



EUROPE AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE: *DE-PL-UKR perspectives*

edited by Adam Balcer | **February 2023**

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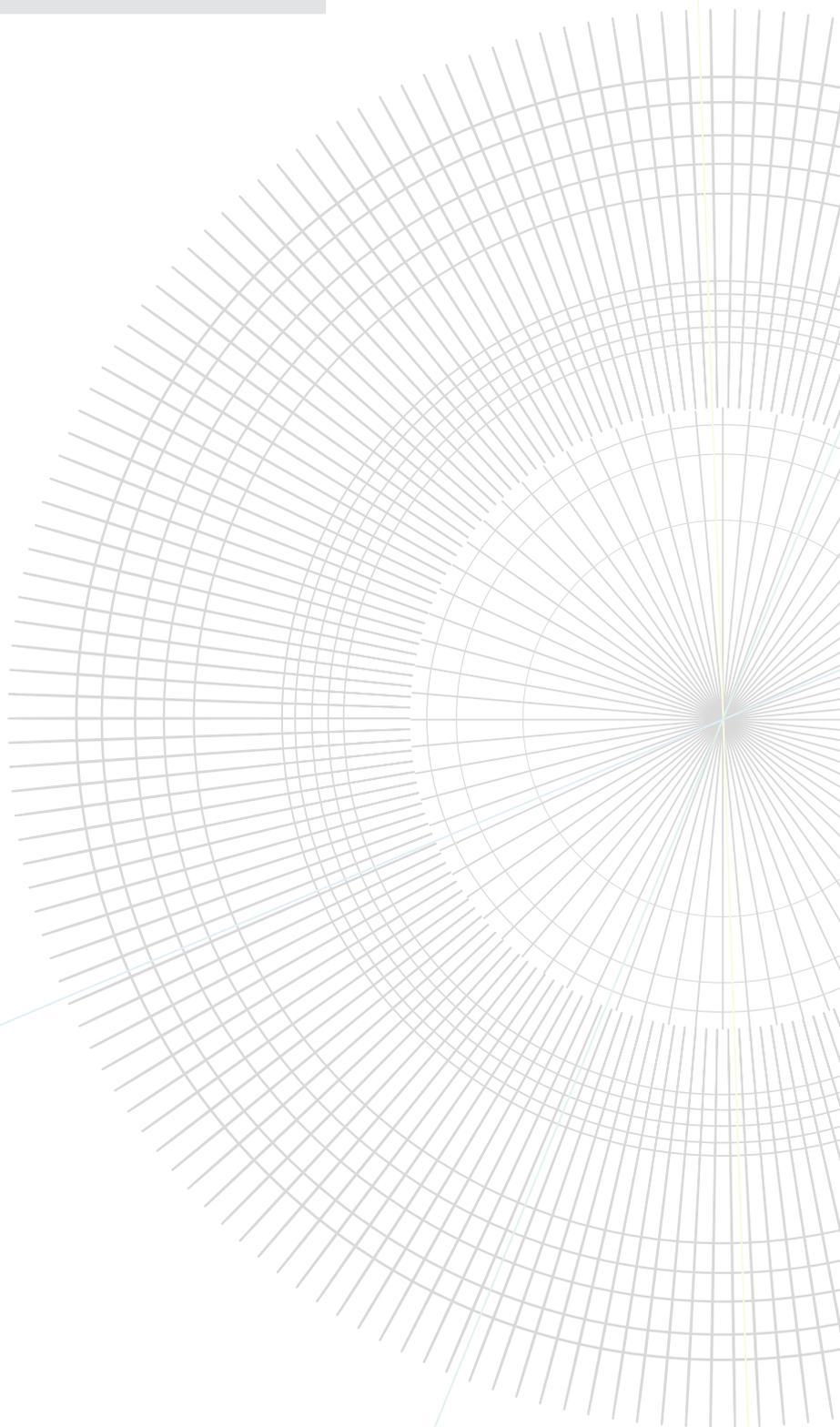


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Introduction

Adam Balcer

Program Director, The Jan Nowak Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe

February 24th 2022 will be remembered as a key date in the modern history of Europe with global ramifications. Russia launched a full-scale invasion against Ukraine on that day, however, Kyiv defended heroically its independence and organised successful regional counterattacks. The Ukrainian state, armed forces and nation showed tremendous resilience and continued the fight against the Russian aggression. On the other hand, the Russian invaders suffered striking setbacks and committed terrible crimes on a massive scale against Ukrainian civilians. The EU and NATO proved their vitality by rallying behind Ukraine. They provided Kyiv with large military, economic and humanitarian support and imposed unprecedented sanctions on Russia. The West managed also to get the support of important external partners in the UN General Assembly. Nevertheless, the war has been going on for one year now and it does not seem like it will end soon. Russia still occupies above 15% of Ukraine's territory and the country suffered enormous material losses. The worst-case scenario for Europe would be Ukraine's military defeat, in which the country would survive but lose a huge part of its territory. This could encourage Russia to invade smaller countries in Eastern Europe or the South Caucasus, and even annex Belarus. The best-case scenario would be Ukraine's victory on the battlefield, the regaining of all occupied territories, and the fall of Putin's regime which could lead to Russia's democratisation.

Taking into consideration all these factors, the increased Western support for Ukraine's war effort represents a crucial issue which will decide the outcomes of the war. Germany and Poland belong to a group of the most important supporters of Ukraine. Consequently, their cooperation with Kyiv, which is deeply rooted in a wider European context, will define to a large degree the conduct of the war. Therefore, The Jan Nowak Jeziorański College of Eastern Europe, together with Austausch, decided to invite prominent German, Polish and Ukrainian experts to write essays approaching the war from various angles and presenting different perspectives. First of all, we assumed that the war is taking place on a great scale also in non-military fields, and that it will have fundamental consequences for all of Europe. Therefore, we placed less emphasis on the conduct of the war on the front and focused more on economic war, Russia's neo-imperialism, the Kremlin's propaganda, politics of identity and memory, and Europe's security, including the impact of the war on German foreign policy.

Our report under the title **"Europe and the war in Ukraine: DE-PL-UKR perspectives"** begins with **Olena Snigyr's** essay **"The future of the European security order: Russia's imperialism versus democracy"**. This piece argues that any democratisation in Russia after a regime change would be impossible without the completion of the decolonisation process in this part of Eurasia. Moreover, Russia must finally start to act like a normal state obeying the basic principles of

international law. No more, no less. However, **Nedim Useinow** in his article **“The national question in Russia. What should be the Ukrainian reaction?”**, believes that the current conditions in the Russian Federation do not support the idea of the country’s disintegration in the short-term perspective. In his opinion, “Instead of reckless narratives about Russia’s ‘decolonisation’, Ukraine should promote more legitimate, clear and realistic liberation rhetoric.” Indeed, Russia wages its war against Ukraine not only on the battlefield but also in the minds of Russian citizens and through propaganda directed at people around the world. As **Jan Piekło** writes in his article **“Frozen historical trauma – how to deal with it?”**, Russia’s narrative“ is a hybrid mix of tsarist Russian imperialism, Soviet mythology and also religious elements connected to Orthodoxy. At the moment, its dominant aspect is fighting “Nazis” and NATO”. **Agnieszka Bryc** in her text titled **“Time to pursue a *Zeitenwende* on Russia”** stresses that Russia’s aggression in Ukraine is not an episode, but a process with profound historical roots grounded in imperial ambitions. In her opinion, the international order needs a profound reshaping so that it will make Russian aggression a highly unlikely scenario in the future. Of course, this is undoubtedly the crucial task for Berlin and Warsaw, which can support Ukraine and thereby take responsibility for Europe’s future sustainable security.

On the other hand, **“How real is the *Zeitenwende*? Explaining the gap between rhetoric and action”**, written by **Susan Stewart**, describes extensively the *Zeitenwende*, namely a political rethink triggered by Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. It includes essential questions on European and transatlantic security, EU reform and enlargement, as well as military expenditures and economic adjustments within Germany. **Mattia Nelles** in his contribution **“The weak link? Germany and Russia’s war against Ukraine”** assumes that most probably the war will continue for many months and that this is why the West, including Germany, must provide Ukraine with all the equipment that Kyiv needs to maintain this high intensity war over the next few months or even years. According to Nelles, Germany’s commitment is considerable but often evaluated as insufficient. Moreover, the German reaction to the war has provoked serious discussions and even tensions within society and the political elite, as well as criticism from other allies.

Certainly, the war brought a dramatic deterioration in the economic situation in Ukraine. Nevertheless, its economy supported by the West has managed to survive and defend itself against Moscow. The condition of Ukraine’s economy after the Russian full-scale invasion is analysed by **Yurii Gaidai** in his article **“The war and Ukraine’s economy: its perspectives and Western assistance”**. Finally, **Justyna Gotkowska’s** article titled **“Security in the Baltic Sea region and the Russian invasion of Ukraine”**, argues in a convincing way that “the sustained will among NATO countries to strengthen collective defence of the Alliance and to enhance deterrence and defence in the Baltic Sea region represents a key issue which will define the security of Europe in the coming years.”

Our report is published within the framework of **the German-Polish Roundtable on the East**. Every year in autumn it gathers experts, journalists, scholars, diplomats, politicians, local government officials and NGO activists from Germany, Poland and other countries in order to discuss German and Polish policies towards Eastern Europe. **The Jan Nowak Jeżiorański College of Eastern Europe**, together with **Austausch**, with the support of the **Heinrich Boll Stiftung**, **the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation**, and **the city of Wrocław**, have been organising the roundtable since 2018.

The future of the European security order: Russia's imperialism versus democracy

Olena Snigyr is a post-doctoral researcher at the European University Institute, Florence

LEAD: Before speaking about the possibility of democratisation in Russia after regime change, the process of decolonisation in this part of Eurasia first has to be finished. Moreover, Russia must start to act like a normal state obeying the basic principles of international law.

February 24th 2022 came as a surprise to most Western analysts due to their estimations that the Ukrainian army would not be able to stop Russia's blitzkrieg plans. The first three weeks significantly changed traditional Western and global discourse regarding the Russian Federation's supposed superpower status and the position of Eastern Europe and Ukraine as its exclusive sphere of influence. Many European scholars recognised that their knowledge was to some extent biased due to Russian direct and indirect influence. However, these misperceptions did not disappear completely. They still maintain a certain resonance among experts and are most apparent regarding the issue of democratisation in Russia.

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Democracy in Russia?

Despite Putin's statements that Russia has a "special democracy", that is to say a democratic system particularly suited to Russia, today it is obvious that the country's transformation into a totalitarian state is almost finished. At the same time, in discussions regarding future post-war scenarios, the possible military defeat of Russia is seen by a group of scholars and representatives of the Russian opposition in exile as a window of opportunity for regime change and a chance to reboot Russian democracy.

Searching for the causes of the Russian aggression against Ukraine and adhering to democratic peace theory, scholars and analysts agree that the invasion put an end to discussions concerning "if Russian special democracy is still a democracy". The focus of discussions has now shifted to the issue of Russian democracy's downfall after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the lessons to be learned from it.

During the online discussion „Military Dictatorships and Their Societies: Germany under National Socialism and Russia Today“, Jan Klaas Behrends, professor at the European University of Viadrina, made an attempt to compare the successful democratic transformation of Ukraine with the failure in Russia. He concluded that the key factor was the successful experience of democratic procedure – free elections in Ukraine. He claimed that if Russians had experienced the same, then that might have significantly influenced their society. This approach highlights the important influence of democratic procedures on the strengthening of societies.

Lev Gudkov, a Russian sociologist and director of the Levada Center, was another participant in this discussion. He stated that Russian society had preserved its totalitarian ideology through the persistent reconstruction of totalitarian state (social) institutions. Gudkov admitted that he, like many others, had also overestimated the chance for democracy in Russia in the short period after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He emphasised that the key mistake was underestimating the depth of totalitarian values in Russian society.

