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A new
opening?

German-Polish cooperation
and the war in Ukraine

edited by Adam Balcer

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Table of contents

Introduction

Adam Balcer

Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine has already lasted for two years and represents the most important threat to the security of the EU, Germany and particularly Poland. The war brought new challenges for German-Polish relations. Certainly, the change of government in Poland after the election that took place on 15th October 2023 created a new window of opportunity for a substantial rapprochement between Berlin and Warsaw. This could lead to the intensification of their cooperation in Eastern Europe, which may become a game changer for the region.

Therefore, we decided to publish this collection of essays titled **a new opening? German-Polish cooperation and the war in Ukraine**. They were written by prominent German and Polish experts and provide both capitals with a sober and comprehensive assessment of developments concerning the war, German and Polish Eastern policies (*Ostpolitik* and *Polityka wschodnia*) and the Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine. They also suggest concrete recommendations for the German and Polish authorities, expert communities and civil societies. Our collection starts with **Kai-Olaf Lang**'s essay **Doomed to conflict or a marriage of convenience? The future of German and Polish Eastern Policies**. According to Lang, there is a huge chance for the strengthening of cooperation between Berlin and Warsaw in Eastern Europe. However, he believes that such a new togetherness is a possibility, not an inevitability. In his opinion, outlining the futures of German and Polish Eastern policies can help to avoid disappointment and improve chances for cooperation. **Stephen Bischoff**, in his essay **The EU changed Ukraine, and now Ukraine is changing the EU**, shows that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine represents a fundamental challenge also to the EU. This is because it is targeting the democratic values of Euromaidan and the enlargement process. The third article, which is titled **Ukraine's EU integration process: Providing a positive narrative** and written by **Susan Stewart**, believes that despite serious challenges, Ukraine is managing to continue the process of EU integration during wartime. According to Stewart, political and societal actors in Poland and Germany can help to disseminate a positive narrative regarding Ukraine's EU accession in order to keep up momentum

on the EU side and ensure the necessary support for Ukraine in the upcoming years. **Adam Kobieracki**, in the third essay of our collection **"Der Weg ist das Ziel". NATO-Ukraine Cooperation and Prospects for Ukraine's Membership**, admits that the process of Ukraine's integration with NATO will be a long and turbulent one that will have important implications for the international security environment even before its actual conclusion. He underlines that while this process carries on, it is imperative that the West, including Germany and Poland, continues its support and military aid for Kyiv. The next essay, **Maciej Matysiak's The global war in Ukraine: the current state and possible scenarios**, presents the war in Ukraine as a de facto war for systemic domination between a democratic system composed of a coalition of countries that supports Kyiv and a dictatorial totalitarian system. Matysiak assumes that the war may end only if Russia is forced into it and has no other acceptable options. Despite this, the threat from Moscow will not disappear even after the conflict is over. Finally, **Agnieszka Legucka** in her article **From Kremlin bots to Sputnik: Russian disinformation in the EU and the lessons for Poland and Germany**, analyses how Russia is adapting to EU blockades and restrictions by introducing new ways to target European societies with disinformation. In her opinion, the Kremlin is tailoring its manipulated message to specific audiences, including Germans and Poles. Moreover, the discreditation of Ukraine continues to be the most important theme of Russian disinformation.

This publication is the outcome of the **5th German-Polish Round Table on Eastern Europe** that the **College of Eastern Europe** (KEW) organizes every year at its headquarters at the Castle on Water in Wojnowice (Lower Silesia, Poland) together with its German partners: **Austausch** and **Zentrum Liberale Moderne** (ZLM). Every year this roundtable gathers experts, diplomats, journalists, politicians and NGO activists from Germany, Poland and other countries. Indeed, the main goal of our initiative is to bring closer the positions of Germany and Poland, reduce the differences between them, make them aware of common interests and overcome mutual distrust and stereotypes**.** The roundtable is co-funded by **Heinrich Boll Stiftung**, the **Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation** and the city of **Wrocław**.

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Doomed to conflict or a marriage of convenience? The future of German and Polish Eastern Policies

Kai-Olaf Lang

Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine brings new challenges but also opportunities for German-Polish relations. While Germany undergoes a rapid and sobering reconfiguration of its Eastern and security policies, Poland feels vindicated and at the same time strengthened by its gains as a key country on NATO's Eastern Flank and as a crucial supporter of Ukraine. However, to predict a period of German-Polish convergence in Eastern policies would be a foregone conclusion. a new togetherness is a possibility, not an inevitability. Given this, outlining the futures of German and Polish Eastern policies and what they mean for mutual relations can help to avoid disappointment and improve chances for cooperation.

After the end of the Cold War, relations with the "East" have always been key elements of foreign and security policy for both Germany and Poland. This could have boded well for German-Polish cooperation, particularly after both countries became partners in NATO and the European Union. However, Germany's *Ostpolitik* (Eastern Policy) and Poland's *polityka wschodnia* (Eastern Policy) often were at odds. Particularly, differing views on how to deal with Russia have caused irritations. Despite a permanent German-Polish debate on Eastern affairs, Eastern policies have been a source of trouble rather than a driver of cooperation in bilateral relations. Hence, it comes as no surprise that in the past, EU activities or transatlantic efforts to strengthen Eastern policies did not have a strong German-Polish component.

After Ostpolitik: New Opportunities, Old Complications

Russia's full-scale aggression of 2022 against Ukraine marked a watershed moment for German-Polish relations. Berlin has declared a reset in its Eastern and security policies, as the main tenets of its traditional *Ostpolitik* have been

abandoned.[1] The new "Zeitenwende"[2] subsequently initiated a transformation of Germany's defense system and strategic mindset. Poland feels reconfirmed in its assumptions and has taken an early and proactive role as a supporter of Ukraine and in reinforcing defense on NATO's Eastern periphery. Hence, Russia's invasion and Ukraine's struggle for freedom are a unique opportunity, perhaps even a necessity, for embarking on the road of German-Polish cooperation regarding relations with Eastern Europe and handling Russia.

However, for the time being the balance is mixed. a consensus in both countries on the West's fundamental responses to Russia's belligerence contrasts with continuing mistrust and mutual criticism. Despite being on the same page in NATO and the EU and irrespective of strengthened coordination in helping Ukraine, there is also a number of missed opportunities. So, despite a growing demand for German-Polish cooperation in Eastern affairs at the bilateral level, in a European and transatlantic context impediments have continued. This was certainly due to domestic political factors, including a staunch aversion to Germany within the previous Law and Justice government in Warsaw. Also, Berlin's reluctance to send arms to Ukraine led to doubts as to whether Germany was serious about its security and Eastern policy realignment.

Things are further complicated by the fact that both sides have a distorted view of their own Eastern policies, as well as their failures and achievements. In Germany, the dominant narrative is one of a sudden collapse of the old *Ostpolitik*. It is certainly true that the events of 24th February 2022 resulted in a spectacular end to the existing German mindset. However, it is clear that this process has been going on for years. Cooperation with Russia had been continuously eroded and Nord Stream 2 was the last attempt to stabilize relations at a low level rather than a new beginning. Ideas of

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1   For an overview of the main elements and changes in Germany's policy toward Russia since 2014 and in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion against Ukraine see e.g.
Jonas J. Driedger, Inertia and Reactiveness in Germany's Russia Policy From the 2021 Federal Election to the Invasion of Ukraine in 2022, *German Politics and Society*, 136 (40- 4), Winter 2022, pp. 135–151.
Andreas Heinemann-Grüder, Russland-Politik in der Ära Merkel, SIRIUS – *Zeitschrift für Strategische Analysen*, 6 (4), 2022, pp. 359–372.
2   Tobias Bunde, Lessons (to be) learned? Germany's Zeitenwende and European security after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, *Contemporary Security Policy*, 43 (3), 2022, pp. 516-530.
Matthias Mader, Harald Schoen, No Zeitenwende (yet): Early Assessment of German Public Opinion Toward Foreign and Defense Policy After Russia's Invasion of Ukraine, *Politische Vierteljahresschrift*, (64), 2023, pp. 525–547.
Hubertus Bardt e.a., Budget Policy under the Sign of the "Zeitenwende" – What Do We Have to Do Without in Favor of Defense?, ifo Schnelldienst, 07/2023, ifo Institute, Munich, 2023.

transformation, such as the "Partnership for Modernization", had long since disappeared. At the same time, Ukraine gradually emerged as a component of Germany's *Ostpolitik* – not yet autonomous, but not marginal anymore. Hence, Germany's farewell to its *Ostpolitik* was a step-by-step phase out, which was sealed with a big bang. On the other hand, it is often overlooked that Poland also has deficits in its Eastern policy. After 1989, Poland's policies concerning the East were inspired by the idea of establishing constructive relations with Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania.[3] At the same time, Warsaw wanted to support the sovereignty of these states and their wishes to move closer to the political structures of the West. As the geostrategic cornerstone of the whole region, Ukraine played a particular role and has been considered a strategic partner for Poland. This all was to go hand in hand with a normalization of relations with Russia. This approach, which aims at building relations with the nations of the old Polish-Lithuanian *Rzeczpospolita* going back to the times of its Jagiellonian rulers, is sometimes described as being "neo-Jagiellonian" in nature. It is also sometimes called "neo-Promethian", referring to a geopolitical concept advanced by Józef Piłsudski and others in the inter-war-period. This would have seen the establishment of a federation among Central and Eastern European states in order to build an effective alliance, which could help limit Russia's imperial aspirations. Poland's Eastern policy, despite its undeniable successes, such as making the EU more active vis-à-vis its Eastern neighbors, could not prevent Belarus from transforming itself into Moscow's puppet state. It could also not stop Ukraine from being attacked by Russia, or Kyiv having to struggle with the consequences of the war's devastation for years to come. In Poland, it is often Berlin or even Washington that is blamed for this catastrophe. However, this is only part of the explanation for these failures of *polityka wschodnia*. The other part of the explication has to do with Poland's limited influence among the elites in Ukraine, constraints regarding Belarus given its Polish minority, restricted economic clout, unresolved issues around historic memories (particularly

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3   For a concise overview of the main components of Poland's Eastern Policy:
     Wojciech Konończuk, Niezmienne pryncypia, czyli o doktrynie polskiej polityki wschodniej, Komentarz, Forum Idei, Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego, 23.07. 2020.
     For a broader historic view:
     Robert Kłaczyński, Prometeizm: utopijna idea czy realne narzędzie polskiej polityki wschodniej, *Studia Politologica*, (18), 2017, pp. 50-60.
     Adam Balcer, Na Wschodzie bez zmian? Polska polityka wschodnia. Stan obecny i perspektywy, Kolegium Europy Wschodniej, Wrocław–Wojnowice 2015.

with Ukraine) and also an inability to convince EU partners to pay more attention to Ukraine and Belarus.

