the Future of European Defense," Stimson Center, July 8, 2024.

³⁴¹ For precedent, see Herszenhorn, 2018; Sheftalovich, 2018.

³⁴² Ashford and Rawlins, 2024.

³⁴³ See, for example, Thomas Grove and Yaroslav Trofimov, "Prigozhin Is Gone, but the Causes of Russia's Growing Instability Persist," *Wall Street Journal*, August 24, 2023; Maksim Samorukov, "Putin's Brittle Regime," *Foreign Affairs*, April 25, 2024.

Prigozhin illustrated the tensions the war has already created within the Russian system, although experts continue to disagree over the extent to which the incident is indicative of the Putin regime's resilience or fragility.³⁴⁴ Regardless, the incident offers, as one observer has noted, a "reminder that political threats in autocracies often emerge unpredictably, and political change often occurs in a nonlinear fashion in these settings."³⁴⁵

How European countries would respond to the destabilization of Russia is uncertain given the dearth of serious public discussion of the prospect since the late 1990s. European leaders almost certainly would view instability in Russia with trepidation, but the extent and nature of their adaptations would depend on whether Putin retained control, the composition and political orientation of any new government that might arise, the implications for the war in Ukraine, the severity of the risk to the Russian Federation's territorial integrity, and the status of Russia's nuclear arsenal. Differing risk tolerances and attitudes toward Russia may also lead to disagreements over whether such instability could present opportunities to establish a more favorable military balance. Europeans would likely look to the United States to take the lead, particularly in an event in which control of Russia's nuclear weapons becomes uncertain. However, a scenario in which Putin were replaced with another member of his inner circle would likely not drive major variations in European policies toward Russia given the likelihood that the new leadership would either continue or intensify the regime's autocratic practices. Indeed, some of the loudest criticism of Russia's war efforts have emanated from ultra-right nationalist figures, who have urged the Kremlin to adopt more-aggressive policies in Ukraine and a more confrontational policy toward Europe and the United States.³⁴⁶ EU leaders have made clear that a relaxation of sanctions and a reset of EU-Russia relations would require a fundamental reorientation in Russian foreign policy and is not dependent on the regime.³⁴⁷ Similarly, a geographically limited rebellion or a failed mutiny likely would not drive a change in European policy, although it might absorb Russian resources and attention that otherwise might be used abroad.

However, a breakdown of public order, such as the resurgence of separatist movements or the outbreak of civil conflict, would likely trigger fears of state collapse and the creation of a political vacuum on Europe's borders. In such a scenario, some European leaders may be incentivized to reduce pressure on the regime and to pursue limited cooperation to ensure the security of the country's nuclear forces. However, Europeans have very limited options for responding to such an event; lifting sanctions, for example, would not produce meaningful near-term changes in Russian economy or otherwise help to redress the immediate drivers of instability. Furthermore, countries with more-unfavorable views of Russia, such as Poland or the Baltic countries, likely would argue for continued pressure to further weaken Russia's capacity to threaten NATO territory.

³⁴⁴ For varied discussion of the implications of the mutiny, see Andrea Kendall-Taylor, "The Russia Stability Tracker," Center for a New American Security, November 2023. For examples of broader disagreements, see Julian G. Waller, "Putin the Resilient," *Foreign Affairs*, August 14, 2024; Samorukov, 2024.

³⁴⁵ See Tim Frye, quoted in Kendall-Taylor, 2023.

³⁴⁶ See, for example, Yuliya Chernova, "In Russia, Far-Right Nationalists Offer Rare Criticism of Kremlin's War Effort," *Wall Street Journal*, August 22, 2022; "Russian Nationalist, Kremlin Critic Girkin Sentenced to 4 Years in Prison," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, January 25, 2024.

³⁴⁷ Meister, 2022.

Recommendations

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has accomplished something that U.S. diplomacy alone could not for years: a multiyear increase in overall defense spending, a push to decouple from Russian fossil fuels, a renewed energy to equip and modernize NATO, and a degree of cohesion among the majority of European allies unobserved in several decades. Defying prewar expectations, European capitals are dedicating substantial resources, political attention, and political capital to translating visions for collective defense into a practical policy agenda, even as political statements have often outpaced states' ability to implement defense reforms. However, significant obstacles to achieving European goals remain, including outstanding questions about their ability to sustain large defense budgets and to maintain political momentum over the long term. As EU, NATO, and European policymakers work to translate common strategies into specific policies, national differences likely will be exposed. The unpredictability of U.S. domestic political processes will continue to cause uncertainty about the United States' role in the region that could fray the alignment currently apparent in U.S. and European strategy.