Russian liberals, who are now often in exile, are considered by the West to be the main drivers of the future possible reboot of Russian democracy. They believe that the short period after the collapse of the USSR gave hope for the democratisation of Russia. Among the diversity of opinions, it is worth paying attention to the words of Elena Nemirovskaya, the co-founder of the School of Civic Education in Moscow. In her speech during the World Democracy Forum 2022 at Forum Talk 7 – The Missed Opportunity of Democracy in the Russian Federation, she made two important points. Firstly, she said that „in our country, freedom has been replaced by security.” She then went on to say that „Russia is a European state with European values, but it is not a Western country. This is a country, where people do not know how to think like a nation about the institutional life of the state, we are not a legal state. Individual, civic consciousness is not cultivated in Russia, but greatness is cultivated from empty ideas.”¹ She considered “the enlightenment” as the main method for the democratisation of Russia. It can be noted that while Nemirovskaya adheres to the value-based approach in analysing the failure of Russian democracy, her terminology is quite vague. In the end, she repeats the same narrative of a “special democracy” promoted by Putin.

Opposing Nemirovskaya's statement, it is worth saying that a country where people do not know how to think like a nation about the institutional life of the state, or where individual, civic consciousness is not cultivated but replaced by empty ideas, is not a country with modern European values. Instead, it has the authoritarian values of empire. And it is clear that the empire cannot be democratised. Therefore, before speaking about the possibility of democratic developments in the territory of the Russian Federation, the process of decolonisation in this part of Eurasia has to be finished.

The empire strikes back

Probably, it would be right to say that the Russian aggression against Ukraine was inevitable, not only from a geopolitical but also a historical point of view. In effect, it is a manifestation of the imperial policy of revanchism. All the Western misinterpretations of Russian strategy and policy after the disappearance of the USSR became possible due to the omission of the imperial heredity of the Russian state and unfinished process of decolonisation of Russian Federation. In her essay for „The Washington Post”, Linda Kinstler notes that “Outside the halls of academia, the former Soviet states are rarely referred to as “post-colonial.” Instead, they are usually called “post-Soviet”, a term which suggests that the Soviet collapse created newly liberated nations.²

1 World Forum for Democracy, Forum Talk 7 – The Missed Opportunity of Democracy in the Russian Federation, 08.11.2022, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/world-forum-democracy/forum-talk-7-2022-the-missed-opportunity-of-democracy-in-the-russian-federation>

2 L. Kinstler, To understand the Ukraine-Russia conflict, look to colonialism, *The Washington Post*, 24.02. 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2022/02/24/ukraine-colony-russia/>

It is also highly likely that the majority of Russian elites, including the so-called liberal opposition to Putin's regime, are bearers of the imperial legacy in their values and narratives. This could be the reason for the failure of Russian democracy in the early 1990s and the inability of Russian liberals in exile to present today a competitive vision of the future reformation of the Russian Federation into a state that is not aggressive to its neighbours.

Meanwhile, Russia continues to transform under the influence of its war with Ukraine. Timothy Snyder argues that "Today's Russia meets most of the criteria (of fascism) that scholars tend to apply. It has a cult around a single leader, Vladimir Putin. It has a cult of the dead, organized around World War II. It has a myth of a past golden age of imperial greatness, to be restored by a war of healing violence – the murderous war on Ukraine."³ We can observe that in today's Russia legal nihilism in favour of authoritarianism has led to the establishment of parallel institutions, such as the mercenary Wagner Group that already operates outside of the legal framework of the Russian Federation. Taking into account the stable and wide public support in Russian society for the current war with Ukraine, it is possible to argue that the popularity of successful military figures, such as Wagner's Yevgeniy Prigozhyn, will grow alongside their political leadership. The Russian state under such leadership would be even less friendly than today's Russia.

Russia and European security

It was important for Russia to maintain a close partnership of relations with the West, not only to satisfy economic interests but also to create instruments of influence in European countries. Hence, one of the tasks of Russian foreign policy was to preserve „normal“ relations with European countries, as well as ensure the Western acceptance of the „peculiarities“ of Russian „democracy“. The desire of big European business to maintain cooperation with Russian partners, united with the efforts of the Kremlin's ideological sympathisers and network of influence in the EU, created favourable conditions for Russian diplomacy in pursuing its goals.

So, what was/is the ultimate goal that guided Russian foreign policy throughout the last two decades? To answer this question I would cite Liliya Shevtsova, who said that it was "to refashion the post-Cold War settlement, in the process guaranteeing the survival of Russia's personalized power system." The crystallisation of Russian foreign policy in such a format is generally considered to have started with Putin's famous speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 and the proposal of the Russian-designed European Security Treaty. At least since that time, Russia started stressing the "necessity" of reorganising the European security order on the new principles of multilateral dialogue, zones of special interests/responsibility and Moscow's veto right in European security issues. Russian political scientists and experts claimed that models, fashioned at the Yalta Conference in 1945 or the Congress of Vienna in 1815, would have been more fair and workable for the European security order. It is clear that the real aim of Moscow was to create an environment of supremacy of power and temporary alliances – "a Hobbesian world order, built on disruption and readiness for surprise breakthroughs".⁴ In a sense, this is confirmed by today's Russian actions in the OSCE, where it is blocking decisions on the annual

3 T. Snyder, We Should Say It. Russia Is Fascist, *The New York Times*, 19.05. 2022
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/19/opinion/russia-fascism-ukraine-putin.html>

4 L. Shevtsova, Ukraine Is Only One Small Part of Putin's Plans, *The New York Times*, 07.01. 2022,
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/07/opinion/russia-ukraine-putin-nato.html>

budget and the 2024 OSCE chairmanship. These are crucial for the bloc's normal functioning and are leading to an existential crisis in the organisation.⁵

And yet, analysing Moscow's foreign policy during the last three decades, it would be right to say that the starting point of modern Russia undermining the European security system should be defined as the period of the early 1990s. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and in the atmosphere of the ensuing political chaos, the Russian hybrid operation in Moldova and its military's role in the creation of the Transnistrian breakaway region happened almost unnoticed and definitely had not been correctly identified by the European states. An equally vague response was also given to Russian wars and atrocities in Chechnya during the 1990s. After the war against Georgia in 2008 and the following "reset" in relations with the West, Moscow was convinced that its goal of disrupting the European security order was realistic and the chosen strategy of breakthroughs and distracting negotiations successful.

The concept of a single European security system has been based upon the voluntary fulfillment of assumed obligations and compliance with the norms of international law by all European countries. If we conditionally divide the European security system into the sphere of hard (military) power (NATO) and the sphere of soft power (the system of international treaties and organisations in Europe), Russia was a source of challenges in both of these dimensions. In the field of hard security, Russia has challenged the system of military deterrence treaties. In the field of soft security, Russia systematically violated its commitments within the frameworks of the OSCE and the Council of Europe, the norms of international and humanitarian law, and various international treaties. And at some point, the Council of Europe changed its own regulations simply to return Russia to the negotiating table. After all, Moscow managed to wage three wars (Chechnya, Georgia and Ukraine) while staying a member of the Council of Europe and experiencing only temporary disciplinary restrictions.

Therefore, the policy of „forgiveness“ and „maintaining dialogue“ on the part of European countries in relation to Russia, despite increasing violations of human rights and the norms of international law, had a damaging effect on the European security system. Russia continued to destabilise the soft sphere of European security while being inside this system, reflecting the goals of Russian diplomacy. For many years, Russia has largely succeeded in these efforts. Even during the Russian invasion of Eastern Ukraine and the occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea, one could hear from various groups of EU representatives (politicians, intellectuals, journalists, etc.) that it was important to find a way to return Russia to the European security system, find opportunities to overcome contradictions, and encourage dialogue. Those European politicians and experts who supported the Russian idea of dividing Europe probably believed that peace in their countries could be guaranteed by moving the front line of the Euro-Atlantic presence away from Russia's borders. However, in reality, this was all about dismantling the European Security architecture which gave a feeling of safety to all European countries regardless of their size or military strength.

The European security system must be reconstructed after the end of the Russian war in Ukraine. The President of France Emmanuel Macron stated that a new security architecture should include guarantees for Russia.⁶ This idea evokes

5 S. Liechtenstein, Will Russia Kill the OSCE? *Foreign Policy*, 29.11.2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/11/29/osce-russia-putin-armenia-azerbaijan/?fbclid=IwAR3o4wDdJzU1ZMdVNAKfImzNFRGnbrOjGFRAgeJ7HkJs1UxtOiy313PM8c>

6 Guerre en Ukraine: „Je reparlerai à Poutine“, affirme Emmanuel Macron sur TF1, TF1 Info, 03.12.2022, <https://www.tf1info.fr/international/video-interview-emmanuel-macrin-au-13h-de-tf1-guerre-en-ukraine-je-reparlerai-a-vladimir-poutine-affirme-le-president-2240660.html>

a number of concerns and questions, the most important of which is connected not so with Ukraine, but with the meaning and existence of international law. Inventing something new would naturally overhaul the foundations of today's system of international law. It is subsequently necessary to strengthen the architecture of the European soft security system by adding a coercive component of sanctions regarding a potential violator of international law. The fragility of the European soft security system between 1993 and 2008 was caused not only by the fact that Russia did not intend to abide by its commitments, but also by the limited political and economic consequences faced by the violator. Hence, when speaking about fixing the European security system, it is worth referring to Kurt Volker's argument: „We must insist that the Russian Federation acts like everyone else.” And this means that for Russia „it should stop attacks on its neighbors, withdraw its forces, take responsibility for the war crimes committed by its leadership and its military, and in the future – undertake to exist within its own borders.”⁷

Conclusions

It would not be an exaggeration to say that the European and global order depend on the outcomes of the Russo-Ukrainian War. And it is important to remember that stable and long-term peace cannot be achieved if Russia continues to be an authoritarian state with imperial worldview. It is in the interest of Russia's neighbours and all other European states to facilitate the process of the “deimperialisation” and decolonisation of the Russian Federation. This will pave the way for the liberalisation of Russia. People who live on this huge territory must get rid of the imperial inheritance in their political culture and historical and strategic narratives. This process can be initiated by a new decolonization program for the West's dialogue with the Russian „liberal” opposition in emigration and the involvement of representatives of small and indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation in this dialogue.

It is also important to make international law work in order to guarantee that Russia's crimes – both of aggression and against humanity – will not go unpunished. Besides continuous support for the work of the International Criminal Court, it is necessary to establish a special tribunal to investigate and prosecute Russia's crimes of aggression. The challenges for this very important process mainly focus on attracting broad international support. Taking into account Russia's mastery in disseminating false narratives, it is important to work on resilience through understanding of Moscow's real political and economic goals by democratic governments all over the world. Hence, it is important to acknowledge Shevtsova's argument that Russia “is suggesting something very different: the irrelevance of rules”. Overall, Moscow wants an environment of chaos, in which the interests of states are secured not by international law but by hard power.

Last but not least, it is important that governments focus on fixing the European security system, and especially the part of it based on soft power instruments. It is hard to imagine that there could be any better and more full-fledged frames and instruments in pursuit of this goal than those based on the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe. Though adding elements concerning the coercive power of sanctions to the existing architecture of the European security system and avoiding veto power in the process of decision-making can be considered reasonable in today's challenging circumstances.

7 Волкер – Макрону: Гарантіями безпеки для Європи є міцна оборона і вступ України й Грузії у НАТО, Укрінформ, 08.12.2022, <https://www.ukrinform.ua/rubric-politics/3630581-volker-makronu-garantiami-bezpeki-dla-evropi-e-micna-oborona-i-vstup-ukraini-j-gruzii-u-nato.html>

The national question in Russia. What should be the Ukrainian reaction?

Nedim Useinow is a member of The World Congress of Crimean Tatars and a PhD candidate in the Department for European Islam Studies at the University of Warsaw.

LEAD: The current demographic, economic, political and social conditions in the Russian Federation do not support the idea of the country's disintegration in the short-term perspective. Instead of reckless narratives about Russia's 'decolonisation', Ukraine should promote more legitimate, clear and realistic liberation rhetoric.