But there are also wider structural issues concerning the broader geopolitical environment, which complicate a German-Polish relaunch in Eastern affairs. The two decisive questions in this context will be the long-term posture of the West vis-à-vis Russia and its continued support for Ukraine's security and inclusion within European integration. In both respects, Germany and Poland will have to show a new commitment, being aware of their differences but avoiding divergence.

There are no clear predictions when it comes to developments in Europe's East. Geostrategic shocks, domestic convulsions, changing fortunes on the battlefield and the political economy of war and peace will all have an important impact on German and Polish Eastern policies. This is also true of domestic developments in both countries, which could diverge considerably. One possibility regarding opportunities for mutual cooperation, which come with their own challenges of potential disagreement, is to influence the shape of the new Eastern policies in an effective manner. In the following scenarios, three basic futures are described with regards to German and Polish policies in the region.

Three Scenarios

Scenario A: All Right Now. The war has been a catalyst for German-Polish rapprochement and has led to convergence in Eastern policies. Given the enduring threat of a revisionist Russia, as well as Ukraine's successful resistance against the invasion, Germany would continue its *Zeitenwende*. Germany also has acknowledged that generous support for Ukraine was decisive for Kyiv's survival as a state and limiting Russia's expansionist plans. As a result, the considerable help would be viewed as a useful investment in both national and European security. Defense spending would reach NATO commitments and the Bundeswehr would overcome basic shortcomings. For example, it would achieve its flagship project of a permanent 5,000 troop presence in Lithuania. Even though Germany is still hesitant regarding Ukraine's NATO ambitions, it is part of a coalition that has supported security guarantees for Ukraine, alongside other Eastern European states. Even though a strongman holds power in the Kremlin, Berlin has rejected the idea of a new pan-European security framework that would include Russia, as proposed by France.

Poland has successfully modernized its armed forces, with defense spending at a stable level of at least 3% of the country's economy. Bilateral political and economic tensions with Ukraine have not disappeared. Despite this, they would be isolated from issues such as strategic, security and EU-related co-operation. Germany and Poland by this point would have become a reliable tandem for EU enlargement. Revitalized bilateral talks about EU reform and the terms of bringing new members into the community, enriched by occasional Weimar Triangle meetings, could contribute to preparing changes in the EU's decision-making process and in the EU budget. This would create the preconditions for the accession of Ukraine and other candidates, which may be due in the first half of the 2030s. Regular meetings at the top level and between line ministries from Germany, Poland and Ukraine have bolstered Kyiv's preparedness for the EU. They have also brought about some palpable initiatives in the context of ongoing reconstruction. Berlin and Warsaw, as a result of their steady communication with Washington, are instrumental in ensuring US engagement in Central and Eastern Europe. This is despite Washington's growing distraction by new tensions in the Middle East and in the Pacific. On the horizon, it appears that there may be a Europe almost without an East in geopolitical terms. Hence, a period that moves debate beyond what we understand to be Eastern policy could well emerge. If Ukraine, Moldova and maybe Georgia are part of the structures of the West, what remains from *Ostpolitik* and *polityka wschodnia* is containment of Russia (likely together with Belarus). This represents the core of security policy, alongside fostering cooperation with countries in the South Caucasus and Central Asia.

Scenario B: At Odds Again. Like in many other Western countries, the ongoing war redirects political attention from Eastern Europe and erodes public support for Ukraine. Economic hardships, protracted crises and new geopolitical clashes make Germany more inward-looking and Poland more insistent on its national interests, also vis-à-vis Ukraine. Germany, France and also the US eventually nudge Ukraine to accept "negotiations" with Russia to end the fighting. This outcome would not be satisfactory for Kyiv but rising conflict fatigue in Western Europe and North America may force Ukraine to give in. Poland could consider Germany the main actor responsible for such a development. Whereas Germany has worked in close coordination with France and the US, it has consulted Poland only sporadically or in a ceremonial way. Poland's doubts regarding Germany are also fueled by a decreasing enthusiasm

for *Zeitenwende*, a sluggish modernization of the Bundeswehr and the emergence of a new "peace movement". This new campaign could include not only the far right and left but may also be driven by a tired middle class. This group is beginning to feel the fallout of economic transformation and the end of the traditional German economic model and blames these issues on sanctions against Russia and costly support for Ukraine. Parts of the political mainstream are now demanding a new détente initiative with Russia, in order to add dialogue to deterrence. Moreover, Germany's eagerness for EU enlargement is decreasing. As resistance to internal EU reform has been too strong, the condition of rebuilding the community before new members join may not be met. a rising need to consolidate the national budget could move Germany closer to more "frugal" EU countries, which would decelerate the accession of Ukraine and other membership hopefuls. In this scenario, Germany would take a considerable credibility hit in Poland and other Central European countries. Warsaw could deepen relations with the US in response to the lack of a sustainable reorientation of Germany and France concerning Eastern affairs. At the same time, Polish-Ukrainian relations would sour. Conflicts over practical issues like agriculture or transport, as well as over symbolic and historical questions, could spoil strategic cooperation. a potential debate in Poland on a review of its Eastern policies and a neo-Jagiellonian approach would not lead to a geopolitical repositioning. However, it is likely that there would be a call for a more assertive approach vis-à-vis Ukraine. The result is atrophy in German-Polish action concerning geostrategic issues in general and Eastern policies in particular. Both countries may feel that the EU had developed no momentum to craft a new Eastern policy – and one of the reasons for that was a lack of German-Polish cooperation.

Scenario C: Cooperation without Strategy, New Divergence on Security
After a short honeymoon and pledges of a revival in German-Polish relations in early 2024 (with a special emphasis on Eastern policies and Ukraine), both countries face up to the harsh realities of their different interests. It is true that a fundamental agreement on Eastern affairs could continue to exist. Both countries believe in the long-term threat posed by Russia and the need to support and integrate Ukraine. a couple of common initiatives to support Ukraine would be launched, alongside cooperation in the realm of security policy. Defense on the Eastern Flank and in the Baltic Sea region would also be occurring at the same time. Also, both countries champion the EU's new

geopolitical role and the need to develop a credible enlargement policy. However, they may fail to agree on the range and depth of internal EU reforms, which means they would not be able to contribute to forging a compromise that would enable the accession of Ukraine and other potential member states. Germany's engagement with Ukraine is substantial when it comes to both reconstruction and associated material and financial support. However, it may be lukewarm regarding membership prospects in both the EU and NATO. Even though Poland itself would also begin to look at the fiscal or economic implications of enlargement, it would still be a strong voice in favor of bringing Ukraine into the West. Growing uncertainty about the sustainability of the US presence in Eastern Europe may not necessarily lead to an increase in EU action or to more common German-Polish commitment. Of course, the possible return of Donald Trump to the White House in 2024 would very likely not lead to new unity between Berlin and Warsaw. Whereas both countries agree in principle that the EU should assume more responsibility for its own security, Germany could move closer to the French idea of an "autonomous" EU in security policy and a "sovereign" European Defense Union. At the same time, Poland could double down on bilateral cooperation with the US in order to maintain basic American engagement on NATO's Eastern Flank. Both countries cooperate in various practical areas, like the economic modernization of Eastern European countries and aspects of Ukraine's reconstruction, such as connectivity and civil society contacts. However, this does not mean that there would be permanent German-Polish strategic thinking about the East. Irrespective of a shared analysis concerning the risks stemming from Russia for Europe's security, threat perceptions may continue to differ and a new divergence on security could arise. Poland continues to doubt whether Germany is ready to follow and step up a transatlantic policy of deterrence and containment against Russia. As a result, Germany feels disappointed due to what it considers to be a lack of acknowledgment of its efforts to overcome its old *Ostpolitik* and self-restraint regarding security.

Recommendations: what could be done?

Irrespective of the complexities of future Eastern policies, Germany and Poland have a common interest in working against Russia's aggression, strengthening NATO's deterrence posture and stabilizing Ukraine and its potential Europeanization. Against this backdrop, both countries could make a couple of realistic steps.

- Germany and Poland could develop common efforts to bolster Ukraine's EU accession process. After political consensus among member states is reached negotiations will start. Improving preparedness will be a key priority. Member states can contribute to this beyond or in the framework of EU measures. Both countries could coordinate their twinning efforts and think about new ways to support alignment with EU law not only for Ukraine but also Moldova and Georgia.

- Germany and Poland could initiate an early strategic debate about Europe's future security order. This could include countries from NATO's Eastern Flank, as well as Western European allies and the US and in some formats even Ukraine. This could help to combat fears about a possible German backslide in security arrangements after the war. In this context, security guarantees and Ukraine's relations with NATO should also be discussed.

- Germany, Poland and Ukraine could set up a trilateral dialogue on demography and migration. The aim of this exchange would be to develop strategies to tackle demographic challenges in Ukraine in the context of refugee policies in Germany and Poland. One question is whether Germany and Poland should encourage Ukrainian citizens to return after the war, or whether they should be integrated in the countries where they got shelter and where at least parts of these groups would help overcoming shortages in some segments of the labor-market. These talks would include government authorities in charge of these issues alongside civil society and experts.

- Weimar Triangle meetings, apart from generally discussing Ukraine's EU ambitions and engaging France in Europe's East, could be used to clarify priorities and detect difficulties in the enlargement process. Gatherings of ministers in charge of agriculture, economy, energy and transport should include talks about the implications of EU enlargement and ideas on how to best deal with them.

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The EU changed Ukraine, and now Ukraine is changing the EU
Stephan Bischoff

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is also targeting the EU due to the fact that the conflict represents a challenge to the democratic values of Euromaidan and integration of Eastern Europe with the Union. As a result, Germany and Poland have a special responsibility in this process. Berlin and Warsaw need a reset in their relations in order to tackle the multiple challenges that they are facing.