Encouraging greater European responsibility sharing has been a consistent component of U.S. defense policy toward the region for over seven decades. European countries must take the lead in addressing the political, economic, and practical obstacles to improving their defense capabilities. However, our analysis highlights that the United States has a role to play in sustaining European and transatlantic unity and reinforcing positive trends in European defense spending, capabilities, and initiatives. The United States should also seize the window of opportunity to leverage the benefits of new defense investments and initiatives to advance its strategic and operational objectives in the region. We have identified several recommendations for how the United States can mitigate the risk of backsliding, help to focus European investments and capability development to align with U.S. priorities, and prepare to incorporate potential European improvements into U.S. planning.

Recommendations for the U.S. Government

We make the following recommendations for the U.S. government:

- **Expand U.S. consultations and coordination with the EU on defense matters to demonstrate U.S. commitment to the principle of complementarity and redress allies' concerns that investments in EU defense capability will alienate the United States.** European concerns about potential negative U.S. reactions have decreased the amount of support for some EU initiatives intended to promote DIB reforms and European capacity building. Although senior U.S. officials have lent rhetorical support for EU programs, the United States can do more to help institutionalize EU-NATO cooperation. This could include pressing Turkey and Cyprus to enable more formalized collaboration between the EU and NATO. In addition, establishing routine mechanisms for U.S.-EU consultation and coordination would also help both sides work through political, economic, and administrative obstacles. The United States could request an increase in the frequency and level of the recently established U.S.-EU Security and Defense Dialogues and could use its position within the NAC to encourage the establishment of a routine schedule of consultations with

the EU Political and Security Committee on a broad set of defense and security matters.³⁴⁸ Although the NAC and Political and Security Committee have been meeting informally since 2016 and more formally since 2022 to coordinate Ukraine assistance, a more structured dialogue with clearly established objectives would benefit both parties. Meetings between these two bodies provide a rare opportunity to align activities and redress outstanding concerns.³⁴⁹ A more routine schedule would help to advance collaboration, sustain momentum, decrease unnecessary redundancies in NATO and EU activities, and reduce the risk of conflict between the institutions. Regular consultations between ambassadors to NATO and the EU would also provide the United States greater visibility into intra-EU political debates. Alternatively, consultations between the European Commission and NATO International Military Staff would help to bureaucratically anchor the two organizations.

- **To help to ensure U.S. and European initiatives are aligned, continue and consider improving information-sharing with non-Five Eye allies regarding Russian intent, capabilities, and potential courses of action.** Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine created a general awareness among European countries that Russia poses a potential military threat to the territorial integrity of NATO and EU member countries. However, European allies continue to disagree about Russia's specific capacity and intent to threaten European and U.S. interests, as well as its pace of reconstitution. Consistent information-sharing can help to promote a common European understanding of the challenge and to align defense cooperation and capabilities development as Russian capabilities and activities evolve. Since 2022, the U.S. intelligence community has sought to improve the sharing of intelligence and information with U.S. allies and partners, but policy, procedural, and cultural factors continue to impose limitations and delays.
- **Encourage the creation of an EU fund to support member states' implementation of initiatives aligned with NATO resilience priorities.** Improvements in the resilience of allied critical infrastructure can benefit U.S. forces operating in the theater by ensuring access to off-base resources needed to sustain operations. Such investments can also support U.S. efforts to maintain or revise basing, access, and host nation support agreements by demonstrating U.S. commitment to local communities' safety and reducing opportunities for Russia or other adversaries to use threats against critical infrastructure to influence internal deliberations.
- **Continue to encourage the development of institutional economic and industrial relationships between U.S. allies in Europe and the Pacific region and cooperation through non-NATO frameworks.** The war in Ukraine has fostered new security ties between Europe and Japan, South Korea, and Australia as European countries realize potential opportunities to access military equipment and diplomatic support. To date, U.S. efforts have emphasized how European political and military contributions may help advance U.S. competition objectives in the Indo-Pacific region. However, the United States should also consider opportunities to develop connections between the regional networks to advance

³⁴⁸ At time of writing, the U.S.-EU Security and Defense Dialogues have met once a year since their establishment in 2022. Sebastian Sprenger, "First-Ever Defense Talks Between US, EU Near amid Ukraine War," *Defense News*, April 19, 2022.