The failure of the *blitzkrieg* war plan during the first weeks of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has dispelled the myth of the invincibility of the Russian military and provoked speculations about its ability to maintain control over the non-Russian regions of the Russian Federation. Many Ukrainians saw hope in possible separatist movements that could help defeat the Kremlin, so they willingly joined in more and more frequent deliberations on the possible 'decolonisation' of Russia. Oleksii Arestovych, a former advisor to the Ukrainian president's office and a popular commentator, in an interview with Russian journalist Yulia Latynina, said that for Ukrainians contemporary Russia will remain a hostile empire as long as it considers Chechnya, Tatarstan and other once-conquered territories to be indigenously Russian.⁸ Although not official, this view is extremely popular in the country and is founded on the belief that the imperial nature of the Russian state will pose a perennial threat to the security of Europe. However, existing demographic, economic, political and social conditions do not support the idea of Russia's 'deimperialisation' in a short-term perspective. Having said this, it would be much better for Kyiv to focus on the promotion of Ukrainian liberation narratives instead. A message formulated in this way will receive greater understanding in the West, especially in Germany and France, as opposed to visions of Russia's 'breakdown'.

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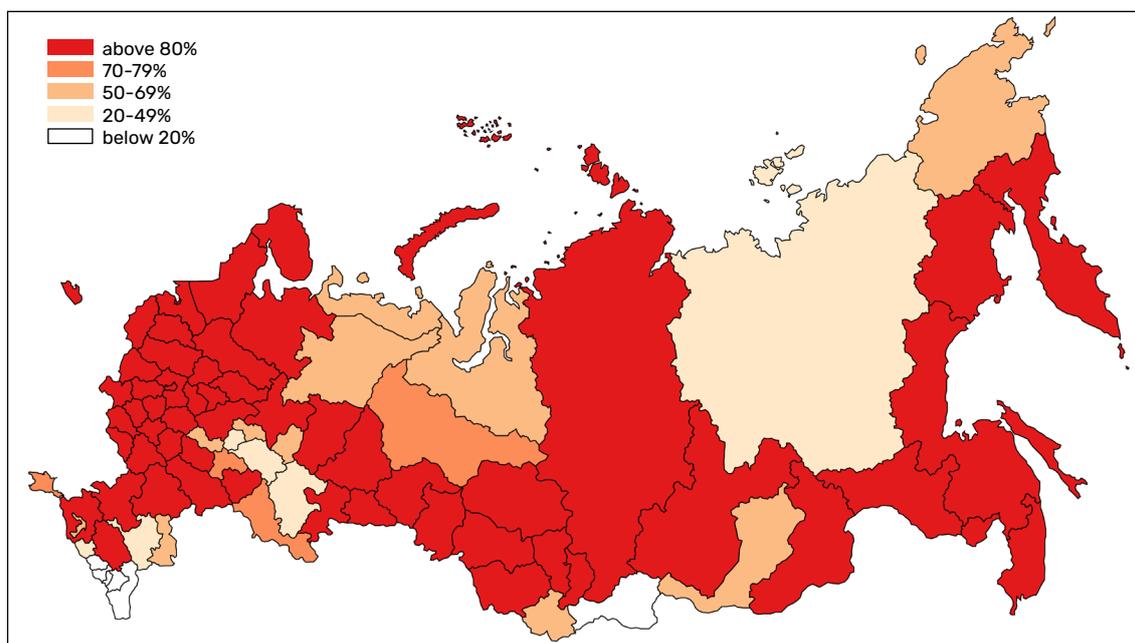
Between dubious statistical data and erased identity

Before presenting some illustrative statistics, it is worthwhile to first discuss terminology, since a myriad of contradictory terms are used in discussions about Russia's 'neo-imperial' policy towards other nations. Most popular are 'decolonisation', 'deimperialisation', 'breakup', 'disintegration', etc. Decolonisation is an extremely complicated phenomenon, which originally referred to the collapse of Western European colonialism after World War II. In popular and scholarly usage, colonies were territories whose conquest required travel overseas. However, in recent decades, researchers have tried to extend postcolonial methodologies by applying them in Russian studies. Ewa Thompson argues that Russia's territorial expansion for many

8 O. Arestovich. Den' 287, 07.12.2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOxR6M5kYL4> (last accessed on 22.12.2022)

centuries has been a form of colonisation.⁹ Alexander Etkind views Russian colonisation as simultaneously internal and external, targeting its own people and lands, as well as others.¹⁰ Both authors perceive colonialism as closely related to imperialism and Russia's territorial expansion over the centuries. In this context, discussions on the possible 'decolonisation' of Russia require us to consider various specific issues. Furthermore, the consequences of its potential breakup should be clearly separated from 'deimperialisation'. As the history of the 20th century has proven, the possible disintegration of Russia will not necessarily change its imperial essence.

Indeed, analysis of the demographic situation presents a rather pessimistic scenario. According to the 2021 census¹¹, non-Russians make up almost 20% of the country's population. Among them, Tatars (3,6%), Chechens (1,3%), Bashkirs (1,2%), Chuvash (0,8%) and Avars (0,8%) are the only five indigenous groups¹² of over a million people. If compared to the 2010 and 2021 censuses, an increase in the share of the non-Russian population in the North Caucasus, Bashkortostan, and a few other regions in Siberia (Turkic and Mongolian nations: Tuva, Altai, Buryatia, Yakutia and Kalmykia in the European part of Russia) can be seen against a decrease in others (the republics of Finnic nations). However, given that because of post-COVID-19 conditions in 2021 11% of the entire population did not indicate their nationality versus 4% in 2010, it is extremely difficult to analyse the current national dynamics in Russia. Experts criticised official data showcasing the Tatars and other non-Russians' share of the country's population, calling it significantly understated.¹³



Map: Percentage of ethnic Russians by region in 2021 (excluding non-stated ethnicity people)

Source: Wikipedia

9 E. Thompson, *Imperial knowledge. Russian literature and colonialism*, Greenwood 2000.

10 A. Etkind, *Internal Colonization: Russia's Imperial Experience*, Cambridge 2011.

11 Федеральная служба государственной статистики, *Итоги Всероссийской переписи населения 2020 года*, <https://rosstat.gov.ru/folder/56580>

12 By 'indigenous' we refer to the non-Russian ethnic populations that originate from a certain land and were never brought there from other territory.

13 Два самых лживых региона – Башкортостан и Саратовская область". Алексей Ракша объясняет результаты переписи, *Idel.Реалии*, 18.01.2023, <https://www.idelreal.org/a/32227478.html>

It is worth looking at the ethnic situation in the largest and most populous non-Russian regions in Siberia, the Volga region and the North Caucasus. In the Sakha Republic, which covers almost 20% of Russia's territory, native Yakuts make up slightly more than half of the population (55%), followed by ethnic Russians as the second largest group (33%). Besides Yakutia, Tuva is the only republic in Siberia inhabited mostly by non-Russians (90%). Generally, indigenous people make up just around 5% of the inhabitants of Asian Russia. In the republic of Tatarstan, where a population of more than four million lives, indigenous Tatars make up 53% of the population, and Russians 40%. In Bashkortostan, which has also a population of four million, Russians constitute 37% of the population, alongside two Turkic nations (Bashkirs 31% and Tatars 24%). The situation in the North Caucasus republics is different, with 94% Chechens and 95% Ingush in their respective national republics. In Dagestan the number of ethnic Russians decreased to 3%. The same trend of decline in the ethnic Russian population can be also observed in the western part of the North Caucasus (Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, North Ossetia-Alania) though its share of the population still oscillates around 20%. A quick look at other regions shows a significant share of Russians in their populations, giving the Kremlin "a legitimate argument to interfere" in the event of any conflict. Although the dynamics of population growth are currently in favour of indigenous peoples, its pace is too slow to make any potential independence attempts realistic in the short term. In the medium term, the North Caucasus may become an exception (geographical location, ethnic structure), though its combined territory is only a fraction of the rest of Russia and around 5% of its total population, so even a possible loss of these entities would not necessarily change Russia's imperial character.

Although the dim outlook of the census may reflect efforts to mask the grim reality of the declining population of ethnic Russians, the use of non-Russian ethnic languages has decreased in the last decade. Leyla Latypova, a popular Tatar journalist and activist, has said that "Russia has been committing open linguicide and ethnocide of our nations." According to an infographic published on her social media, over the past 11 years the use of non-Russian languages has significantly decreased in most of the Volga region.¹⁴ Mordovian, Tatar and Udmurt suffered the biggest losses with 38, 21 and 17 % declines in Tatarstan, Mordovia and Udmurtia respectively. Although the rather insignificant increase in the use of the Bashkir language has been noted in Bashkortostan, the overall situation has been deteriorating since the federal law that abolishes mandatory hours of 'national languages' in schools was adopted under the pretext of freeing ethnic Russians from the obligation to learn them.¹⁵ In reality, the law contributed to deepening the unfamiliarity of non-Russian minorities with their mother tongues. In addition to his increasingly discriminatory language policies, Putin has significantly centralised power and concentrated full political and economic control over the regions in his hands. A series of laws and decrees over several years have turned Russia into a de facto unitary state with disenfranchised local governments that are heavily dependent on central authority.¹⁶ One of the

14 See Latypova's Tweet published on 20 January 2023, <https://twitter.com/LatypovaLeyla/status/1616391684652163073>

15 Е. Барышева, Что не так с российским законом о национальных языках, Deutsche Welle, 19.06.2018, <https://www.dw.com/ru/не-в-ущерб-русскому-что-не-так-с-законом-рф-об-изучении-национальных-языков/a-44297566>

16 P. Goble, "Hyper-Centralization of Russia Threatens Its Development and Survival", *Jamestown*, 19.10.2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/hyper-centralization-russia-threatens-development-survival>

consequences of such a policy has been the lack of political and economic autonomy of national elites, who are under-represented at the federal level.

Is history instructive?

When discussing the prospects for Russia's 'disintegration' in the near future, arguments based on historical analogies are often used. Janusz Bugajski mentions the collapse of tsarist Russia after World War I and the decomposition of the USSR following the defeat in Afghanistan.¹⁷ On the one hand, he believes that Vladislav Surkov, the former prominent ideologist of the Kremlin, may be right when claiming that if Russia stops being imperial, it could fail as a state. On the other hand, there seems to be too much conviction that a negative outcome in the war against Ukraine could trigger harsh civil and national turmoil against the Kremlin. It is an uncertain view, as the causes of Russia's decay were not so much lost wars or battles as more momentous historical events. At the root of the empire's twofold collapse in the past century were nationalisms yearning for autonomy. Although Balts, Poles, Ukrainians or Crimean Tatars in the early 20th century were no strangers to the ideas of socialism, their national movements always had a distinctly pro-independence accent. Additionally, Russians barely made up 45% of inhabitants of the tsarist empire and slightly more than half in the Soviet Union. Wojciech Zajączkowski writes that it was typical for the socialist movement in the Russian Empire to ignore the demands made by national movements, and the Bolsheviks arrogantly considered aspirations for independence from Russia contrary to the interests of the 'revolution'.¹⁸ This policy has persisted throughout the many decades of Moscow's domination and has contributed to a growing national sentiment among local elites, as Włodzimierz Marciniak correctly points out in his comprehensive study of the Soviet Union.¹⁹

In the late 1980s, reawakened aspirations for independence became the final nail in the coffin of the Soviet empire. The formal collapse of a state with an army of more than four million and an inefficient planned economy was initiated by the declarations of independence of the Baltic states. These were soon followed by other republics, including Ukraine and Belarus. What needs to happen for history to come full circle once again? Agnieszka Legucka considers three possible outcomes of the Russian war against Ukraine: the strengthening of Putin, the collapse of his regime, and the disintegration of Russia.²⁰ With regards to the last scenario, the author points out consciously that it is unlikely at the moment, but at the dawn of an economic recession and growing regional discontent over the high cost of the war, mass protests in the remote provinces cannot be disregarded. The first to lose patience may be the non-Russian peoples of the federation, as seen in the revolts in Dagestan during the September mobilisation. Not surprisingly, many experts view the North Caucasus as the region with the greatest separatist potential despite it being clearly controlled by the Kremlin. Ramzan Kadyrov is a striking illustration of an authoritarian ruler whose power is founded on absolute personal loyalty to Putin and dependence on his protection. Matthew Sussex points out correctly that

17 J. Bugajski, *Failed State. A guide to Russia's Rupture*, Washington DC 2022, p. 287.

18 W. Zajączkowski, *Rosja i narody: ósmy kontynent. Szkic dziejów Eurazji*, Warszawa 2009., p. 184.

19 W. Marciniak, *Rozgrabione imperium. Upadek Związku Sowieckiego i powstanie Federacji Rosyjskiej*, Kraków 2001, p. 13-100.