Ten years ago, millions of people from all over Ukraine protested for weeks in the centre of Kyiv and other cities. They demanded democracy, the rule of law, an end to pervasive corruption and a pro-European course for their country, which then-President Viktor Yanukovych was trying to abandon due to direct pressure from the Kremlin. These people were aware of the importance of the European Union for the implementation of their demands and human rights as a whole. They were also aware that closer ties with Russia contradicted their ideas. Euromaidan is therefore a milestone on Ukraine's path that began in the 1980s and aims to overcome arbitrariness, oppression and nepotism. Euromaidan represented the fundamental alternative and challenge to Vladimir Putin's autocratic system. Also known as the "Revolution of Dignity", it has triggered a social and reformist political dynamic and created a new basis for democratization and political engagement. Thus, it has established the prerequisites for possible EU accession. Indeed, Maidan has opened up space for political participation, which Ukrainians are now embracing with confidence. Moreover, many young NGOs originating in Maidan have built a new democratic civil society in Ukraine in great contrast to Russia.

The protests can certainly be regarded as a key moment for Ukraine's European integration. Moreover, their significance for Europe and the integration process at a theoretical level cannot be disregarded. Euromaidan is one of the key democratic revolutions of our shared recent history. European integration as we know it today has its origins in the shipyards of Gdansk. The Polish *Solidarność* movement ultimately made German reunification and the EU enlargements of 2004 and 2007 possible. If we recognize

this connection, we understand our responsibility to Ukraine as a part of our community of values.

Russian autocracy versus Ukrainian democracy

The prospect of a successful, democratic and prosperous Ukraine threatened to expose the misguided developments of the Russian system of power. Since Euromaidan, Ukraine has therefore been exposed to constant Russian attempts at destabilization. Putin's war against Ukraine that started in 2014 is a war to maintain his regime's power. Both Euromaidan and a successful democratic Ukraine are perceived by the Kremlin as a threat to the vertical of power – and rightly so. It inspired the people of Belarus and beyond. Putin has been waging a war against the integration of Ukraine into the EU, yet at the same time he is also waging a hybrid war against us and our ideals.

However, despite the Russian aggression since 2014, Ukraine has moved unprecedently closer to the EU over the past decade under the most difficult conditions. An Association Agreement was signed back in 2014, which came fully into force in 2017 and created a free trade area that is intended to bring about Kyiv's gradual economic integration with the EU single market.

A few days after the full-scale Russian invasion – on February 24th 2022 – the country applied to join the EU and was granted candidate status on June 23rd. In order to open accession negotiations, the European Commission demanded seven defined reform priorities, which had to be implemented first. At the beginning of November 2023, the Commission reassessed Ukraine's reform progress and ultimately recommended the opening of EU accession negotiations.[1] The decision to open EU accession negotiations with Ukraine by Europe's heads of state and governments in December 2023 thus marked Putin's first major political defeat.[2] He was unable to dissuade Ukrainian society from its course of reform or undermine wider Western solidarity with Ukraine. This clearly shows that the EU is and remains a reliable partner for Ukraine's progress on democratic reform and that no force can stop the integration process.

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1   European Commission, Ukraine 2023 Report, 08.11.2023. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_699%20Ukraine%20report.pdf
2   Europäischer Rat, Tagung des Europäischen Rates (14. und 15. Dezember 2023) – Schlussfolgerungen, 15.12.2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/68982/europeancouncilconclusions-14-15-12-2023-de.pdf

Post-Maidan EU and Germany's responsibility

However, Euromaidan should no longer be seen as a purely Ukrainian phenomenon. Its impact extends far beyond its borders. The Revolution of Dignity is changing the face of the European Union. The EU, our freedoms, our security and our rights depend to a large degree on developments in Ukraine. No other country has had to pay such a high price for turning to the EU. In doing so, Ukraine is also showing us the relevance and vitality of the values of the EU. Ukraine's integration is the self-assurance of our way of life.

However, we also need to take a sober view. With its war of aggression against Ukraine, the Russian government is breaking the most elementary rules of the international global order. The European peace order of recent decades is the basis for our life in freedom, prosperity and security. Russia had already caused serious damage to the status quo by recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia (2008) and by annexing Crimea in violation of international law (2014). Putin is striving for an international "order" in which violence takes precedence over the rule of law, with internal repression followed by external violence. He seeks confrontation instead of cooperation. We must not allow such an "order" because it is primarily directed against us. Therefore, the EU must step up to the task of becoming an active guardian of European security.

Germany bears a special responsibility for peace and democracy in Europe. As the country responsible for the horrific crimes against human rights in Europe committed by the totalitarian Nazi regime – especially in Belarus, Poland and Ukraine – Germany has a particularly clear obligation to contribute to the defence of democracy and restoring and securing peace in Eastern Europe. So far, we have fulfilled this responsibility only to a limited extent. The true character of the Russian regime was revealed in 2014 at the very latest. Putin has never been interested in a security partnership with the EU. He is instead persistently pursuing the Russian imperialist legacy of dividing our continent into zones of influence. Nevertheless, the German government under Angela Merkel was blind to these developments, relied on appeasement and gambled away the trust of our partners in Poland and Ukraine. Berlin had no strategic compass. On the one hand, it supported the reform processes in Ukraine and sanctions following the annexation of Crimea. On the other, the German government made excessive concessions to Russia during the Minsk negotiations, allowed itself to be shown up in

the Normandy format, and pushed through the controversial Nord Stream 2 project against all resistance from friends and partners. Once again, this was especially true concerning Poland and Ukraine. Berlin's particular interests have troubled security in the EU, put a massive strain on German-Polish relations and ultimately weakened trust in us. Although, it should be admitted that the anti-German policy of the previous Polish government also contributed to the crisis.

Breakthrough but still room for improvement

Berlin has almost completely failed in a crucial phase. A country that prides itself so much on coming to terms with its own past was confronted with its own historical forgetfulness. The Germans had almost no understanding of Ukraine, its culture and its independence. Germans had no background whatsoever when it came to the history of Ukraine – be it the crimes of the Holodomor or the Nazi terror at places like Babyn Yar. In addition, the Germans and their political representatives viewed Ukrainian national pride with suspicion. The emancipative national aspirations of Ukrainian society were too often equated with the aspirations of German right-wing extremists. German uptightness in this area revealed above all a lack of understanding regarding Ukrainian perspectives and made it easier for Russian propaganda to frame Ukrainian civil society as all right-wing extremists. Fortunately, that understanding is – though slowly – changing today.

The Russian full-scale invasion forced Germany to recognize the changed political reality as a historical "caesura". Since then, Berlin has declared its unwavering solidarity with and defence of Ukraine and European integration. We have assured Ukraine of our political, financial, humanitarian and military support and have made it clear that we will not accept a peace dictated by Russia.[3] Germany has already made a major contribution to improving Ukraine's defensive capabilities. Together with our international partners, we have put Ukraine in a position where it can withstand Russia's war of aggression. The delivery of modern tanks, artillery systems, air defence and multiple rocket launchers has changed Ukraine's military situation. The Ukrainian armed forces were able to liberate occupied territories, although the 2023 summer offensive fell short of our collective hopes.

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3   Deutscher Bundestag, Frieden und Freiheit in Europa verteidigen – Umfassende Unterstützung für die Ukraine, Drucksache 20/1550, 27.04.2022, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/015/2001550.pdf

A large majority of Germans support the supply of heavy weapons to Ukraine, even though there has been a growing reluctance to export arms to crisis and war zones in recent years. Most Germans have become aware that Ukraine is waging a just war of self-defence against an imperial aggressor. Although there are polarizing voices calling for an end to our military support and the start of peace negotiations, this group has no significant political influence within the ruling factions and is regularly exposed as a Kremlin mouthpiece. Much stronger and more noteworthy are those voices that rightly call for an increase in German military aid. For example, they express support for the delivery of the modern Taurus long-range cruise missiles to Ukraine.

German military support has often come too late to be effective against Russia's aggression and, above all, is still not enough. Russia is spending six per cent of its GDP on the arms sector and is switching to a war economy. Therefore, support for Ukraine must not be allowed to wane, as Putin has still not given up his goal of the complete subjugation of the war-torn country.

Neither Russia nor Ukraine currently has the potential to make major territorial gains. The Russian war of aggression appears to be turning into a war of position, in which both sides are initially concentrating on their defensive capabilities. This threatens to reduce related media coverage and, hence, the awareness of Western partners – with clear negative consequences for Ukraine. Putin is playing the long game and waits for declining support for Ukraine. He is betting against the will of Europe's democratic societies to persevere.

Conclusions and recommendations

If Germans and Poles recognize that we share our common difficult history, then we also share the responsibility to shape our future. This means that we should see ourselves in line with the values of the Revolution of Dignity and also as targets of Putin's war aims. Therefore, Poland and Germany should improve their cooperation in the coming months and work together to promote enhanced military support for Ukraine, as well as the necessary changes in security policy. This will help the EU face up to new geopolitical challenges and develop a common security agenda.

While the bilateral relations of the past governments were tense, there is now an opportunity for a Polish-German reset that meets our common

challenges. After almost two years of war, the European Union is currently struggling to deliver aid to Ukraine on a new footing and make it more robust, permanent and sustainable. Such projects need traction and leadership and here Poland and Germany must act in partnership for the benefit of Ukraine. The formal opening of EU accession negotiations is a welcome victory, but it cannot hide the fact that adequate and steady funding could not be agreed in December 2023. Overall, there was a lack of clear leadership and common will among the major EU states to find a more robust approach to heads of government such as Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary. This must change in the future. Warsaw and Berlin should examine whether a more transactional approach towards certain heads of state is conceivable if they undermine our agreed canon of values.

The EU must cooperate more closely on security and defence policy issues. Joint armed forces involving both Poland and Germany, a joint EU command structure, structural adjustment of the European Peace Facility and improved coordination in arms production and procurement are topics that should be put on the political agenda.

This is not about the seeming utopia of a European army. Instead, it is about making better use of each other's military capabilities and establishing capability clusters in the European Union that meet the requirements. This will help everyone better face the challenges stemming from Russia's full-scale aggression.

Above all, however, there is a need for increased European commitment to peace in Ukraine. These activities are all tasks that must be pushed primarily through close Polish-German cooperation. The European Defence Fund for Ukraine within the European Peace Facility must be launched as quickly as possible and the necessary funds must be made available. In addition, the Russian threat requires a massive strengthening of the European defence industry. The European Commission's regulation – for example, on improved ammunition procurement – points in the right direction but must be replaced by long-term instruments such as the pooling of national capabilities. Poland and Germany are called upon to develop long-term measures to strengthen the technological and industrial basis of European defence and to ensure their financing.

Euromaidan is also changing the scope of the European Union by putting the accession of Ukraine on the agenda. The demands of the Maidan founders will only be fulfilled once the country is fully integrated into the EU.