³⁴⁹ For a similar recommendation, see Mathieu Droin, "NATO and the European Union: The Burden of Sharing," Center for Strategic and International Studies, January 17, 2023.

both theaters’ resilience to external and internal challenges. Given the EU’s role in shaping DIB policy and its ability to help fund European acquisitions, EU joint procurement and DIB initiatives may be better suited than NATO frameworks to institutionalize defense cooperation and establish common standards. The United States could, for example, encourage the EU to study the potential benefits and trade-offs of extending invitations to select Indo-Pacific countries to participate as third states in select PESCO projects to encourage the joint production of capabilities for which there is currently no European provider.³⁵⁰

Recommendations for the U.S. Department of Defense

We make the following recommendations for DoD:

- **Increase and regularize dialogues with the European Defence Agency and other EU institutions to encourage the interchangeability of new systems, particularly munitions, developed through new European joint development and procurement programs.** The United States has traditionally encouraged European allies to purchase American systems to enhance interoperability and ensure capability. Given the extant shortfalls in U.S. and European defense production and the apparent need to revive the transatlantic industrial base, however, the United States should encourage European defense spending and procurement from European sources. If sustained, increased European defense investments in research, development, and procurement may enhance European contributions to NATO, support other multinational operations with the United States, and supplement U.S. production in the event of a major contingency that drains U.S. stockpiles and stresses the United States’ ability to produce. However, routine coordination through such forums as the armaments directors’ meetings is required to establish common military standards, technical specifications, and practices.
- **Identify areas in which European producers may be well or best suited to address U.S. capability and stockpile gaps.** Genuine interoperability goes both ways, and new European defense initiatives may provide novel solutions for capability and capacity gaps for a potential future contingency in which U.S. demand exceeds national production or transport capacity. Although European stocks and production capacity are currently stretched thin, U.S. planners should monitor their growth and identify whether European producers are developing components, equipment, or weapons that could augment U.S. supplies, particularly in the event of an early wartime surge. Leveraging this opportunity requires identifying and communicating U.S. needs that could be met in a major contingency, as well as consideration of multiyear orders to incentivize production; these needs should be identified and communicated to major European producer countries and in European-led joint production forums. In identifying what non-U.S. origin equipment, munitions, and other support could

³⁵⁰ As of August 2024, Canada, Norway, and the United States already participate as third states. The UK was invited to participate in a project in 2022 and Canada in 2023. EEAS, “Questions & Answers: Third States’ Participation in PESCO Projects,” May 23, 2023. Japan and South Korea reportedly have expressed interest in increased defense industrial cooperation with the EU; see “EU Seeks Defence Industry Partnerships with Japan, South Korea, Says Nikkei,” Reuters, June 23, 2024.

be leveraged—and what adaptations might be required—DoD, DAF and U.S. Air Forces in Europe should consider opportunities to use European stocks or production lines to reduce logistical barriers to implementing concepts for distributed air operations in Europe.

- **To help preserve European cohesion, work through NATO forums to identify “common denominator” requirements useful for responding to variety of hostile actions, including measures short of war.** NATO’s new deterrence and defense plans represent an important step toward identifying capabilities, posture, and exercise requirements. Yet some Southern European members that are currently facing greater challenges from migration have already expressed reticence to focus NATO resources on the Russia threat out of concern that NATO may divert resources from counterterrorism requirements. Future crises, such as a resurgent migrant crisis, a substantial increase in terrorist attacks, a public health emergency, or climate change, could divert attention or galvanize opposition from needed investments. To prepare for a variety of futures and to preserve support from European members already concerned that the Alliance is neglecting other threats, DoD can assist NATO in identifying high-return investments and communicate their usefulness for a variety of contingencies. By clarifying how NATO is preparing to address all members’ priorities, the United States can help to preserve cohesion, encourage equitable contributions from all members, and strengthen political consultations between members on issues vital to the Alliance.
- **Continue to cooperate with the EU on regional and security issues beyond Russia that preoccupy Southern members,** such as migration, counterterrorism, and climate change. Local crises can generate friction among European countries and weaken the consensus required to tackle major obstacles to building European defense capacity and resilience. To reduce or avert concerns that EU and NATO leaders’ focus on Russia is allowing other problems to fester, the United States should pursue opportunities to cooperate with European allies to redress drivers of insecurity.