20 A. Legucka, *What Would Be the Consequences of a Russian Collapse?*, *New Eastern Europe*, 08.12.2022, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2022/12/08/what-would-be-the-consequences-of-a-russian-collapse>

Kadyrov has few friends in Moscow, and he has managed to expose himself to the wrath of some of them, including Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu.²¹ Beliefs that in the event of Putin's exit from the political scene Kadyrov would immediately declare Chechen independence do not sound realistic, as losing Moscow's patronage would mean trouble with internal opponents he has persecuted for decades. Many of them are fighting on the Ukrainian side today, waiting for an opportunity for revenge.

Although history can be a valuable guide, it rarely repeats itself accurately. It is risky to rely on historical analogies such as the collapse of the Russian Empire or the USSR and conclude that the current war in Ukraine will end Russia's neo-imperialist inclinations. The lack of potential for strong independence movements and a relatively stable macroeconomic situation, despite the growing impact of western sanctions, are the biggest obstacles. As discussed above, highly centralised power with an extensive apparatus of repression and propaganda will help the Kremlin face even harsh political, economic and military turmoil as long as elites remain loyal to Putin. War failures and poverty may lay the groundwork for regime change and mass revolts in the long-term perspective rather than in the short run. But even then, as a potential civil war in Russia could further disrupt regional security, it is better for Ukraine and its European allies to be prepared for any scenario.

Conclusions

During its fight against Russian aggression, Ukraine pursues several tactical and strategic goals. The first and most important is victory, which means ending hostilities, reclaiming occupied territories, and holding the perpetrators of crimes accountable. After that, international security guarantees, including the accession of Ukraine to NATO, must be implemented in order to deter Russia. While Ukraine communicates its views and needs quite efficiently, which so far helped it secure military assistance from Western allies, the country's internal discourse from time to time has been buzzing with misleading calls for the 'decolonisation' of Russia, based on some reckless prophecies of its inevitable breakdown into smaller nation states. Although the Kremlin's imperial nature is rightly assessed as a strategic threat to Ukraine's security and peace across the continent, the belief in the enemy's decay sounds like wishful thinking. Even if the Russian Federation lost the North Caucasus as the direct outcome of this war, it would not change its aggressive character or significantly weaken its military strength. Moreover, the transformation of Tatar, Bashkir, Yakut or other non-Russian nationalisms into self-sufficient independence movements seems unrealistic in the near future. Consequently, for Ukrainian society, a much better alternative would be to replace vague 'decolonisation' rhetoric with Ukraine's own anti-colonial liberation narratives. This approach would gain more understanding and sympathy from the western public, vital in terms of securing continuous support for victory. Furthermore, focusing on defeating the Russian army on the ground is a realistic and legitimate goal, while striving for Russia's 'collapse' raises massive concerns about regional security and the future of the Russian nuclear arsenal.

In the long term, the desire of nations that are currently controlled by the Kremlin to establish independent nation states in the territory of today's Russia is understandable, and this goal should be further pursued, since there is a belief that

21 M. Sussex, "Could Russia collapse?", The Conversation, 30.10.2022, <https://theconversation.com/could-russia-collapse-193013> (last accessed on 22.12.2022)

only then security can be ensured in the continent. The resolution of the Verkhovna Rada passed in October 2022, which recognised the independence of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, is an illustration of this kind of long-term thinking. At the same time, such a promise to the non-Russian peoples of the Russian Federation to support their independence movements should be preceded by a well-thought-out strategy, which includes cooperation with ethnic leaders both at home and in exile.²² In this context, it is worth drawing from the legacy of the interwar political and intellectual movement called 'Prometheism', which supported independence movements among today's former USSR nations by helping governments and exile organisations resist the Bolsheviks. In any case, it should be clearly understood that even Russia's partial breakup will most likely be the result of the ineffectiveness of its current economic model and its neo-imperial character in the long-term, rather than the war in Ukraine. The worst-case scenario could include a plunge into social revolt and ethnic discord in a state with the world's largest nuclear arsenal. Having this in mind, Ukraine should focus on a long-term peaceful strategy, which includes developing ties with the indigenous populations of Russia by supporting their cultural identities and national movements, collaborating with ethnic leaders in exile, funding scholarships for young activists, initiating cultural exchange, helping to preserve native languages, subsidising discussion platforms that promote greater national autonomy, and a range of other initiatives that will help overcome Russia's neo-imperialism in the future.

22 M. Makarowa, "Ludzie w Rosji nie rozumieją, że już są na wojnie". W Jabłonnie zjazd jednej z frakcji rosyjskiej opozycji", *Okopress*, 4.11.2022, <https://oko.press/w-jablonnie-zjazd-jednej-z-frakcji-rosyjskiej-opozycji>

Frozen historical trauma - how to deal with it?

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LEAD: It is impossible to comprehend the Russian invasion of Ukraine without understanding the geopolitical context of historical relations in this part of Europe. The Kremlin has fabricated a narrative which is a hybrid mix of tsarist Russian imperialism, Soviet mythology and also religious elements connected to Orthodoxy. At the moment, its dominant aspect is fighting “Nazis” and NATO.

Russia’s full-scale aggression against Ukraine has launched a war that is now often seen through the lens of Tolkien’s famous novel *Lord of the Rings*. In this perspective, Russia became the dark land of Mordor inhabited by orcs, while Ukraine was an attacked Gondor fighting for humanity’s survival. In 2014 the heroic Ukrainian defenders of Donetsk Airport became legends, and now they are followed by the Azovstal fighters from Mariupol. The Russians visibly lack the capacity to construct a mighty counter narrative and this is the reason why Moscow is losing the propaganda/information war in the West. It is worth adding that Tolkien’s inspiration for writing *Lord of the Rings* came from his own experience of fighting in the trenches of World War I and then from his memories of World War II. In both cases the aggressors and enemies were Germans, the losers of both wars.

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Hybrid Russian mythology versus history

History, or rather historical mythology, is also one of the battlefields Russia, for some reason, loves to discuss. The Kremlin’s favourite national holiday is the Day of Russian Unity – *День народного единства* – celebrated on November 4th. Vladimir Putin decided to replace the celebration of the Great October Socialist Revolution (October 7th) with a specific date corresponding to when after two years of occupation (1610-1612) in Moscow the Polish-Lithuanian army was expelled from the city, ending the long period of *Смутное время* – Time of Troubles.²³ This holiday was celebrated in tsarist Russia until the October Revolution. It is worth mentioning that units of Ukrainian Cossacks from Zaporozhe and the Crimean Tatars joined then the Polish-Lithuanian forces. Putin’s decision subsequently reflects well his plan to construct a hybrid version of Russian history combining the heritage of both Soviet and tsarist Russia. The vision of current Russia as a successor state that has merged tsarist imperialism with its Soviet counterpart constitutes the key element of this

23 I. Gruber, *Orthodox Russia in Crisis: Church and Nation in the Time of Troubles*, DeKalb, Illinois, 2012.

policy of memory. Control over Ukraine is crucial for Putin's political success as, at the time of World War II, it was for Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany.

Meanwhile, Poland commemorates especially the Battle of Warsaw in 1920, when Polish troops supported by their Ukrainian allies managed to halt the Soviet army's march to conquer Germany and then Western Europe. Polish Marshal Józef Piłsudski was a key author of this success. He also promoted a close alliance between Poland and Ukraine, which was successfully blocked by his political opponents in the 1921 Riga peace treaty, which gave the eastern and central lands of Ukraine to the Soviet Union. The western parts of the country were then incorporated to Poland. Any moment in history when Poles and Ukrainians successfully cooperated caused an almost allergic reaction in Russia, which tried either to block it or produce a manipulative and divisive false narrative.

Anti-Nazism as an ideological weapon for the Kremlin

Today the tragic episode of the Volhynian massacre in 1943, when the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and its supporters murdered their Polish neighbours, is exploited by Russians as an opportunity to strengthen divisions between Poles and Ukrainians. It is important to mention that at that time the territory of Volhynia was controlled either by the Germans or Soviet occupants. Both were equally interested in preventing any cooperation between Polish and Ukrainian partisan groups (Home Army and UPA). The Polish and Soviet communist authorities' Operation Vistula in 1947 – the forced expulsion of Ukrainians from the south-eastern provinces of post-war Poland to former German so-called "Recovered Territories" in the west and north of the country, given to Poland as part of the 1945 Yalta Agreement – magnified this trend, labelling the Ukrainians as fascists or "Banderists" after Stepan Bandera, a Ukrainian nationalist politician. On February 24th 2022 Putin used exactly the same pretext to "justify" his aggression against Ukraine. He blamed the Ukrainian government for being fascists and Nazis which planned to exterminate "Russian patriots" living in Ukraine.

Such narratives of "fighting Nazism" were incorporated into the Kremlin's memory of the Great Patriotic War – *Великая Отечественная война* – which started in 1941 after Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union. However, Moscow's alliance with Nazi Germany (the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact), which saw both attack, divide and occupy Poland in 1939, was simply cut out of the whole picture of Soviet/Russian historical memory. It also played for many decades a minor role in German historiography. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the secret protocol attached to this agreement opened a way for attacking Poland and ultimately resulted in World War II.²⁴ After 1941, both countries fought for control over Ukraine (including the part which belonged to pre-war Poland) because the country was rich in oil and gas and had the best soil for agriculture. Ukraine also became a key region for controlling the West-East transport corridor.

Hitler's invasion offered the Soviets a chance to join the anti-German coalition, and then to force the victorious allies to accept Moscow's control over Central and Eastern Europe, including the territory of today's Ukraine, at the 1945 Yalta Conference. The Soviet leadership erased the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact from its historical memory and replaced it with the heroic Red Army's fight with the German Nazis, as well as the pro-Nazi Banderists from the UPA and other "Ukrainian fascists".

24 L. Rees, *Hitler and Stalin: The Tyrants and the Second World War*, New York 2021, pp. 1-90.

Such a narrative is now dominant in Putin's Russia, but the Kremlin has added to it by introducing a component of tsarist Russian imperial tradition alongside the Slavic Orthodox "brotherhood" of the Russian World (*русский мир*). Of course, this has resulted in pure hatred for Ukrainian statehood.

Such a mythological, hybrid history from the Kremlin's playbook became a toxic and infectious mix for indoctrinating Russian people, who unfortunately have clearly followed the leadership line and fallen for this trap. The level of "infection" is comparable to the effects of Nazi propaganda in Germany before World War II. Without this ideological context it is impossible to comprehend the character and dynamics of Russian policy and the country's social mood.

The Russian-German historical memory knot

It may take generations to change this, but first Putin has to be fully defeated, much like Hitler. Although this will not be enough. The denazification process in Germany could only take place because it was under the Allies' occupation. A similar process in Russia could only be initiated following the dissolution of the Russian Federation and would need a generation or more to cure this toxic "disease". This scenario seems inevitable if there is to be normality, security and predictability in this important part of the world.

It happened that Germany, unfortunately, has always been on the wrong side of Europe's contemporary history. Under Hitler's leadership Germany launched (thanks to the firm support of the Soviet Union) World War II. After the Allies' occupation and denazification efforts, supported by the USA Germany (Washington's plan was to promote Germany as a key anchor country for European security) managed to forge a leadership position in Europe. Germany's reunification in 1990 sent a signal to the world that the country had regained western trust and was ready to be a credible and honest partner.

The aim of a united Germany was naturally to involve Russia. A clear partnership was needed in order to erase the dark shadows of the Cold War's past and incorporate Moscow into modern European security architecture. Like in the Soviet Union and then in Putin's Russia, the shameful episode of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was overshadowed by the Germans' overwhelming feeling of guilt for their aggression and atrocities committed in the Soviet Union during World War II.²⁵ German foreign minister and then President Frank Walter Steinmeier has publicly declared that this feeling of guilt is a justification for Berlin's intense cooperation with Putin's Russia. All this resulted in numerous EU projects like the Partnership for Modernisation, Black Sea Synergy, and the construction of Nord Stream 1 and 2 by Moscow and Berlin. Former Chancellor Angela Merkel defends even today Germany's pre-war policy towards Russia. In response Polish politicians and public opinion considered these statements and moves by Berlin to be unbalanced and unfair. In 1939 Poland was a victim of joint German-Soviet aggression and according to Timothy Snyder's statistics from his book "Bloodlands"²⁶, during the war Ukrainians, Belarusians and Poles suffered proportionally much more than ethnic Russians. So, the German feeling of guilt should rather be redirected towards other nations, which suffered humiliation and destruction at the hands of the Germans and Soviets at

25 D. McGuinness, Ukraine war: Germany's conundrum over its ties with Russia, BBC, 18.04.2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61118706>

26 T. Snyder, Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin, New York 2012.

the same time. Germany's selective approach to history was probably one of the reasons why the Polish government decided to request war reparations from Berlin. The core of the issue is not just the financial compensation but rather the attempt to change Berlin's optics and increase awareness of German moral responsibility for cooperation with the Soviets/Russians in launching World War II.