On the way there lies the reconstruction of the country, and that must go hand in hand with the accession process.

In terms of a sustainable reconstruction, the EU and especially Germany and Poland are obliged to provide Ukraine with committed support – financially, technically and, above all, as partners on an equal footing. In view of the unending hardship in Ukraine caused by the Russian war of aggression, we need to act quickly and decisively in a way that does justice to our weight in Europe. Berlin and Warsaw should demand the strong involvement of Ukrainian civil society, which has been the driving force behind transparent procedures, reforms, social participation and the strengthening of municipalities and regional structures throughout the country for years. Ukraine's great potential for clean energy and greater energy efficiency must also be addressed. Finally, long-term and sustainable financing is needed for the reconstruction of the country.

The economic integration of Kyiv with the EU will have a positive impact on the challenges of reconstruction. It is already giving people hope for a better future and will pave the way to full EU membership. However, successfully bringing Ukraine closer to and integrating it into the EU will also be a test of our endurance – especially for neighbouring countries like Poland. Large economic sectors will feel threatened by additional market participants and question our integration efforts. This is a key task for Berlin and Warsaw, as there were similar reservations and fears in Germany and Poland when the EU expanded in 2004 and none of them came true. On the contrary, the mutual appreciation felt between the German and Polish societies has increased since 2004. We should take this as a lesson and an incentive to work together courageously and boldly to welcome Ukraine into the Union.

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Ukraine's EU integration process: Providing a positive narrative

Susan Stewart

Despite serious challenges, Ukraine is managing to continue the process of EU integration during wartime. Political and societal actors in Poland and Germany can help to disseminate a positive narrative regarding Ukraine's EU accession in order to keep up momentum on the EU side and ensure the necessary support for Ukraine in the upcoming years.

The relationship between Ukraine and the EU has become much more complex and diverse since the outbreak of the full-scale Russian invasion on 24 February 2022. The EU and many of its member states have become increasingly active in providing military support to Ukraine, for example through an unprecedented use of the European Peace Facility for this purpose. The EU has also offered significant budget support to the Ukrainian government in order to help the country to survive financially during wartime. Furthermore, the EU has taken on a key role in the context of the Multi-Agency Donor Coordination Platform, which was created to facilitate funding for Ukraine's reconstruction and recovery process.[4] As for Poland and Germany, while both have provided significant assistance, the two cases are very different. Germany has supplied much more in absolute terms, but less in terms of percentage of GDP. German assistance has also been slow in coming, which has had an impact on what Ukraine has been able to achieve on the battlefield.

However, arguably the most fundamental advance in the EU-Ukraine relationship since the beginning of the full-fledged war was the decision by the European Council to grant Ukraine the status of a candidate for membership in the EU in June 2022. In the past, the road to deeper integration into the European Union has been paved with reforms, and this will be the case in the future as well. It is certainly true that Ukrainians' bravery (and success) in countering Russian aggression, as well as the desire of the EU to act according to its geopolitical interests, have contributed in a major way to the decision

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4   For a more detailed treatment of the areas in which Ukraine and the EU have cooperated in the past 20 months, see Jan Joel Andersson and Clara Sophie Cramer, the EUISS Yearbook of European Security 2023, The European Union Institute for Security Studies, pp. 18ff., https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/yearbook-european-security-2023

on candidate status. And in the future, allowing Ukraine to advance towards, and finally to achieve membership, will depend on political circumstances and the interests of particular member states. However, without significant progress in reforms at all stages of the process, Ukraine will not have an opportunity to continue pursuing EU integration, even given a favourable geopolitical climate. Thus, the environment for and capacity to produce reforms remains crucial.

In general, the ability of the Ukrainian executive, parliament, and bureaucracy to continue to reform the country during the war has been impressive. According to the most recent report issued by the European Commission in November 2023, Ukraine has made significant reform progress in certain areas, in particular relating to the seven recommendations outlined by the Commission in June 2022, which have come to be seen as necessary (if not sufficient) conditions for opening accession negotiations. According to the Commission's assessment, four of the seven steps had been completed by the beginning of November 2023. Substantive progress had been made regarding the other three, even if more remained to be done.[5] As of early December 2023 Ukraine had responded by passing laws to comply with three of the additional four recommendations specified by the European Commission in November 2023.[6] Partly based on this progress, the European Council voted on 14 December 2023 to begin accession negotiations with Kyiv, although without the support of Hungary under Prime Minister Viktor Orban. While Poland has consistently advocated for the option of Ukraine's accession to the EU over the years, Germany decided to back it more recently, as a result of Russia's full-fledged invasion of Ukraine. Currently Berlin is clearly favourable to the effort to bring Ukraine into the EU but believes that further enlargement should go hand in hand with internal EU reforms.

Seven steps and challenges ahead

However, the experience with the seven steps points to several challenges concerning reform processes in Ukraine. First of all, high-ranking members of the Ukrainian elite continue to overestimate the country's capacity for rapid reforms. When the seven steps were published by the European Commission

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5   European Commission, Ukraine Report 2023, 08.11. 2023, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/ukraine-report-2023_en.
6   EU Assesses Ukraine's Law on National Minorities Positively, von Der Leyen Says, *European Pravda*, 13.12.2023, https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/eng/news/2023/12/13/7175473/

in June 2022, the Ukrainian position was that it would be possible to complete them all by the end of that year. Even allowing for differing interpretations of the reform measures involved, with hindsight it seems clear that this assessment was overly optimistic. In addition, both the Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and the Deputy Prime Minister for Euro-Atlantic Integration Olha Stefanishyna have repeatedly insisted that Ukraine will be able to fulfil all EU accession requirements within two years.[7] Given the complexity of the EU acquis and the (rather limited) progress achieved so far in implementing the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, it is difficult to find any convincing basis for these claims. They bring with them the danger of creating unrealistic expectations among the Ukrainian population and setting the stage for severe disappointment.

Second, the experience with the seven steps indicates that the most effective way of achieving results on reforms is to formulate a series of limited and specific measures and to offer positive incentives for their implementation. This has repeatedly been proven to function well in the Ukrainian case, e.g. with regard to the Visa Liberalisation Action Plan. However, this approach implies a high ongoing degree of micro-management by EU institutions rather than a gradual assumption of ever greater responsibility for the process by the Ukrainian side. It is unclear whether the EU will be politically able to continue to provide the necessary institutional capacity and support to this degree during the entire time required for Ukraine to complete the transposition of the EU acquis on both the legislative and the practical levels.

This uncertainty raises – third – the question of whether at some moment in time a sort of tipping point will be reached, after which a critical mass of key reform measures will have been implemented, thus permitting the remaining ones to become more rapid and automatic, in the sense of being necessary corollaries of the steps already taken. Such a tipping point is particularly important with regard to rule-of-law issues, which lay the groundwork for successful implementation in many other reform areas. It is for this reason that the approach chosen by the European Commission to start the negotiations by addressing the so-called fundamentals, which include rule-of-law questions in particular, appears justified. The fact that negotiations on this cluster will continue throughout the entire process and be concluded as a final step in the implementation of the acquis pays homage to the

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7   Lisa O'Carroll, Ukraine doesn't want sympathy vote on joining EU, says deputy PM, *The Guardian*, 6 November 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/06/ukraine-joining-eu-reforms

enormous difficulties associated with instituting a rule-of-law-based system. Indeed, the same approach has already been adopted by Brussels with regard to the Western Balkans. As has already become evident in the Ukrainian context (as well as elsewhere), transitioning to institutions founded on the rule-of-law means waging a ferocious battle against strong vested interests with major resources at their disposal.

Fight against corruption

The topic of vested interests leads directly to questions concerning corruption, which occupy a key place in discussions about EU integration, including in the recent progress report by the Commission. Debates about corruption during wartime have undergone a certain evolution. In the first months of the war there were claims from both government and civil society representatives in Ukraine that the war would constitute a game-changer with regard to corruption. The logic behind these claims was that the extremely high levels of suffering and death caused by the war would make it morally impossible for those wielding power to continue to engage in corrupt practices. However, this logic has only partially been borne out. There is some initial evidence that in business circles corruption is now perceived as less of a problem than before the invasion. But in some other areas corrupt practices are alive and well and have been able to profit from the lack of transparency in certain domains resulting from the wartime situation. Over time numerous examples of high-level corruption have surfaced, in part thanks to the work of investigative journalists. These include scandals concerning overpriced food provision for soldiers, possibilities to buy one's way out of military service, and a bribery scheme utilized by employees of the Ukrainian Supreme Court, including its top judge – just to name a few of the most prominent cases. From past experience it can be concluded that there are many more instances of corruption below the surface that are not currently visible.

Regarding corruption, there have been at least three important developments during the full-fledged war. First, President Volodymyr Zelenskyi has repeatedly made clear that corruption will not be tolerated. Even if there are suspicions of corruption within his inner circle, and even if his approach to fighting corruption is not always systematic, this message and the accompanying actions are important. Second, there has been substantive progress (especially within the framework of the seven steps mentioned above)

regarding both the work of anti-corruption institutions and the reform of the judicial system. Third, tolerance for corruption among the population has radically decreased due to the war. Thus, there are high expectations (likely to result in corresponding societal pressure) that a post-war Ukraine will successfully tackle at least the most egregious forms of elite corruption.

However, for the time being, corruption remains a serious problem, which sets a difficult stage for reconstruction and recovery processes. There is an important nexus between these processes and EU integration. Even though certain forms of reconstruction on the ground are already ongoing, e.g. in the form of local projects to restore (partially) destroyed schools, hospitals, etc., numerous major projects are in the planning stages. For such projects, it will be necessary to pay attention to using EU standards where possible, in the sense of "building back better" and of practically applying the EU acquis. But since Ukraine is largely dependent on foreign donors such as Germany and Poland to finance reconstruction, these donors will need to be convinced that their funding will not be misused or diverted into private pockets. One attempt to deal with this is the DREAM platform, which is supposed to ensure transparency of selection of contractors and of financial flows. Analysis points to the need to institute compliance mechanisms at the regional and local levels as well.[8] While other country cases highlight important lessons learned,[9] the Ukrainian context is a challenging one due to the pervasive and persistent corruption problems described above.[10] Fortunately, Ukraine has knowledgeable and experienced civil society actors who can bring together instruments for fighting corruption with those for implementing EU requirements, and provide crucial feedback on successes and failures. Reconstruction and recovery processes further offer an opportunity to increase awareness about and better tackle lower-level corruption, thus preparing both local government officials and Ukrainian citizens for EU membership.