Recommendations for the U.S. Air Force

We make the following recommendations for USAF:

- **Assess and communicate to European allies the potential munitions, maintenance, and spare parts requirements that might differ from demand signals created by the Russia-Ukraine war.** The Russia-Ukraine war has energized Europeans to increase defense procurement, modernize their DIBs, and reexamine the forces required for a potential future high-intensity conflict. Given the time required to build new force structure and infrastructure, the decisions EU and European leaders make over the next few years are likely to shape the forces available for decades to come. Yet there is a risk of over-learning from the Russia-Ukraine war. Current European efforts to boost production emphasize the need to either supply Ukraine or backfill European donors’ inventories. However, a potential future conflict between NATO and Russia likely would generate different operational needs,

particularly for air forces, given their more limited use in the current conflict.³⁵¹ A comparison of future and current needs can help to ensure that these production lines are established before they are needed. This should include consideration of how best to prepare for prolonged conflicts and potential adjustments in stockpiles of assets like fuel and spare parts, as well as transportation and distribution networks.

- **Increase information-sharing related to the drivers of U.S. Air Force operational requirements in other theaters, particularly the Indo-Pacific region.** Despite the United States' forceful response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, European allies remain concerned that political, financial, and strategic factors could lead the United States to reduce its commitments to European security. Although European leaders generally recognize their dependence on the United States, uncertainty about the United States' future role in the region historically has weakened transatlantic political ties and complicated efforts to align U.S. and European defense and industrial policy. Uncertainty about the future U.S. role and the availability of U.S. forces also contributes to tensions among Europeans and could hamper efforts to build the indigenous capabilities required to improve European responsibility sharing. Making U.S. policy and posture decisions more predictable by clarifying the rationale behind them can help to rightsize expectations, avert or reduce future tensions, and inform European force structure and acquisitions decisions. The Russia-Ukraine war has created a window of opportunity to shape long-term European investments.

³⁵¹ Mark Hvizda, Bryan Frederick, Alisa Laufer, Alexandra T. Evans, Kristen Gunness, and David A. Ochmanek, *Dispersed, Disguised, and Degradable: The Implications of the Fighting in Ukraine for Future U.S.-Involved Conflicts*, RAND Corporation, RR-A3141-2, 2025.

Abbreviations

ASAP	Act in Support of Ammunition Production
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
DAF	U.S. Department of the Air Force
DDA	Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area
DIB	defense industrial base
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
EDIRPA	European Defence Industry Reinforcement Through Common Procurement Act
EEAS	European External Action Service
eFP	enhanced Forward Presence
EPF	European Peace Facility
EU	European Union
EUMAM	European Union Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine
G7	Group of Seven
GDP	gross domestic product
LNG	liquefied natural gas
MAP	Membership Action Plan
NAC	North Atlantic Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NRC	NATO-Russia Council
NSATU	NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine
PESCO	Permanent Structure Cooperation
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication
UK	United Kingdom
USAF	U.S. Air Force
USAFE	U.S. Air Forces in Europe

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The Russia-Ukraine war has compelled European leaders to ask fundamental questions about European security and defense, confront the realities of modern interstate conflict, and reassess the tools available to manage the current emergency and defend against future threats. Since the war began, European nations working collectively through the European Union (EU), North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and sub-regional coalitions have come together in opposition to Russia's invasion and in defense of Ukraine's sovereignty. It remains to be seen, however, whether the war will drive broader changes in European understandings of the threat to their collective interests and what is required to ensure their collective defense.

RAND researchers examined the consequences of the Russia-Ukraine war and how U.S. allies in Europe understand and pursue their security. To assess whether the conflict is likely to drive long-lasting changes in European security priorities, investments, and relations, the researchers analyzed the conflict's effects on (1) European attitudes toward relations with Russia; (2) European collective security strategies, institutions, and resources; and (3) prospects for increased integration with Ukraine.

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