Now, even after the Russian atrocities committed by Putin's army in Ukraine, the rhetoric of many German politicians keeps a similar track. The idea that the West needs "dialogue" with the Kremlin and Putin's circle persists in Berlin. It is interesting that any thought concerning the possible disintegration or collapse of the Russian Federation causes almost an allergic, panicked reaction. Often during meetings with my German colleagues, I was told that such an option should be excluded because it might bring the collapse of the world order and Armageddon for all of us. This quite typical reaction seems also to be a projection of Berlin's feeling of guilt towards Russia. Putin has very skilfully played this card, neutralising Berlin by taking advantage of German weaknesses related to perceptions of World War II. Of course, he excludes from the whole picture the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and any joint Soviet-German responsibility for starting the WW2. As a result, most of Berlin's political elite have followed the narrative that only Germany was responsible for this European tragedy. Such an approach also caused Germany to partially buy the Kremlin's myth about Ukrainian "right wing fascists and Banderists", which only gave Berlin more reason to pursue comfortable cooperation with Russia.

Berlin's seduction by the Russians – Nord Stream 1 and 2

In absolute numbers Germany hosts the largest number of Russian agents of influence in Europe and they are present at all possible political, cultural and religious levels.²⁷ The Kremlin's penetration of the German political elite has resulted in beneficial trade contracts. Russian gas and oil transfers through Nord Stream 1 managed to secure Putin's funding for the aggression against Ukraine. It is worth quoting here the statement of then Polish Defence Minister Radosław Sikorski, who at a transatlantic conference in Brussels on April 30th 2006 compared the pipeline NS1 to the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact: "Poland has a particular sensitivity to corridors and deals above our head. That was the Locarno tradition, that was the Molotov-Ribbentrop tradition. That was the 20th century. We don't want any repetition of that."²⁸ It can be said that in today's Europe Ukraine plays a role similar to that of Poland in 1939, a victim of aggression by much more powerful neighbours.

After reunification, the German concept for the further development of Europe was based on self-interest and cooperation with Russia. The Kremlin's slogan "free trade zone from Vladivostok to Lisbon" won support from Berlin. As the German weekly "Der Spiegel" stated in 2010 with excitement: "Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin would like to see a free trade agreement between the European Union and Russia." In this article, Putin is quoted talking about "a unified continental market with a capacity worth trillions of euros".²⁹ The Germans' unsuccessful approach to

27 The germs of the Russian World, *Texty.org.ua*, 01.12.2022, <https://texty.org.ua/projects/108323/germs-russian-world-who-supports-russia-europe/>

28 M. Bunderman, Poland compares German-Russian pipeline to Nazi-Soviet pact, *Euobserver*, 02.05.2006, <https://euobserver.com/world/21486>

29 Putin Envisions a Russia-EU Free Trade Zone, *Spiegel International*, 25.11. 2010, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/from-lisbon-to-vladivostok-putin-envisions-a-russia-eu-free-trade-zone-a-731109.html>

EU integration and transatlantic cooperation was based on the false assumption that the incorporation of Russia into European trade relations would build a secure and stable continent. “Change through rapprochement” (*Wandel durch Annäherung*)³⁰ worked well for the German business elite and Berlin’s position in Europe and the world, but not for Eastern Europe and the EU in general. Germany together with France successfully blocked Ukraine’s NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008. It is worth remembering that the Polish position represented at the summit by the late President Lech Kaczyński was in favour of giving Kyiv the NATO MAP (Washington also supported this option).

Euro-Atlantic integration of the EaP countries - why it did not work.

The result of this decision was Russian aggression against Georgia in Summer 2008 and the occupation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As it turned out later, this Kremlin operation was a pilot project – preparation to later annex Crimea and take over part of Donbas in 2014. The reaction of France and Germany to the Russian aggression was weak and irrelevant (Minsk 1, Minsk 2 and the Normandy Format). These were all based on the German and French self-interests of keeping good relations with Putin’s Russia and benefitting from mutual trade. At the same time, mutual understanding of the Russian threat resulted in a gradual increase in security cooperation between Poland and Ukraine. This alliance was deepened especially after 2014. This rapprochement between Poland and Ukraine brought results after Russia’s full-scale aggression. Poland became one of the biggest donors of military aid to Ukraine and welcomed the largest number of Ukrainian refugees in the world following the invasion.

The Eastern Partnership (EaP), the Polish-Swedish idea of intensifying cooperation with the countries of Eastern Europe, was endorsed by the EU in 2009 and was a kind of soft reply to developments in the region. In order not to aggravate the Kremlin, the EaP – in contrast to EU policy towards the Western Balkans – did not include an EU membership perspective for the countries which signed Association Agreements with the EU – Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Warsaw’s position was to include EU candidate status, but Brussels maintained the already agreed consensus. Finally, the full-scale Russian aggression on February 24th 2022 and the subsequent war changed the status quo. Under the growing pressure of Central European countries, the EU decided to offer Ukraine the prospect of becoming a member in the “distant future”.

Since February 24th 2022 the whole geopolitical concept of the EU and NATO has been challenged. The latest developments in the Western Balkans show that Ukraine has a much firmer and more determined position to integrate with the EU and NATO than Serbia. Now, Ukraine needs urgent political and military support from the West in order to defend itself against Russian aggression. On the other hand, Ukraine is not a liability for the EU and NATO but a serious asset. The Ukrainian army is today one of the strongest in Europe, its officers were trained by their NATO colleagues, and they know how to use Western military equipment and utilise NATO intelligence. Their determination and skills are highly evaluated by Western militaries. They have gained serious combat experience and also know well the strategy of their

30 S. Meister, Reframing Germany’s Russia Policy – an Opportunity for the EU, European Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Brief, April 2014, https://ecfr.eu/archive/page/-/ECFR100_GERMANY_RUSSIA_BRIEF_AW.pdf

enemy. The Ukrainian army could be a great asset for strengthening the Alliance in the near future, after the war ends.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, facing this new situation Germany (and also France) played the game according to well-established rules. The Chancellor of Germany Olaf Scholz and President of France Emmanuel Macron declared their support for Ukraine, but on the other hand both also tried to secure communication channels with Putin. In spite of pressure from Washington, Scholz is still balancing between promises and inaction. The latest story concerns Berlin's unwillingness to immediately give the green light for Leopard tank deliveries by Finland, Poland, Spain and other EU countries. This is probably the best illustration of Berlin's schizophrenic dilemma. The term "*Scholzing*" was already coined for it.

Truly alarming news came recently out of Germany about a planned coup d'état.³¹ The plotters' plan was to storm the German Bundestag, arrest lawmakers and execute the chancellor. The Russians immediately denied any involvement in the plot. Dmitry Peskov, the Kremlin's spokesperson, said that "there can be no question of any Russian interference, it is a German internal problem." Such Russian denial should usually be treated as a confirmation. This scenario resembles very much a similar plot organised by Russian intelligence concerning the overthrow of the legitimate government of Montenegro³² in 2016. Russian participation was proven in court and Russian military intelligence staffers were sentenced to 12 and 15 years in prison in absentia. A couple of days before the arrests in Germany, one of the leading Kremlin TV commentators said that Germany should again be divided. Was this all just a coincidence?

This situation shows the scale of Russian penetration in Germany. Of course, this is a key challenge for all of Europe and in particular its Eastern states such as Poland, the Baltics and Ukraine. Now is the time to pursue better cooperation in order to stop the Kremlin from generating more chaos in Europe and the whole world. Helping Ukraine regain control over those territories occupied by Russia, including Crimea, is our joint obligation today. A world without Putin and his cronies should be our collective aim. A democratic and sovereign Ukraine will be a key element in the new post-war geopolitical order of Europe.

31 K. Bennhold, E. Solomon, Germany Arrests 25 Suspected of Planning to Overthrow Government, *The New York Times*, 07.12.2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/07/world/europe/germany-coup-arrests.html?campaign_id=60&emc=edit_na_20221207&instance_id=0&nl=breaking-news&ref=cta®i_id=93443789&segment_id=115246&user_id=ca0faa314023a41e6fc7fb45fe472cad

32 Dusica Tomović, Montenegro Court Sentences 13 In 'Coup' Case, *Balkan Insight*, 09.05.2019, <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/05/09/montenegro-court-sentences-13-in-coup-case/>

Time to pursue a *Zeitenwende* on Russia

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LEAD: Russia's aggression in Ukraine is not an episode, but a process with profound historical roots grounded in imperial ambitions. Ending the war is therefore not just a question of signing a peace agreement, but of reshaping the international order in such a way that Russian aggression cannot return with renewed impetus in a few years' time. This is undoubtedly the crucial task for Berlin and Warsaw, which can support Ukraine and thereby take responsibility for Europe's future sustainable security.

Russia's full-scale military aggression against Ukraine, which was launched on February 24th 2022, has provoked global shifts. By invading Ukraine, the Kremlin has not only attacked its sovereign neighbour, but also deliberately attacked the world order based on the principles of the United Nations Charter. Russian belligerence was driven by its own revisionism, i.e., the desire to destroy the post-Cold War world order and restore the so-called "concert of powers". The West had repeatedly downplayed signs that the Kremlin has abandoned a cooperative strategy in favour of a revisionist one. The first warning, in Vladimir Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007, was trivialised by the West. It also ignored the second warning, the 2008 war in Georgia, when, instead of punishing Russia, it was subsequently rewarded with dialogue and even a "reset". This only encouraged Putin to continue, with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the war in Donbas (2014-2015) only a matter of time. Weak sanctions did not stop Putin, and Ukraine came under intense pressure, including from the Normandy Format countries, to implement the Minsk II agreement, which primarily served Russian interests.

Today, Russia's aggression against Ukraine has confirmed in a brutal manner that its political elite, along with most Russians, embrace an imperialistic and nationalistic foreign policy. For more than two decades, Putin has managed to centralise power, destroy the free media and sideline the opposition outside the system. He has also deprived charismatic leaders who could threaten him of their lives, like Boris Nemtsov in 2015, or imprisoned them in a penal colony, like Alexei Navalny two years ago.³³

Heading to a new strategic culture

The only guarantee for a secure future in Europe is a major Russian military defeat. The potential end of the war through compromise would allow the Kremlin to force concessions (territorial and political) on Ukraine and would be seen in Moscow as a sign of the West's fragility. For the Kremlin, this would mean returning to business as usual, since the costs of the war would have been prohibitive for the

West, with economic development seemingly impossible without the benefits of trade with Russia. Overall, history shows that Russia only withdraws in the wake of a clear defeat.

After February 24th 2022, European countries divided into two camps, with the first wanting peace and the second wanting victory. While the peace camp tends to start talks with the Kremlin, believing that every war ends at the negotiating table, the victory camp is convinced that only by defeating imperial Russia is Ukrainian sovereignty and European security possible. However, in numerous countries, even such as those bordering Ukraine, Slovakia or Hungary, the prevailing assumption is to “look wider, beyond the horizon of war”. This is perceived as a sign of realism and long-term wisdom. The peace camp promotes three general arguments for keeping dialogue with Putin’s Russia:

First, there is a risk that Putin’s successor will be even more radical, making Russia an even greater threat to international security than today.

Second, because the collapse of a nuclear state is not an option, the threat of its destabilisation is unacceptable from a global security perspective.

And thirdly, it is impossible to conduct a proper policy towards the post-Soviet republics without involving Russia (the involvement of Russia is the lesser of two evils).