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8   Martina Boguslavets, Funding Ukraine's Reconstruction: Who Will be Accountable for Integrity?, RUSI Commentary, The Royal United Services Institute, 27.09. 2023, https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/funding-ukraines-reconstruction-who-will-be-accountable-integrity

9   Lilly Blumenthal et al., History reveals how to get Ukraine reconstruction right: Anti-corruption, Brookings Commentary, Brookings Institute, 20.10. 2022, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/history-reveals-how-to-get-ukraine-reconstruction-right-anti-corruption/

10 Katherine Wilkins, Reconstructing Ukraine: Context-tailored approaches to corruption, The Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, October 2023, https://globalinitiative.net/analysis/ukraine-conflict-reconstruction-corruption-risk/

Conclusions and recommendations for Germany and Poland

In addition to the challenges and obstacles already mentioned, the relative failure of the Ukrainian military offensive in recent months poses new questions with regard to EU integration. Ukraine was granted candidate status in an environment in which western actors were both surprised and impressed by Ukrainian achievements on the battlefield. The tacit assumption (of those who believed the status had a more than symbolic role) was that a Ukrainian victory would pave the way for more intensive reforms and eventual EU accession. Currently there is much more doubt about the likelihood and shape of such a victory. This is contributing to scepticism regarding the viability of Ukraine's path towards the EU. It seems unrealistic to expect either a rapid breakthrough on the battlefield or a greatly increased reform tempo from the Ukrainian armed forces and government in the upcoming months. It will thus be important to prepare both the Ukrainian population and member state societies in the EU for a long and difficult road to an end to the war and to EU accession. This places great responsibility on elites in Kyiv, Brussels and EU member states such as Poland and Germany to embed a realistic assessment of possible developments in a scenario that emphasizes the numerous economic, (geo)political and security-related benefits of a sovereign Ukraine inside the EU. Developing and propagating such a narrative will be essential for ensuring support for ongoing assistance to Ukraine in the upcoming years.

The main problem is that many elites within the EU are not convinced of this narrative themselves. It is therefore the job of experts to provide the underlying analysis and make it available to both elites and EU publics. Polish-German exchanges on how to frame and reinforce such a narrative can aid in this process. German and Polish researchers and civil society activists focusing on both Ukraine and EU enlargement processes could examine the current messages being sent and attitudes towards Ukraine's EU accession present in their respective societies. Then, together with Ukrainian analysts, they could prepare and disseminate pertinent information concerning reforms in Ukraine and the contributions Ukraine will provide as an EU member state. Making this information accessible to Polish and German politicians, bureaucrats and interested citizens will help to counter Russian disinformation and lay a foundation for better-informed and more long-term support for Ukraine's entry into the EU. At the same time, feedback from

Ukrainian analysts to their own elites and society about the importance of this information could help to increase pressure on Ukrainian actors to ensure that positive developments continue, as well as making them more aware of dynamics in Polish and German societies that are relevant to Ukraine's EU accession process.

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"Der Weg ist das Ziel". NATO-Ukraine Cooperation and Prospects for Ukraine`s Membership

Adam Kobieracki

The process of Ukraine's integration with NATO will be a long and turbulent one that will have important implications for the international security environment even before its actual conclusion. While this process carries on, it is imperative that the West continues its support and military aid for Kyiv. The fundamental questions are the timing and exact conditions of Ukraine's membership in NATO. While Kyiv insists on getting it now, which in its view would constitute a decisive factor in winning the war with Russia, most Western capitals see it as a part of the post-war settlement, not least because they do not want to get involved in direct war with Russia.

NATO-Ukraine cooperation has a long history. Relations were formally launched in 1992, when Kyiv joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which was later renamed the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. In 1994 Ukraine was the third country of the former Soviet Union (after Lithuania and Estonia) to conclude a framework agreement with the Alliance as part of the Partnership for Peace. In 1997 the NATO-Ukraine Commission was established and the distinctive partnership between Brussels and Kyiv was initiated. It worked quite well, notably the military cooperation between Alliance and Ukrainian military units, including in crisis management operations in the Balkans. However, it resulted neither in the structural reform of the Ukrainian armed forces nor in any deep changes of a political nature concerning the rule of law, civilian control over the armed forces or the fight against corruption. The prevailing outlook among the Allies was that the main beneficiaries of the Alliance's cooperation with Kyiv were individual Ukrainian military units.[11]

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11   James Greene, NATO-Ukraine Distinctive Partnership turns twenty: lessons to take forward, NATO Review, 04.07.2017, https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2017/07/04/nato-ukraine-distinctive-partnership-turns-twenty-lessons-to-take-forward/index.html

As to Ukraine's integration with the Alliance, the most important reason for most NATO states' reluctance to offer candidate status to Kyiv was the potential negative reaction from Moscow. With current events, this was clearly a correct assumption. However, those strategic or geopolitical assumptions were also underpinned by the relatively limited reforms seen within Ukrainian political and military structures during the first almost 20 years of cooperation.

In 2002, at the NATO Summit in Prague, the Alliance's direct response to Ukraine's request for a Membership Action Plan (MAP) was to offer an Action Plan, a kind of pre-MAP. That was hardly a good compromise. The worst, however, came at the 2008 Bucharest Summit, when the Alliance did not agree on a MAP for Kyiv and instead made a political statement/commitment that Ukraine will in future become a member of NATO. From today`s perspective such a move, even if originally considered a political success by NATO states supporting Ukraine, including Poland, resembles inviting a guest into the waiting room with no guarantees of an invitation to the rest of the house. It also put Moscow on alert, though at that time it already had quite an aggressive and revanchist outlook, as seen in the 2008 war in Georgia.

Just to make the picture complete, in 2010 Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych declared Ukraine a neutral state, showing just how volatile Kyiv's policy was at that time. That was one of the first things that President Petro Poroshenko changed, once more opening the door to integration with the transatlantic community.

Different security environment

The years 2014 and 2022 (representing Russia's regional and full-scale aggressions against Ukraine respectively) dramatically changed the security environment and led to the collapse of the rules and norms-based international security order as we understood it. For Ukraine, integration with NATO is no longer a security policy instrument to prevent potential Russian aggression. Instead, it is a matter concerning its actual existence as a sovereign state. It is also a clear expression of a commitment to liberal values, and thus adherence to the Western world.

Meanwhile, for the transatlantic community it is an instrument to secure Ukraine's sovereignty. At the same time, it would also prevent Moscow's aggressive actions in the future and deter any other possible hostilities against

other European states. Seen from such a perspective, Ukrainian membership in NATO seems to be in everybody's interest. It is even in the Russian interest if considered objectively and properly, since it would put the future relationship between Kyiv and Moscow in a broader international context, possibly reducing post-war bilateral tensions and keeping them under some kind of multilateral control.

The possibility of Ukraine joining NATO was one of the "reasons", at least those declared publicly, for the Russian attack against Ukraine. Given the current status of Russia as almost a pariah state, even if still a relatively strong military power and nuclear superpower, Moscow's stiff opposition to Kyiv's relentless efforts to "join the club" will not stop the process. However, they may slow it down.

Today, multilateral institutions that were established to manage Russia-West relations and co-existence, like the OSCE, are dysfunctional. The network of disarmament and arms control agreements has disappeared, with Moscow withdrawing from them one by one. The rules and norms of international relations, codified for Europe in the Helsinki Final Act, are now being portrayed by Russia as being imposed by the West and are thus not observed.

In other words, the key issue is not just when Ukraine will join NATO but what kind of security regime and multilateral institutions will emerge from the current "disorder" and how NATO would fit into such a new order.

The big issue for the future will be how to make sure that commitments are being observed (*pacta sunt servanda*) by everybody, once agreed. It is at best doubtful that simple regime change in Russia would ensure the credibility of Russian commitments. Altogether, it seems as if we are starting a journey from Kyiv to Brussels in bad weather with no idea what climate will prevail around NATO headquarters when we arrive.

The Russia-Ukraine War and scenarios for integration

The West (NATO and the EU) became the closest allies and supporters of Kyiv after February 2022. However, there is one fundamental difference between Western capitals and Kyiv when it comes to attitudes surrounding NATO's eastward expansion. Ukraine (supported especially by some Central and Eastern European states that view Russia as a direct threat to their security) sees NATO membership as the best tool to decisively defeat Russia and bring the war and Moscow's aggressive policy to an end. However, the prevailing

view in NATO is that military aid and support, involving massive transfers of all kinds of arms and military equipment, will suffice to help Ukraine at least not be defeated and to achieve peace in decent conditions. Under these circumstances, actual membership is seen as one of the main building blocks for post-war settlement, preventing a resumption in hostilities. This is true even regarding the mere possibility of membership, which may be important in bringing hostilities to an end. It is clear that this chance to join will play a role as long as the military phase of the conflict continues. The main reason for NATO reluctance to offer membership to Ukraine right now is of course Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, which would commit the Allies to directly enter the war with Russia.[12] Even defining today a timeframe for membership, which President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was hoping for at the Vilnius Summit in July 2023, may entail such a risk. The same is true of an idea voiced recently by former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen to offer a form of membership to Ukraine that would not cover the territories occupied by Russia.

What should happen on the front line so that membership negotiations could at least start? In an ideal and just world, the answer would be simple. Negotiations would start following Ukraine's victory, the withdrawal of Russian occupation forces from all illegally annexed territories and the restoration of peace.

However, most probably it will be a long war and a protracted conflict, lasting much longer than the military activities themselves. It could hardly end with one side's clear, or unequivocal, victory. Thus, at some point in time, it should be up to Kyiv to decide when peace negotiations will start. Their format and agenda will depend on the circumstances at the time the talks begin.

In cases like the war in question, negotiations usually open with talks on a lasting ceasefire. While the ultimate aim would be a permanent peace settlement, a sound, institutionalized armistice might be a temporary solution – for months, years or even decades (the Korean scenario). One would need to develop instruments and establish institutions to monitor the observance of the terms of the actual agreement, such as international peacekeeping or monitoring forces, multilateral bodies to settle potential disputes, etc.

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12   Ukraina w NATO. Jak do tej pory przebiegał proces? Co może spowodować rozszerzenie sojuszu?, Rzeczpospolita, 10.07.2023, https://www.rp.pl/konflikty-zbrojne/art38718011-ukraina-w-nato-jak-do-tej-pory-przebiegal-proces-co-moze-spowodowac-rozszerzenie-sojuszu

The procedure of finalizing Ukraine's NATO membership may start around the time of achieving a lasting ceasefire or armistice. In both cases this would involve credible security guarantees for Ukraine. This would still be a sub-optimal outcome for the Alliance, as the risk of a resumption in hostilities and thus direct NATO involvement in the war would remain. The best option would be a permanent peace agreement, followed immediately by Ukrainian membership in NATO.[13] However, given the underlying assumption that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict will last for much longer than the war itself, waiting with the issue of membership until a peace deal is achieved seems to be an option that would only prolong uncertainty and contribute to instability.

Ukraine's road to NATO after 24th of February

It is imperative now for the Alliance and the wider West to continue to provide military aid to Ukraine, or even to increase support in relation to needs on the front line. It is more than a recommendation; it is effectively a *sine qua non* condition.

The Vilnius NATO Summit in July 2023 decided to drop its usual demand that Ukraine implement the MAP that is normally required for NATO newcomers. This was only logical in light of the close military cooperation between NATO member states and Kyiv. However, the Ukrainian political elite should pay attention to the various domestic political reforms that are still required. These concern particularly the rule of law and the fight against corruption, which effectively amount to a specific recommendation for Kyiv.

Altogether, the Vilnius Summit confirmed that Ukraine will be invited to join NATO when conditions allow. The established NATO-Ukraine Council has replaced the Commission from 1997 and will simplify the procedure of achieving membership in spite of the fact that no timeframe has been specified (most probably when hostilities stop).[14]

However, it is not clear what kind of NATO Ukraine will be joining in the future. First, there are global challenges which may divert the attention of the US from strictly European affairs. There is a growing challenge coming from China in the Far East, and other conflicts like that in the Middle East will

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13 Bogusław Chrabota, Ukraina w NATO. Kiedy i na jakich warunkach?, Rzeczpospolita, 11.07.2023, https://www.rp.pl/komentarze/art38722991-boguslaw-chrabota-ukraina-w-nato-kiedy-i-na-jakich-warunkach

14 Wojciech Lorenz, NATO Vilnius Summit Focused on Ukraine, but Still No Invitation, PISM, 14.07.2023, https://www.pism.pl/publications/nato-vilnius-summit-focused-on-ukraine-but-still-no-invitation

require American attention and perhaps not only political involvement. Given the highly unpredictable security environment, the future shape of NATO, as well as its main focus and modus operandi, cannot thus be taken for granted.

The security environment may turn out to be still very confrontational, with a hostile "Weimar" Russia seeking revenge and continuing to "fight the West". It may also be a competitive environment, with deep divisions among NATO member states that will be trying to re-build, or probably build from scratch, some fundamentals of the new international security order.

It is also unclear at the moment what the exact terms and conditions of Ukraine's membership in NATO may look like. Back in 1999 new NATO members had to respect limitations on their military postures, which were agreed in the NATO-Russia Founding Act in 1997. It should not be excluded that today serious consideration might also be given to some restrictions on the immediate deployment of NATO forces on Ukrainian territory. This may be done with a view to avoiding any possible hostile reaction from Moscow. Such restrictions may affect the deployment of forces, their configuration and/or the establishment of military infrastructure. These ideas are not being discussed publicly today by experts. However, apart from formal deliberations, experts also whisper to each other.

The other way of introducing restrictions on Ukrainian NATO membership might be through arms control arrangements accompanying a ceasefire or peace agreement. Such an agreement may introduce in parallel a special military security regime, mainly composed of confidence and security building measures (concerning the deployment of armed forces, their locations and numbers, the withdrawal of heavy military equipment from specified areas, regular exchanges of military information, prior notifications of military movements, etc.). Accepting some restrictions on Ukraine's military posture and the NATO military presence in Ukraine through some arms control arrangements (necessarily reciprocal, and thus affecting the Russian armed forces too) would be much easier and wiser than imposing limitations on Ukraine's NATO membership as such.

How Germany and Poland could help Ukraine to join NATO

There are three key areas of German-Polish cooperation in the context of Ukraine and NATO. The first is bilateral coordination and leadership as part of the continued military support for Kyiv by NATO as a whole. This should be

based on a closer analysis of what capabilities, technology and information the Alliance can quickly offer during new stages of the war.

Second, while Ukraine's membership in NATO remains, and rightly so, an overall strategic goal, the importance of current processes leading to its achievement should not be underestimated. These processes constitute Kyiv's de facto integration with the Alliance. It is worth quoting in that regard a slogan of one German car manufacturer: *"Der Weg ist das Ziel"* (The journey is the goal). Given German knowledge and Polish experience, Berlin and Warsaw may offer some assistance to Kyiv across the entire dossier of internal political and institutional reforms required to join NATO.

Third, for the more distant future, German and Polish experts could together take a closer look at the possible and desirable parameters of any future Russian-Ukrainian armistice/peace agreement, focusing on arms control (confidence and security building) measures accompanying such a deal. Those measures may affect the terms of Ukraine's integration with NATO, but they will also be important for the security of Central and Eastern Europe.

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The global war in Ukraine: the current state and possible scenarios

Maciej Matysiak

The war in Ukraine is a de facto war for systemic domination between a democratic system and a dictatorial totalitarian system. This war may end only if Russia is forced into it and has no other acceptable options. The threat from Moscow will not disappear even after the war is over. The Russian aggression against Ukraine taking place on Ukrainian territory is a de facto war between Russia and a coalition of countries that support Kyiv. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has set in motion processes that affect the global security system and will consequently cause it to change.

In order to understand, or at least try to understand, why there is a full-scale war between two European states almost eighty years after the end of the Second World War, as well as why specifically Russia attacked Ukraine, one has to dig at least a little deeper into the history and previous actions of Moscow. The way in which the Kremlin governs and conducts its international policy today is a result of its historical experience and is based, practically almost unchanged, on the same premises as in the past. Russians had been living for several centuries in the mostly authoritarian political system of tsarist Russia, which varied on the scale of repression in different periods. In the 20th century they subsequently experienced several decades of a functioning totalitarian regime under the USSR, which committed massive crimes against humanity including genocides.

After the collapse of the USSR, political changes took place in Russia and a relatively democratic elite led by Boris Yeltsin, who served as president of Russia from 1991 to 1999, came to power. During his presidency, there was a temporary democratic thaw in the country. Quite soon, however, Yeltsin's rule was plagued by corruption and the instrumental use of power for individual gain. As a result of these phenomena and to protect himself from accountability, Yeltsin appointed Vladimir Putin, a KGB functionary, as prime minister in 1999. At the same time, he also named Putin as his successor to the presidency. The current Russian leader would go on to win the presidential election in 2000.

Under Putin's rule, Russia's political system shifted from a hybrid regime (according to The Economist Democracy Index) to an electoral autocracy (according to V-Dem terminology)[1] controlled by the secret services. Finally, after 2022 it transformed itself into the totalitarian system similar to the Soviet Union before *perestroika*. Moreover, the Soviet political legacy still impacts to a large degree today's Russian society, which is characterised by passiveness, indifference and obedience towards the ruling elite.

Tsarist Russia, as a modern European colonial power, was based on territorial expansion and the rate at which it accomplished this was particularly impressive. Soviet foreign policy became even more imperialistic, as defined by the inclination to exert force, including military aggression against other countries. The Russian Federation continued this policy, attacking or intervening in Chechnya during 1994-1996 and 1999-2009, Georgia in 2004, Syria in 2015 and finally Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. This imperialist policy enjoys widespread public support in Russia today.

The USSR waged from its beginning an ideological war aimed at the export of communism. Moscow was present everywhere in the world where it could spread the ideas of communism and had a destructive impact on capitalist states and democracies. Currently, Russia also supports the political and extremist movements of the far right and radical left. The overriding aim of such actions is not the Kremlin's attachment to any political ideology but only a desire to have a destructive impact on Russia's opponents or the countries that Moscow defines as such.

It is also impossible to overlook the economic factor when assessing Russia's foreign policy. Modern Russia has sought to make other countries dependent on its supply of raw materials, of which it has abundant resources. Over the past few decades, Russia has gained considerable influence in this regard through its so-called energy resources, such as oil, coal and natural gas. This dependency has affected countries in the former USSR and the former socialist camp to varying degrees, but also in Western European countries, especially Germany.

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1   Economist Intelligence Unit, Democracy Index 2022, https://www.eiu.com/n/campaigns/democracy-index-2022/
V-Dem Institute, Defiance in the Face of Autocratization, Democracy Report 2023, https://v-dem.net/documents/29/V-dem_democracyreport2023_lowres.pdf

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and Europe

On 24th February 2022, Russian troops launched a full-scale war against Ukraine, which is called a "Special Military Operation" in Russia. The land invasion of Russian troops into Ukrainian territory was made from three main directions: north, east and south-east. From the north, using the territory of Belarus, they targeted the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, with the aim of seizing, paralysing and capturing the most important political and military decision-making centres. Moscow would then establish a puppet government dependent on Russia. This plan failed. In a pivotal battle, Ukrainian forces successfully prevented a Russian air landing operation at Hostomel airfield.

The second direction of attack came from the east, with the intention of seizing primarily the areas of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts still under Ukrainian control. In addition, one further intention was to seize the entire eastern territory of Ukraine up to the Dnipro river.

The third principal direction of aggression was from the south-east, where Russian troops invaded Ukrainian territory from Russia proper and Crimea, aiming at the seizure of southern Ukraine. This direction was intended to ensure that Moscow could create a 'land corridor' between Russia proper and Crimea, completely cutting Ukraine off from its coast on the Sea of Azov. If successful, the next step would have been the crossing of the Dnipro, the seizure of Odesa and finally reaching the Romanian border. This would have completely cut off Ukrainian access to the sea and ports.

In carrying out the invasion in this way, Putin assumed that, as in 2014 in Crimea, Ukraine's resistance would not be significant. It was guided by the belief that Ukraine's armed forces were ineffective, and that Kyiv would not receive military assistance from NATO and other countries. The only support the Ukrainians would get would be political.

This plan also failed. The Russians underestimated the social determination and changing nature of the Ukrainian armed forces, which had benefitted from their training and cooperation with NATO countries for several years. Moreover, the US strongly supported Ukraine not only politically but also with the immediate organization of arms, weapons and ammunition. Quite quickly, the US was joined by the UK and other NATO and EU countries, including Poland and at the beginning to a lesser degree Germany. In the initial period, the supply of equipment consisted of anti-tank and anti-aircraft small arms and small arms ammunition. In addition,

the first of a series of economic and political sanctions against Russia was implemented.