Theoretically, this argumentation may seem right at first glance, but in fact, going back to “business as usual” with Russia is no longer in the West’s fundamental interest, not to mention that it would be dangerous as well. First of all, fear of an even worse hard-liner in the Kremlin is unjustified. At present, there is little indication that Vladimir Putin is about to give up his power. Rather, we are currently witnessing a “rally around the flag” effect, that is, consolidation around the Kremlin. The opposition has been decimated and stigmatised through their new status as “foreign agents”, which in the eyes of the average Russian is tantamount to an internal “enemy of the state”.

Putin’s regime and destruction of alternatives

For nearly two decades, Putin has hedged against a “hostile takeover” of power, eliminating any charismatic opposition leader, from Boris Nemtsov, who was shot dead in February 2015 at the entrance to Red Square in Moscow, to Alexei Navalny, who has been imprisoned in a penal colony. He has also neutralised any prominent politician with ties to the Kremlin who might, with their popularity, undermine Vladimir Putin’s leadership. Thus, two years ago the governor of Khabarovsk Krai, Sergei Furgal, was arrested and presented with new, fabricated charges in an old murder case that had long been closed. Also posing a threat from within was Yevgeny Roizman. He is a former mayor of Yekaterinburg (2013-2018), and even earlier, a State Duma deputy for the Fair Russia party. He has spoken out strongly against the war and even had a sharp Twitter debate with party leader Sergei Mironov. In August 2022, he was detained for “discrediting the army”, but his real threat to the Kremlin was his position as a challenger within the elite, who does not represent the heavily isolated non-system opposition.

Nowadays, the potential for any kind of a revolt in Russia is also unlikely. The possibility of a mass uprising is not feasible, as Russians mostly (around 75% according to a Levada Center survey conducted in November 2022) support the so-called “special military operation”.³⁴ At the same time, they consider Ukrainians to be a “brotherly nation”, that is, a “Little Russian” branch of the Russian nation (*rusскиye*) headed by the Great Russians (ethnic Russians).

34 Levada Center, Conflict with Ukraine: November 2022, 12.12.2022, <https://www.levada.ru/en/2022/12/12/conflict-with-ukraine-november-2022/>

The likelihood of a palace coup and an oligarch revolt is equally low. Putin has created a state that functions in the manner of a mafia, giving protection (*krysha*) to members of the system but in exchange demanding absolute loyalty under threat of loss of life. The “Politburo 2.0”, the circle of Vladimir Putin’s closest associates, remains loyal. The Russian oligarchs have also not spoken out. Although around twenty of them have died in mysterious circumstances since the start of the war, they do not so far pose a threat to the Kremlin. They must be aware of the alternative if they betray Putin, especially as he has warned them of passivity and financial non-involvement regarding the special operation. Besides, Yevgeny Prigozhin, head of the mercenary Wagner Group, has been hitting back at them, advocating as early as this January for the mobilisation of oligarchs and their children into the army. However, it cannot be denied that the elite’s entanglement with the war has shaken the stability of power. While accusations of responsibility for the army’s failures are growing louder, there is little hiding the dissatisfaction with mobilisation. The economic crisis is also becoming increasingly clear. It is getting harder and harder to cover the truth with propaganda, not to mention the fact that Putin has broken the country’s unwritten social contract. There was supposed to be stability, but instead the war is beginning to knock on the doors of average Russians.

Transition of power and possible successors

Therefore, if there were a change in the Kremlin, the most likely scenario is a transition of power within the ruling political elite. In other words, we should expect the appointment of an acting president with Putin ruling from behind the scenes. This scenario has basically two options: a hawkish or dovish one. This all depends on whether the crisis in the Kremlin deepens and if the interests of the *siloviki* would prevail. If that were the case, Putin would most likely designate a successor such as Nikolai Patrushev, who previously led the FSB and now leads the Security Council. This would resemble the situation in 1999, when Boris Yeltsin named the then-young Putin as his successor in exchange for security guarantees.

But if external pressure turned out to be harsher, i.e., the West would maintain the position that it would only talk to a genuinely new leader in the Kremlin, and China would support this demand, the dovish option would probably prevail. This would see the rise of a “nice tsar” who could talk to Western leaders about lifting the most severe sanctions. This is also an option that would be acceptable to Putin, as it would mean not a loss of power but rather an adjustment. More importantly, this manoeuvre has already succeeded once. In 2008, Putin swapped positions with then-Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev. Until 2012, they were functioning as a tandem. Medvedev was formally the head of state, and Putin was prime minister. But actually, power was never surrendered by Putin. Medvedev’s role was supposed to be the face of new, attractive, liberal Russia. As a lawyer, and an alleged gentleman and open-minded politician, he lured the West in, even though Moscow attacked Georgia just three months after his inauguration. And this strategy worked – instead of punishment for the invasion, Russia got a reward. In December 2008, France and Germany blocked plans for Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO, and Barack Obama offered Moscow a reset in relations with the US.

“If things go badly for Putin, if Russia cannot reach an agreement with Ukraine and the West, the man who could replace him is, among others, Sobyenin,” said Leonid Nevzlin, one of the ex-managers of the Yukos oil company and a Russian-

Israeli businessman, in an interview with Ukrainian journalist Dmitry Gordon.³⁵ In fact, Sergei Sobyenin, the mayor of Moscow, is always mentioned in the context of Putin's succession. His greatest asset is his ability to compromise, and for the outside world he would be a "nice tsar". It would also be easy to promote Sobyenin by comparing him, for example, with former French President Jacques Chirac, who was mayor of Paris for almost 20 years before becoming head of state.

The bankruptcy of "Russia first"

As for the argument that the collapse of a nuclear power is out of the question, it should be remembered that the USSR disintegrated in 1991 and nuclear weapons were "returned" to the control of the Russian Federation. Rumours about the potential disintegration of modern Russia remain only speculation, as since the outbreak of the war there have been no signs of such a risk. The most questionable idea proposed by the peace camp, however, is the argument that it is impossible to conduct any policy toward the post-Soviet states by excluding Russia.

It is clear that a "Russia first" policy is no longer relevant following Putin's decision to undermine the post-Cold War world order and impose his interests by force. Moscow has not adapted to the post-1991 reality that for the last more than 30 years other post-Soviet states have managed to consolidate their sovereignty and significantly free themselves from Russia. The first were the Baltic states (Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia), for whom the disintegration of the Soviet empire meant not only regaining their legal sovereignty but full independence. More currently, as Ukraine has rejected at least twice the "offer" to "enter Russian civilization (*Russkiy mir*)", first during the Orange Revolution in 2004 and a decade later during Maidan, it today has to pay in blood for its full freedom and sovereignty. Indeed, Russia has invaded in a colonial style, as it seems to perceive Ukraine as a rebellious province that must be drowned in blood in order to be eventually pacified. Russia has not only embraced its imperial past, but its ruling elite is still shaped by a colonial mentality.

The national liberation struggle was always anything but a rebellion of "ungrateful nations". A good example is the case of Imam Shamil (1840-1859), the legendary leader of North Caucasian guerrillas who fought against the Russian conquest. He was sometimes portrayed in Russian historiography as a traitor who showed hospitality to "Polish and Hungarian mobs", being inspired, of course, by Russia's enemies (the Ottoman Turkey and the United Kingdom). Generally, Russia created and still cultivates a myth that it did not "colonise" or oppress the conquered peoples, but "liberated" them.³⁶ Its expansion always supposedly brought civilizational advancement, the emancipation of people and great modernisation (especially during the Soviet era). Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, in particular, were supposed to benefit from "joining" Russia, living together in a "great friendship".

As a result, many Russians cannot accept that their worldview and historical memory are in fact often xenophobic, colonial and racist. The absorbed nations could only be obedient or remain ungrateful. So, it is very symbolic that up until

35 Невзлин о возможных преемниках Путина: Мишустин, Собянин, Кудрин, Набиуллина. Раньше назвал бы Кириенко, но он либо с ума сошел, либо к увольнению готовится, Гордон, 29.10.2022, <https://gordonua.com/news/worldnews/nevzlin-o-vozmozhnyh-preemnikah-putina-mishustin-sobyanin-kudrin-nabiullina-ranshe-nazval-by-kirienko-no-on-libo-s-uma-soshel-libo-k-uvolneniyu-gotovitsya-1633447.html>

36 Jersild Austin, *Orientalism and Empire: North Caucasus Mountain Peoples and the Georgian Frontier, 1845-1917*, Montreal and Kingston 2002.

now they have not recognised forcible Russification as colonialism. For instance, the 19th century national awakening in Ukraine pushed the tsar to adopt a law in 1876 that banned the Ukrainian language. The law also ordered that Ukraine be called “*Malorossiya*” and Ukrainian people “*Malorosy*”. It is therefore not a surprise that the “*Ruskiy mir*” concept, referring to the ideal of collecting the Rus’ lands controlled by the great princes and tsars, became the ideological foundation for aggression against Ukraine.

Going forward, Russia’s aggression is not only a military one. Moscow has elevated terrorism to the level of state policy. Bombing civilian settlements aiming to break the morale of Ukrainians, as well as destroying the state’s critical infrastructure, and slaughtering civilians like in Bucha and other cities, are nothing new with regards to Russia’s expansion. Revenge against civilians, and that is what the Bucha murders were in essence, is rather a military routine – enemies are assigned collective responsibility. But terrorism is unquestionably one means that Vladimir Putin is not afraid to pursue. For example, keen on restarting a war with Chechnya in 1999, the FSB planted bombs in Moscow apartment blocks just to threaten citizens and find a pretext for a quick and victorious war. Thereafter came the terror of the Grozny filtration camps, as well as the shelling of civilian districts by Russian troops in Syria. Jan Rachinsky, while receiving the Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of “Memorial” on December 10th 2022, confessed that historians and lawyers have observed war crimes committed by Russia in Chechnya, and now they are seeing the same happening in Ukraine. As he stressed, crimes against humanity are being committed or perpetrated by the Russian state. Their roots are definitely – according to him – found in the sacralisation of state power as a supreme value, in the absolute priority of what this power wishes to consider “state interests” over the individual, his freedom, dignity and rights.³⁷

Ruscism: A Russian fascism

Putinism now increasingly seems to resemble fascism. In fact, we are now rather talking about “Ruscism”, that is, the peculiar mix of supremacy, cultural chauvinism and colonialism found in Russia.³⁸ The manifesto of Ruscism (Russian fascism) was articulated by Timofey Sergeytsev, the Kremlin’s political technologist and philosopher. In the past, he was involved in the political campaigns of Leonid Kuchma (1999), Viktor Yanukovich (2004) and Arseniy Yatsenyuk (2010). He also became famous for creating a propaganda poster that divided Ukraine into three sectors and the nation into three groups. Since the annexation of Crimea, he has been working for the state-owned RIA Novosti, where on April 3rd 2022 he wrote an article titled “What Russia Should Do About Ukraine”.³⁹

First of all, the manifesto is merely a paraphrase of Putin’s own words. According to it, the elimination of the Ukrainian ruling elite and the “de-Ukrainisation” of the Ukrainian nation should be Russia’s fundamental goals in this war. In order to achieve this, Russia will have to destroy Ukrainian culture and erase the very name “Ukraine”. This process was expected to take some time. “It cannot be less

37 Memorial, Nobel Lecture, Peace, memory, freedom, The Noble Prize, 10.12.2022
<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2022/memorial/lecture/>

38 A. Etkind, *Internal Colonization. Russia’s Imperial Experience*. Cambridge, Polity Press 2011.

39 Т. Сергейцев, Что Россия должна сделать с Украиной, 03.04.2022,
<https://ria.ru/20220403/ukraina-1781469605.html>

than a generation,” Sergeytsev believes. After all, the “Nazis” are not only in the government in Kyiv. “The nation is to blame, the passive Nazis, the carriers of Nazism.” So, they have to be re-educated *en masse*: with repression and harsh censorship in politics, culture and education.

It means that Putin does not intend to end the war, and any signs of the Kremlin’s “willingness to talk” must be understood as classic Russian *maskirovka* (deception). Putin is playing for time, due to the fact that he is unable to win the war on the front lines. His Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov stated on October 13th 2022 that the same goals could have been achieved by diplomatic means. In this case, however, NATO should not be directly involved in Ukraine and the West’s solidarity with Kyiv should cease immediately. The predictions of MGIMO experts, who in 2014 after the annexation of Crimea predicted that Ukraine would be destabilised at least until 2025 and would disintegrate by 2050, are still valid today.