The delivery of modern artillery systems (howitzers, self-propelled cannon howitzers and HIMARS rocket artillery systems) and the ammunition required for them began slightly later. This made it necessary for the Russian side to re-examine its original invasion objectives and withdraw from some of the Ukrainian territory already occupied. In the next phase, most of the restrictions on equipment were removed and Ukraine was supported with state-of-the-art air and missile defence systems. The training of Ukrainian pilots started so that F-16 aircraft can be handed over to them in the coming months.

Due to all these developments, Russia had to revise its original military plans and withdraw its troops aimed at occupying Kyiv. It now concentrated its efforts on the east and south of Ukraine. Larger supplies of equipment to Ukraine were intended to ensure the country's transition to offensive operations in order to regain as much of its territory as possible. Unfortunately, as we now know, the Ukrainian counteroffensive undertaken in summer 2023 was unsuccessful and could not cope with the well-prepared defences of Russia, which had used the available time to fortify the area and mobilise personnel and material reserves. In effect, still close to 20 per cent of Ukrainian territory remains under Russian occupation.[2] Moreover, Moscow is again attacking at a regional level and is seeking to occupy the entire Luhansk and Donetsk regions. Nevertheless, at present, the battlefront appears to be stabilising and no significant progress by either side can be seen. The conflict now takes the form of a trench war.

The survival of Ukraine would not be possible without strong support from the EU, NATO and their allies. According to the estimations of the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, from January 2022 until the beginning of November 2023 these partners committed aid (military, financial and humanitarian at both a bilateral and multilateral level) exceeding 240 billion euros (the US above 70 billion, Germany almost 40 billion and Poland almost 8 billion).[3] Russia's invasion of Ukraine had a particularly significant impact on the

2   Before 2022, Russia occupied 7% of Ukrainian territory (Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk). After its full-scale invasion in February 2022, it increased its area of control to almost 27%. Since then, Ukrainian forces have liberated a huge part of the territory gained by the Russians after 24th February, leaving them with control of about 18% of the country. The New York Times, Maps: Tracking the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/world/europe/ukraine-maps.html

3   Kiel Institute for the World Economy, Ukraine Suport Tracker Data, 12/2023, https://www.ifw-kiel.de/publications/ukraine-support-tracker-data-20758/

balance of power in Northern Europe because it provoked a dramatic incre-ase in support in Sweden and Finland for accession to NATO. Both countries soon entered a fast track for membership. Consequently, Finland joined the Alliance in April 2023, while Sweden is still waiting for Hungary and Turkey's endorsement. This means that Russia's border with NATO countries has do-ubled in length and the Baltic Sea has effectively become an internal sea of the military bloc.

Russia's non-military confrontation with the West

In addition to military aggression, Russia launched a whole series of propa-ganda and disinformation activities before and during the invasion. These were mainly directed at the societies of countries supporting Ukraine, with the aim of discouraging them from providing such assistance. At the same time, these activities were intended to put pressure on politicians and their governments to take decisions that were in line with Russia's expectations. One of the main Russian threats was nuclear blackmail. The Kremlin sug-gested that if Ukraine was further supported, the situation could escalate towards the use of nuclear weapons. The war in Ukraine could then turn into a global conflict.

As a result of these Russian activities, pro-Russian and also anti-EU trends are on the rise in many countries in Europe. In the countries suppor-ting Ukraine, far right, far left and nationalist circles, many of them clearly pro-Russian, have become more active and have emphasised the threats to these countries from the war. The idea of ending the conflict as soon as pos-sible has been promoted, despite the fact that this would mean for Ukraine significant territorial losses.

The Russian activities are designed to weaken the structure of existing political or military alliances, as well as the foundations of democracy. This is because the proper and correct functioning of all of these institutions is an obstacle to Russia's policy. This policy also entails creating buffers against anything that could threaten the existing way of exercising power in Russia. We see such actions in Russia's favouring of countries that are embarking on the path away from democracy, for example Hungary or Turkey. We also see the reinforcement of incentives for this in Poland, such as the attempt to provoke tensions regarding the migration and refugee crisis on the Polish -Belarusian border. Propaganda and disinformation have also been spread and correlate with far right and populist narratives in terms of alleged threats

posed by liberals and the left to traditional culture and an image of Western decay and decline.

In addition, for many years Russia has not hesitated to interfere directly in the political life of individual democratic states in order to bring about the results it desires. This includes elections, as was the case in the US presidential election, alongside other democratic processes where societies can decide on state issues. Such an example is Brexit and the subsequent withdrawal of the UK from the European Union. Russian actions in the form of troll farms reinforced messages favourable to Brexit supporters.

In its activities, Russia also uses more direct methods such as funding terrorist organisations, independently carrying out acts of terror, political subversion or contract killings against opponents of the Kremlin both inside and outside Russia. These have included assassinations of independent journalists and political opponents of President Putin in Russia (Anna Politkovskaya and Boris Nemtsov), assassinations outside Russia (Alexander Litvinenko and Boris Berezovsky), assassinations in Russia (blowing up a residential building in Moscow in 1999 in order to create a pretext for war in Chechnya), and attacks outside Russia (blowing up arms and ammunition stores meant for Ukraine in the Czech Republic in 2014, as well as the attempted putsch in Montenegro in 2016).[4]

Today, Russia is making economic and diplomatic efforts to enlist the support of countries that either stand in opposition to the West or take the opportunity to gain economic benefits from such a situation. Russia has thus managed to largely offset the sanctions imposed on it in terms of the supply of goods, including essential arms and weapons. In addition, it has strengthened relations with Brazil, India, China and South Africa within the framework of BRICS. Russia's rapprochement with Iran is also important. Tehran, in addition to political support, has decided to supply Russia with arms, including combat drones. The Iranians are also providing training in the use of these weapons and helping with the construction of plants on Russian soil to produce them.

The Israeli-Hamas war of 2023, which started with the Hamas attack on 7th October, is causing a distraction from the war in Ukraine and redirecting the attention of the West to the Middle East. It also created a necessity to distribute US political, military and financial support in two directions. This means weakening support for Ukraine. One may ask whether the start

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4   Yuri Felshtinsky, Vladimir Popov, From Red Terror to Mafia State: Russia's Secret Intelligence Services and Their Fight for World Domination from Felix Dzerzhinsky to Vladimir Putin, London 2023.

of this conflict could have been influenced by Russia? Even if it was not, and many judge this unlikely, it is a development that is definitely favourable to the Kremlin. It is a well-known fact that Iran is the country significantly supporting Hamas, while Israel and the US are fundamental adversaries of Tehran. It therefore seems reasonable to ask whether the attack on Israel was independent of the situation in Ukraine, or whether it was to some extent the result of a community of interests between Russia and Iran?

Also, recent developments in the US regarding a decrease in funds for aid to Ukraine, as well as the obstructionism by Republicans in the US Congress concerning additional funds for this purpose, raise the question of whether this will threaten Ukraine's defence capabilities?

Scenarios and conclusions

The political situation in the US in the context of the presidential election of 2024 is very significant. Donald Trump has already started his election campaign. His views and statements in the context of US policy towards the wars in Ukraine and Israel suggest his willingness to come to an agreement with Russia in the case of Ukraine and to support mostly Israel. This would bring a disadvantageous end to the war in Ukraine from the point of view of the West that would be very favourable to Russia. Moreover, there are further possible flashpoints on the horizon (Taiwan in Asia and the Sahel in Africa). The first flashpoint represents a key area of interest for the US and the second one for the EU (especially France, Spain and Italy). In the long-term perspective, the economies of the Western countries may not have the capacity to meet Kyiv's needs for several years, namely until Ukraine achieves a decent peace that will allow it to reconstruct the territories devasted by the war. Meanwhile, despite the sanctions and loss of a large part of its energy market, as well as the considerable military losses suffered in Ukraine, Russia has not changed its aims and objectives to destroy Ukraine. Moreover, the conflict has been used by the Kremlin administration to further increase its control over its own society and restrict rights. In view of the above, it is in fact impossible to answer the fundamental question posed by virtually everyone today: "When and how will the war in Ukraine end?" At present, one must also consider very negative scenarios for Ukraine, such as being forced to start peace negotiations and consequently losing control over part of its territory due to the inability to push Russia out.

Recommendations

One thing is certain, for the sake of the basic security of Europe, the West must continue to support Ukraine and to resist an authoritarian and aggressive Russia and its allies. If this stops, the EU, Germany and especially Poland will face a direct threat from Moscow in the near future.

Therefore, EU and NATO countries should cooperate militarily, economically and politically as closely as possible. They should also stand behind Ukraine in any way necessary and as long as it will be required to defend its independence and sovereignty, allowing it to regain lost territories (at least most of them). Poland and Germany should establish a permanent bilateral alliance aimed at jointly working to counter Russia's aggressive actions and support Ukraine. Berlin and Warsaw should become the engine of the European axis against Russia's neo-imperialism. It is vital for all friends of Ukraine to increase considerably the production of weapons and ammunition to meet Kyiv's needs. It is important to strengthen NATO's Eastern Flank (new military deployments) and ensure Sweden's accession. It is also crucial to enhance social and institutional resistance to Russian influence in Western countries.

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From Kremlin bots to Sputnik: Russian disinformation in the EU and the lessons for Poland and Germany

Agnieszka Legucka

Russia is adapting to EU blockades and restrictions by introducing new ways to target European societies with disinformation. Russia is tailoring its manipulated message to specific audiences, including Germans and Poles. Discreditation of Ukraine continues to be the most important theme of Russian disinformation. This is done in order to undermine Western support for Ukrainians fighting against Russian aggression.

The EU understands disinformation as "verifiably false or misleading information that is created, presented, and disseminated for economic gain or to intentionally deceive the public, and may cause public harm".[15] However, the Union has also promoted and used the broader term of "Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference" (FIMI), which describes "a mostly non-illegal pattern of behavior that threatens or has the potential to negatively impact values, procedures, and political processes. Such activity is manipulative in character, conducted in an intentional and coordinated manner, by state or non-state actors, including their proxies inside and outside of their own territory".[16] Russian disinformation and propaganda increased dramatically in intensity with the outbreak of the war against Ukraine in February 2022. By the end of December 2023, EU institutions had identified more than 16,303 instances of Russian disinformation, as catalogued in the EUvsDisinfo database. While the EU believes that Russian disinformation poses a grave threat to member states specifically due to its systemic nature, in view of Russia's long-term strategy of the destabilisation and disintegration of the Euro-Atlantic area, the Union recognises that Moscow

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15 EU Monitor, COM(2018)236 – Tackling Online Disinformation: A European Approach, 26.04.2018, https://www.eumonitor.eu/9353000/1/j9vvik7m1c3gyxp/vknuhx4rywy5.

16 EEAS, 2021 StratCom Activity Report – Strategic Communication Task Forces and Information Analysis Division, 24.03.2022, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/2021-stratcom-activity-report-strategic-communication-task-forces-and-information-analysis-division_en

is cooperating with other actors, such as Belarus and Iran, as well as with non-state actors.[17]

The beginning is perhaps more difficult than anything else

The European Union began making efforts to combat disinformation back in March 2015, following Russia's annexation of Crimea a year earlier. The European Council appealed to the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to create an action plan on strategic communication to counter disinformation campaigns by Russia. As a result of this appeal, a task force was set up within the European External Action Service (EEAS) called East StratCom. This group was tasked with monitoring, analysing and responding to Russian propaganda and disinformation. In 2017, two further StratCom task forces were created: one for the EU's Southern Neighbourhood and another for the Western Balkans. In 2018, the European Commission, together with a group of experts, produced a document titled "Combating online disinformation: a European approach". This set out the principles and objectives for combating this threat. The main objective of this effort was to increase public awareness of disinformation.

However, despite the perceived threat of Russian disinformation, the EU was faced with limited resources to effectively counter the problem. Initially, the East StratCom group consisted of only three people and had no dedicated budget. Despite Russia's use of disinformation and propaganda apparatuses to destabilise, interfere with, and attack the democratic system of values in many EU countries, there was a lack of unanimity and political will to effectively counter these activities. Some European leaders feared accusations of censorship and violations of freedom of expression when trying to restrict Russian propaganda channels. The EU's lack of sufficient preparation and response led to Russian interference in political processes in 16 out of 20 total cases worldwide between November 2016 and April 2019 (for example in the UK, France and Spain). One of the best-known examples of these Russian disinformation campaigns was the January 2016 report by a Russian journalist about the kidnap and rape of Lisa, a girl of Russian origin, by immigrants in

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17 Isabelle Facon, Russia's National Security Strategy and Military Doctrine and Their Implications for the EU, Directorate-General for External Policies Policy Department, European Parliament, January 2017, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/578016/EXPO_IDA(2017)578016_EN.pdf.

Germany. This situation triggered a wave of anti-Muslim demonstrations in Germany but it soon became clear that the story was not true.

The European Commission therefore argues that the disinformation activities of the Russian Federation were distinguished by their systematic and long-term nature, as well as their impressive toolkit. Compared to other states using disinformation, such as China, Iran or North Korea, Russia showed exceptional determination in spreading its influence. The first EEAS report on disinformation, manipulation and influence operations in the EU in February 2023 showed that Russia used the technique of "distraction" with European audiences in 42% of cases. This was directed at, among other things, attributing responsibility for the outbreak of the war in Ukraine to Western countries. In 35% of cases, the intention of Russian propaganda was to "distort the picture" by imposing its own interpretation on the course of hostilities and the causes of the conflict, which was inconsistent with reality.[18]

Russia's disinformation strategies in the EU: the case of Germany and Poland

Since the launch of Russia's full-scale aggression in Ukraine on 24th February 2022, the Russian authorities have remained keen to influence public debate in European countries, including by blackmailing Europeans with the use of nuclear weapons, high energy prices and destabilisation resulting from a prolonged armed conflict in Ukraine (the prospect of mass migration, arms trafficking and increased crime remain key issues).[19] The aim of these actions was to get EU states to weaken their support for Ukraine, sowing fear among European societies and political elites so that they would then "convince" the Ukrainian authorities to make territorial concessions to Russia. This was accompanied by disinformation campaigns targeting the West. These denigrated Ukraine and promoted an image of Russia as a state defending itself against US 'imperial expansionism' and the 'threat' from NATO. Russian propaganda and disinformation were aimed at undermining the legitimacy of Western sanctions, which the Russian government would like to see reduced and ultimately lifted. Pro-Kremlin media argued that sanctions were conducive to the development

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18 EEAS, 1st EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats, 07.02.2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/1st-eeas-report-foreign-information-manipulation-and-interference-threats_en.

19 Justyna Szczudlik and Agnieszka Legucka, Breaking Down Russian and Chinese Disinformation and Propaganda About the War in Ukraine, PISM, 17.01. 2023, https://www.pism.pl/publications/breaking-down-russian-and-chinese-disinformation-and-propaganda-about-the-war-in-ukraine.

of the Russian economy. The latest aim of Russian disinformation during the conflict with Ukraine is to undermine the current international order and show Russia as a victim of Western 'aggression', which is supposedly motivated by Russophobia. Russian FIMI operations are planned, organised and executed by many institutions. This network involves coordination between the Russian intelligence services (FSB, SVR, GRU), pro-Kremlin media (e.g., RT/Russia Today, Sputnik), the Internet Research Agency (IRA), social media users, diplomatic channels and academic and cultural institutes. At the same time, the overlapping goals and narratives of Russia and China are attempting to undermine the credibility of the West. The overarching goal of Russia and China is to create divisions between transatlantic partners by amplifying anti-NATO and anti-US narratives within European societies, and anti-EU ones in the US. This strategy seeks to undermine the unity and cooperation between EU states and the United States, ultimately weakening the transatlantic alliance. Russia, more so than China, portrays the European Union as a part of a "decaying West" that promotes values conflicting with the conservative way of life in Russian society, particularly with regard to the promotion of LGBTQ+ and women's rights.

At the same time, Russia had to adapt to new restrictions in the international information space. In March 2022, after RT (formerly Russia Today) and Sputnik were blocked from the territory of the European Union, propagandists, for example, created a special channel on Telegram called "Videos in different languages", where they posted videos on Ukraine, allowing others to spread false content on other social media platforms. The most shared material was on Twitter (where RT posted its videos in 17 languages), as well as on Gettr, Gab and TruthSocial. This made it possible to denigrate the Ukrainian side through the accounts of Russian ministries and embassies.[20]

Russian FIMI operations in Europe target societies at large and are designed to distract, divide and polarise democratic societies. That is why Russian information campaigns focus on different groups of people and extreme political groups, encompassing both far-left and far-right extremists. The research also shows that Russia adapts its messages to each specific audience, and therefore it may differ from one country to another.

In Germany, Russia's FIMI activities are highly developed (media, political corruption, social media, a network of "Russia friendly" experts, journalists like

20 Jessican Brandt and Valerie Wirtschafter, Working the Western Hemisphere: How Russia Spreads Propaganda about Ukraine in Latin America and the Impact of Platform Responses, Foreign Policy at Brookings, December 2022, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/FP_20221216_russia_propaganda_brandt_wirtschafter.pdf.

The German-Russian Forum, etc.). For example, pro-Russian trolls exploit public sentiment about rising inflation and rile up discussions about sanctions, suggesting that they have been more severe for the West than for Russia. In German social media after 2022, there were six relevant narratives employed as part of three different strategies. Some wanted to give a general interpretative framework to the war: anti-Westernism, where the US and NATO are to blame for Russia's attack. Furthermore, one narrative was aimed clearly at generating debates by spreading a Kremlin-critical narrative. Some profiles involved in this were caught disseminating both pro-Kremlin and anti-Kremlin narratives, which indicates that they are not intended to counter the Kremlin's information operations but are meant to be an integral part of it. The third category of texts reflected contemporary events, such as heightened discussions on sanctions.

In Poland, Russia is less able to influence society with pro-Russian sentiments. This is why Russian FIMI operations focus on stoking anti-EU, anti-German and anti-NATO sentiments among Poles. After the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian War, Russian trolls focused on an anti-refugee narrative, aiming to stir up anti-Ukrainian public sentiment and weaken Poles' willingness to help their neighbours. On social media, Poles were frightened that there would be a spillover of the war into Poland and possible military action against Poland triggered by American involvement in the conflict. There was also criticism of the inefficient policies of the government to manage the influx of Ukrainian refugees or to prevent the war. In addition, the trolls use an anti-refugee and historical narrative (related, among other things, to the Volhynia massacre) in an attempt to stir up anti-Ukrainian public sentiment and weaken the willingness among Poles to help Ukraine.[21]

Conclusions and recommendations

Russia's FIMI operations are more extensive in Germany than in Poland. This is due to the Russian elite's appreciation of Germany's role in shaping EU policies, particularly the EU's Eastern policy. Moreover, though in Germany the public is less vulnerable to Russian disinformation, there are still some notable sections of society that embrace these narratives: voters of the radical right Alternative for Germany (AfD), supporters of a newly established nationalist left association named "Bündnis Sahra Wagenknecht" and the far-left

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21 'The Kremlin's troll network never sleeps, Political Capital, 28.10.2022, https://politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/pc_ned_study_kremlin_troll_network_2022_web.pdf.

parliamentary party "Die Linke". The politicians of these political forces promote the lifting of sanctions or arguments about Ukraine known to come from Russian disinformation campaigns.

Poland, though less susceptible than Germany to Russian FIMI attacks, must be prepared for a further rise in anti-Ukrainian narratives promoted by Russia, which will exploit a refugee fatigue, economic tensions and historical disputes. These could resonate especially among the right-wing electorate and lead to social and political tensions, including over further support for Ukraine in its fight against Russia.

Berlin and Warsaw should focus their efforts on increasing the resilience of states and societies to Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI). This would be in line with the Strategic Compass, adopted by the EU Council on 21st March 2022, and help broaden the EU's ability to support the member states in responding to crises caused by hybrid methods.

Poland and Germany may continue to invest in strengthening their own institutions and resilience to disinformation to better monitor associated threats in their countries and across the EU. a task force would be a natural part of cooperation, training and the exchange of information with partners.

As a result, consideration may be given to launch a special Polish-German platform that would bring together disinformation experts, academic communities, fact-checking organisations, NGOs and civil society organisations from Poland and Germany. Given Poland's experience with Russian and Chinese disinformation and Germany's experience with disinformation from China, such a knowledge-sharing platform would increase the situational awareness of both actors.

Berlin and Warsaw could also consider establishing an academic hub to raise EU funds for research and collaboration between Polish and German experts in this field. This would help increase awareness and the capacity to deal with disinformation in both societies. Finally, Poland and Germany within the EU should strengthen support for tougher sanctions against Russian propagandists and those promoting disinformation.

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