Conclusions

First, the West should acknowledge that the *Zeitenwende* has arrived. This means that there is no return to business as usual with Russia. A secure Europe and Ukraine’s sovereignty depend to a large extent on whether Poland and, above all, Germany, will change their strategic cultures. We should forget about Russia as a partner and must define Moscow as a threat. It is fundamental not to delude ourselves that an offer of dialogue (or another “reset”) will change the Kremlin’s policy.

Warsaw, as a leading country of the Eastern Flank, and Berlin, as the main partner of the US in Europe, should multiply their efforts to help Ukraine win this war on the battlefield. This is the only way to break Russia’s imperial desires. Otherwise, the Kremlin will succeed in freezing the conflict under the guise of peace talks and, in the worst-case scenario, turn Ukraine into a failed state, dependent on international humanitarian aid and deprived of a fifth of its territory. Meanwhile, the European “peace camp” will be keen to see sanctions lifted in exchange for the familiar illusions of “democratisation and peaceful coexistence”. At the end of the day, Putin would remain in power and gain some time to rebuild his exaggerated military potential, to carry out a real mobilisation and improved training of reservists. After a few years of recovery, he will return with new resources and old imperial ambitions.

Second, Poland and Germany cannot afford to waste this new window of opportunity that will prove to be of historic importance. Assuming that imperial Russia only retreats on the brink of defeat, the West has to change its strategic culture. There is no time for endless arguments, it is time for the argument of force. To put it bluntly, the era of naiveté or economic selfishness by promoting “dialogue” with the Kremlin must come to an end. Peace and security in Europe depend on whether Russia will be successfully forced to accept responsibility for its aggression against a sovereign state, as well as the war crimes and terrorist attacks committed by the Russian army. Poland and Germany should undertake all possible measures to ensure that after fascism, Nazism and communism, Ruscism will be internationally recognised as another totalitarian ideology or at least as one that threatens international security and order. Both governments should also push for the establishment of an international tribunal to judge Russian war crimes and jointly lobby for Russia’s frozen assets (more than 300 billion US dollars) to be used for Ukraine’s post-war reconstruction.

Third, there can be no more “post-Soviet” talk. Poland and Germany’s task should be to avoid relativising Russian aggression. For example, the 12 countries of the so-called “near abroad” (this naturally does not include the Baltic states) should no longer be seen as a separate and homogenous post-Soviet region. By labelling them “post-Soviet”, we support the Kremlin’s narrative that the post-Soviet space represents Moscow’s exclusive zone of influence.

How real is the *Zeitenwende*? Explaining the gap between rhetoric and action

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LEAD: Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has triggered a political rethink in Berlin which goes far beyond the relationship with those two countries. It includes essential questions of European and transatlantic security, EU reform and EU enlargement, as well as military expenditures and economic adjustments within Germany. In fact, the *Zeitenwende* is about a fundamental shift of political and strategic culture in Germany in particular and in the EU more broadly.

Numerous aspects of the *Zeitenwende* as seen by the German government have been laid out in particular in several speeches and an article by Chancellor Olaf Scholz. The first speech, on 27 February 2022 in the Bundestag, only three days after the massive Russian invasion of Ukraine, focused on the implications of the war and most notably pledged a special expenditure of 100 billion euros for the German armed forces. The second speech, on 29 August 2022 at the Charles University in Prague, emphasized the need for EU reform in the context of the *Zeitenwende*. This raised fears among some observers that the lack of such reform could be used as an excuse to postpone the accession of Ukraine and other candidate countries to the EU indefinitely. The third speech, at the UN General Assembly on 21 September 2022, addressed questions of international order.⁴⁰

Finally, in a wide-ranging article published in December 2022 and January 2023 in both German and English in the influential US journal "Foreign Affairs", Chancellor Scholz gave his assessment of the developments in previous decades which led to Russia's revisionism and its war of aggression against Ukraine, as well as embedding these developments in a larger international setting. Crucially, Scholz emphasized the need for a new strategic culture in Germany and spoke of a new role for the country as one of the main providers of security in Europe. He claimed that the changes made so far, in particular to strengthen the Bundeswehr, "reflect a new mindset in German society".⁴¹

There are also numerous examples of other high-level German government officials and members of the Bundestag clearly committing to the tenets of the *Zeitenwende* in their statements. This involves in particular the idea of supporting Ukraine "for as long as it takes" and the necessity for Russia to lose the unprovoked and unjustified war it has begun.

40 Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung (BPA), Bundeskanzler Olaf Scholz: Reden zur *Zeitenwende*. Zweite, erweiterte Auflage, 26.10. 2022, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/service/publikationen/bundeskanzler-olaf-scholz-reden-zur-zeitenwende-2127768>

41 O. Scholz, The Global *Zeitenwende*: How to Avoid a New Cold War in a Multipolar Era, *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/germany/olaf-scholz-global-zeitenwende-how-avoid-new-cold-war>

It is thus evident that significant shifts are taking place in German foreign and security policy.

At the same time, Berlin has not always been perceived as living up to its rhetoric in practice. This gap between statements and actions has been seen most clearly in the question of arms deliveries to Ukraine. Although the mere fact of these deliveries is evidence of a major change in German foreign and security policy approaches, the mode and timing of the deliveries have often been less convincing than the rhetoric about military assistance. Initial hesitancy to accept Ukraine as a candidate member of the EU as well as the inclination of some political actors to encourage the pursuit of negotiations with Russia (a so-called Minsk 3 approach) have also raised questions about the degree to which Germany stands firmly behind its own rhetoric and that of the transatlantic alliance to which it belongs.

German policy towards the war in Ukraine is married with the gap between rhetoric and action. The mental shift which will be required within the German elite and society in order to transform the relationship with Russia into one with an adversary remains, despite certain changes, rather limited. German foreign and security policy still copies with the of strategic thinking. An overly bureaucratic approach and the corresponding hurdles in the German context are also partly responsible for the gap. None of these factors completely explains the difference between statements and deeds but taken together they go a long way towards doing so.

Previous German policy towards Russia

In order to comprehend the problems associated with making a sustainable shift towards viewing Russia as an adversary (and acting accordingly), a review of the previous approach to Russia in the German elite and society is essential. Earlier policy towards Moscow stemmed from a fundamentally positive attitude towards Russia consisting of various components. These included an experience of the Soviet Union (USSR) as a reliable partner in the energy sphere, a sense of guilt linked to the responsibility of Nazi Germany for millions of deaths of Soviet citizens during World War II, and gratitude for Moscow's role in making possible the reunification of Germany. Post-Cold War Russia was perceived as being synonymous with the USSR, which it legally succeeded. Only in recent years has it entered the German debate that the highest number of deaths per capita during World War II occurred on the current territory of Ukraine and Belarus.⁴² On the societal level, contacts between individuals and organizations in Germany and Russia have been numerous and persistent. All of this created a solid basis for a policy towards Russia which was founded on the idea of Moscow as an important and credible partner.

Policy towards Russia was characterized by a remarkable degree of continuity under Chancellors Helmut Kohl, Gerhard Schröder and Angela Merkel. Despite displaying a clearer awareness of the authoritarian character of the Russian regime and adopting a more critical tone, Russia policy under Merkel retained more features of that of her predecessor than originally predicted. In particular, energy cooperation (with the Nord Stream pipeline as a flagship project) and active development of economic relations continued. This satisfied not only many within the German political elite, but also those business actors who were involved with Russia and/or dependent on affordable Russian natural gas deliveries.

42 J. Bender, This Chart Shows the Astounding Devastation of World War II, *Business Insider*, 30.05. 2014, <https://www.businessinsider.com/%age-of-countries-who-died-during-wwii-2014-5>

After the illegal Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014 and the Russian invasion of Donbas which began in April 2014, German policy towards Russia changed significantly. Berlin became a major driver of EU sanctions against Russia, helping to keep all member states on board and ensuring an escalation of sanctions from those affecting certain persons and entities to those encompassing entire economic sectors. The tone vis-à-vis Russia became harsher and numerous formats in both the German and EU contexts were suspended or discontinued. Nonetheless, economic cooperation went ahead and a second branch of the Nord Stream pipeline was tacitly approved by the German government in 2015. Berlin committed itself to working within the framework of the “five principles” of the EU approach to Russia, placing especial emphasis on the fourth principle, which involved selectively engaging with Russia on areas of interest to the EU. Germany did not, however, come up with a new national Russia policy to reflect the altered situation starting in 2014. It also clung tenaciously to the idea of eventually implementing the Minsk agreements as a way of resolving the war in the Donbas triggered by the de facto occupation of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk regions by Russian military representatives and administrators.⁴³

A difficult mental shift

Germany is known for its incremental approach to change, so radical alterations of policy are difficult, in particular when they run counter to the interests and attitudes of significant parts of the political elite, business and society. While the period since 2014 can be seen as a transition phase away from the era focused on cooperation which preceded it, the absence of a new Russia policy allowed key actors to believe that the crisis would pass and that certain elements of the previous approach could be reinstated.

In addition to habits and attitudes instilled over the course of recent decades, there is also a series of fears accompanying the current German approach to Russia. The previous policy had the advantage of not needing to confront Russia in the role of adversary. With the onset of the full-fledged war in February 2022, concerns about previously unthinkable developments have emerged. First, there is a fear of escalation of the war and especially of its potential spill over onto the territory of NATO member states. Second, there is a (not always articulated) fear of the possibility of nuclear war, which is skilfully manipulated by President of Russia Vladimir Putin. Third is a fear of the political, economic and security-related consequences implied by perceiving and treating Russia as an enemy. Finally, there is a fear of instability and chaos developing within Russia due to the war and its consequences, as well as of the spill over effects such instability could have for Germany and the EU.

Nevertheless, the shift in Germany’s policy towards Russia is occurring, although at varying tempos among different groups. In the political sphere, the Greens were the first to voice strong criticism of Russia, well before the 2014 changes in policy, in particular during the period surrounding Vladimir Putin’s assumption to the presidency for a third term in 2012. Parts of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) followed this trend, with a critical line towards Russia becoming ever more

43 The Minsk agreements were a series of accords reached in 2014–2015 through mediation efforts by Germany and France. Their goal was to resolve the armed conflict concerning parts of the Donbas which resulted from the covert Russian invasion of that region in spring 2014 and involved Russian financial, administrative and military support for local separatist groups.

predominant over time. The Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Left Party (Die Linke) remained consistently Russia-friendly until the outbreak of the full-fledged war in February 2022, and even since then their positions differ substantively from those of the German government.⁴⁴

More complex was the situation in the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), where there has been a significant generational shift. Many of the older SPD MPs were attached to the idea of Ostpolitik and thus also to what was seen as its contemporary incarnation in tenets such as “*Annäherung durch Verflechtung*” (Rapprochement through linkage) and the many cooperation offers made to Russia in the framework of the Modernization Partnership initiated by then Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier in 2008. Younger MPs and party functionaries identified much less with these ideas (and were indeed much less interested in Russia) and thus were (and are) more open to a critical approach, although there are exceptions.

Even if Russia was not one of Germany’s major trading partners prior to February 24th 2022, there were nonetheless thousands of German companies involved in business there. While some have completely halted any form of economic cooperation, others have continued to operate as usual. The majority fall somewhere in between, e.g. having ceased some but not all operations, continuing some of them but halting investment, retaining the option to return, etc.⁴⁵ Although most German businesses engaged in Russia have supported the existing sanctions, this does not mean that they advocate for complete economic decoupling.

Finally, there is the question of attitudes in German society. As mentioned above, the numerous contacts and experiences with Russian citizens and organizations have contributed to a certain sympathy for Russia among parts of the German population. This is enhanced by the fact that knowledge about and awareness of Ukraine has been very limited until extremely recently. There is also the issue of attitudes being different in eastern and western Germany.⁴⁶ On the territory of the former GDR perceptions of Russia have consistently been more positive than in the western Länder. This remains true even after February 24th 2022. However, since the Russian invasion on that day there has been an outpouring of support for Ukraine in the German populace. Not only have many people welcomed Ukrainian refugees into their homes, but the condemnation of Russia has been strong, as evidenced by support for sanctions.⁴⁷ Furthermore, there is a willingness to undergo certain economic losses in order to support Ukraine, including in the sphere of energy.⁴⁸

44 See, for instance: L. Zimmermann, Die AfD und ihre umstrittene Beziehung zu Russland: Es ist kompliziert, *Kreiszeitung.de*, 15.05.2022, <https://www.kreiszeitung.de/politik/die-afd-und-ihre-umstrittene-beziehung-zu-russland-es-ist-kompliziert-91546865.html>

45 Chief Executive Leadership Institute, Yale School of Management, Over 1,000 Companies Have Curtailed Operations in Russia – But Some Remain, 05.02. 2023, <https://som.yale.edu/story/2022/over-1000-companies-have-curtailed-operations-russia-some-remain>

46 ARD DeutschlandTrend, Mehrheit unterstützt Sanktionen gegen Russland, *tagesschau*, 22.07.2022, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend/deutschlandtrend-3087.html>

47 dts Nachrichtenagentur, Umfrage: Mehrheit für Beibehaltung der Sanktionen gegen Russland, *OOZ: Oldenburger Onlinezeitung*, 11.10. 2022, <https://www.oldenburger-onlinezeitung.de/nachrichten/umfrage-mehrheit-fuer-beibehaltung-der-sanktionen-gegen-russland-93080.html>

48 Statista Research Department, Was meinen Sie, sollten wir die Ukraine trotz hoher Energiepreise in Deutschland weiterhin unterstützen?, Statista, 09.09. 2022, <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1320532/umfrage/unterstuetzung-der-ukraine-trotz-hoher-energiepreise/>

Lack of strategic thinking and bureaucratic hurdles

Another factor which has hindered the implementation of some elements of the announced *Zeitenwende* is a lack of strategic thinking in German policy circles, in particular with regard to security issues. Post-World War II Germany was for decades expected to keep a low profile and prove that it could interact constructively in multilateral settings without attempting to become dominant. This approach was successfully inculcated into German diplomats and other country representatives and persists to this day. Thus, Berlin frequently prefers to act in multilateral formats rather than going it alone. This has been particularly true for the political and security realms, albeit much less so for the economic and energy spheres.

Thus, strategic thinking has not necessarily been encouraged or practiced to the extent that this has occurred in comparable European capitals. This appears to be changing, as the first German national security strategy is in the works and is scheduled to be published in early 2023. However, reports on the process of its generation reveal that this is indeed a new experience for the German government, one fraught with difficulties concerning priority setting and cross-ministerial coordination. Nonetheless, the process has begun and is likely to be the start of a new model. With strategic frameworks in place which define and reflect national interests, formulating and implementing policy should be easier and faster, since fundamental decisions will already have been taken.

Certainly, Germany is far from the only country to have slow and cumbersome bureaucratic processes. However, they have come particularly to the forefront in conjunction with the need to assist Ukraine, and thereby to combat Russian aggression. The slow tempo of German decision-making is often attributed to the federal system. This is true in many cases, but less so with regard to decisions regarding Ukraine and Russia, which lie primarily in the realm of foreign and security policy and are therefore not subject to approval by the 16 Länder. Rather, certain overly bureaucratized procedures have been responsible for part of the problem, such as those associated with the defence procurement office of the Bundeswehr (BAAINBw, or Beschaffungsamt). The inflated requirements for acquiring anything from helmets to communication technology have led to processes in which years are needed to obtain even simple equipment.⁴⁹

Moreover, the fact that Germany lags behind most European countries in the area of digitalization means that certain bureaucratic procedures are slower than they could (and arguably should) be. Additionally, the German inclination towards optimization of processes tends to slow things down or even prevent them from occurring. Concerns that Ukrainian soldiers would not be able to deal with equipment, which was not properly refurbished, still unfamiliar to them, or for which ammunition was likely to run short in the future deterred some potential arms shipments. However, from the Ukrainian point of view, it would have been better to have something rather than nothing, even under far less than ideal circumstances. This phenomenon has been referred to using the phrase: "The perfect is the enemy of the good."

49 Ralf Bosen, Bundeswehr: Modernisierungsbremse Beschaffungsamt?, *Deutsche Welle*, 05.06. 2022, <https://www.dw.com/de/bundeswehr-modernisierungsbremse-beschaffungsamt/a-61994433>

Conclusions

The situation in Germany with regard to Russia and Ukraine is not likely to change quickly. In addition to the factors analysed above, the current political environment, involving a three-party coalition on the federal level, often renders decision-making difficult and time-consuming. It is highly unlikely that Germany will take on an overarching leadership role in the formation of new policies on the EU level concerning Russia and/or security questions. Such a role would be made even more difficult by the current problems Berlin is facing in its relationship with various EU member states, in particular Poland and France.

Close collaboration between Germany and countries within the EU further to the east, such as Poland and the Baltic states, would seem to be a natural consequence of developments, which have shown the latter states to be correct in their assessments of the nature of the Russian regime and its capacity for violence. However, such an alliance is proving impossible to consolidate due in large part to the highly problematic nature of the Polish-German relationship. Unfortunately, the ruling party in Poland has included a strong anti-German component in its ideology, which seems likely to be retained and even strengthened in the context of the upcoming elections in autumn 2023. The ongoing problems with rule-of-law in Poland make it difficult for Warsaw to play a key role in defining a new EU-Russia policy, due to reputational losses for Poland in Brussels and other EU member states.

Relations between Germany and France are not as problematic, but far from good, as was evidenced by the postponement of the joint cabinet meeting originally foreseen for October 2022.⁵⁰ The agreement on pursuing the long-postponed FCAS fighter jet project (together with Spain) is a welcome development, but serious differences of opinion and approach between Paris and Berlin on both energy and security matters remain, despite the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Élysée Treaty in January 2023.⁵¹

A further reason for the probable lack of German leadership is a continued reliance on the US. Despite increased military spending and contributions to European defence projects such as FCAS, in Germany a strong tradition of viewing the US as the primary security provider for Europe nonetheless exists. This tradition does not seem to be called seriously into question despite repeated demands from Washington for Europe to supply more of its own security needs and a US foreign policy which places an ever-greater emphasis on other parts of the globe, Asia in particular. There is little preparation in Berlin for the possibility of another US presidential term by Donald Trump or someone who espouses similar positions. The linkage made by Chancellor Scholz to US delivery of Abrams battle tanks to Ukraine during his decision to provide Kyiv with Leopard 2 battle tanks is evidence of German unwillingness to take the lead even when encouraged to do so by partners.

Finally, German society has not been prepared for the idea of Berlin becoming a major actor in the sphere of security policy. While the society has evolved over the years, it retains a significant segment with a strong pacifist streak and a certain scepticism about the idea of spending large amounts on security and defence,

50 J. Ross, K. Kremer: Stunde der Wahrheit: Die deutsch-französische Kooperation braucht dringend Erfolgsmeldungen, *DGAP Kommentar*, 26.10. 2022, <https://dgap.org/de/forschung/publikationen/stunde-der-wahrheit>

51 T. Hummel, Ch. Amann, Airbus, Dassault reach deal on FCAS jet programme, *Reuters*, 01.12. 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/companies-have-reached-deal-fcas-jet-programme-says-dassault-aviation-head-2022-12-01/>

especially if this should threaten the existing social welfare model. In the current situation, the German government has focused on reassuring the population that even in the face of energy shortages and inflation resulting primarily from the war, their needs will be taken care of and life will continue more or less as normal. While this approach is understandable, it does not contribute to a deeper understanding of the degree of the threat to the European order coming from Russia, nor does it convey the urgency of the situation.

Thus, for multiple reasons, a leadership role for Berlin in the upcoming years does not seem to be the most probable option, despite Germany's overwhelming importance in the EU and transatlantic frameworks. However, since all three factors responsible for the gap between rhetoric and action are being addressed, it seems likely that over time this gap will shrink, opening up possibilities for more decisive German leadership in the future.

The weak link? Germany and Russia's war against Ukraine

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LEAD: The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine does not seem to be ending soon. Therefore, the central question is whether the West, including Germany, can provide Ukraine with all the equipment that Kyiv needs to maintain this high intensity war over the next few months or even years.

At the end of 2022 after Ukrainian forces liberated the strategic city of Kherson and all of the Kherson region west of the Dnipro River, the front lines have somewhat stabilised. But there is no end to the Russo-Ukrainian War in sight. Ever since Russia launched its full-scale invasion and occupied large parts of the country, Ukraine has managed to liberate more than 45,000 square kilometres of its lands. But according to the Institute for the Study of War Russia still controls about 17% of Ukraine, including the Donbas and Crimea.⁵² Meanwhile, Russia has not abandoned its maximalist war aims and still seeks to subjugate all of Ukraine, even if that seems practically impossible at this time. As Russia is gearing up its war economy and learning to cope with the increasingly biting Western sanctions, its latest move to mobilise 300,000 soldiers indicates that Moscow is determined to drag out this war.

However, most Western economies have not yet adapted to the new reality. Germany announced that it would significantly ramp up military spending, but it will take years to reach the stated NATO 2% of GDP spending targets. Only in late December 2022, the US announced that it would triple its 155mm artillery shell production to address the high demand from Ukraine. But production falls short of the immense artillery shell consumption seen in the conflict.

The new military reality

Despite the recent losses in Kherson and Kharkiv, Russia's maximalist war aims have not changed. Russia is still trying to subjugate all of Ukraine, even if that does not seem feasible at this point. In fact, Putin's theory of victory is predicated on the assumption that Western resolve will falter and aid will eventually subside. Then and only then will Russia have a shot to realise all or parts of its aggressive ambitions.

With its recent mobilisation Russia stabilised the front lines and effectively is trading body bags for time as the Russian war economy is fully gearing up and the country is dealing with the reality of sanctions. This raises serious questions as to

52 F. W. Kagan, Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, Institute for the Study of War, 13.11.2022. <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgroundunder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-november-13>

how we in the West have adapted our economies to deal with the very high usage levels of equipment and ammunition provided to Ukraine. The military analyst Mick Ryan recently wrote on Twitter, "Like it or not, this war is now a battle of industrial systems - like previous large wars. The post-Cold War 'small, exquisite, periodic and expensive' approach to weapons procurement in the West is over. We just haven't fully realized that yet."⁵³

Indeed, in early December 2022, Army Secretary Christine Wormuth stated that the US will go from making 14,000 155mm shells each month to 20,000 by the spring and 40,000 by 2025.⁵⁴ Meanwhile Ukraine uses about 20,000 to 90,000 shells a month, about twice the rate that the US and European countries produce combined. This raises questions as to how the Ukrainian usage of both rocket and regular artillery can be maintained as the West's stocks are increasingly depleted and production is not significantly ramped up in Europe.

Given the unspecified but likely very high losses on the Ukrainian side, the training of the Ukrainian Armed Forces with the help of its Western partners is key to reconstituting its strength. Since summer 2022, the United Kingdom in partnership with other allies began training up to 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers in the UK. In November 2022 the European Union launched its Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) to train up to 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers over the next 24 months over multiple locations in the territory of EU member states, mostly Germany, Poland and France.⁵⁵

On the military side, the central question remains whether the Western coalition can provide Ukraine with the ammunition, spare parts, maintenance, equipment and new weapon systems it needs to maintain this high intensity war over the next few months and possibly years. The setting up of a US command in Europe to streamline a training and assistance system that the United States and its allies created on the fly after Russia's invasion is a positive signal.⁵⁶ It is high time that the provided aid is transformed from an ad hoc to a more steady and hopefully strategic approach. That is crucial because without a continuous influx of Western weapons, ammunition, and training of Ukrainian troops, Kyiv will find it more difficult to use the momentum it has gained on the battlefield and liberate all of its Russian-occupied territories.

The West and the war

More fundamentally, however, the central question remains whether the West is united enough and has a political will strong enough to maintain not just the

53 M. Ryan, Twitter, 13.11.2022, online:

<https://twitter.com/WarintheFuture/status/1591926298360053760>

54 J. Gould, Army plans 'dramatic' ammo production boost as Ukraine drains stocks, Defense News, 05.12.2022, <https://www.defensenews.com/pentagon/2022/12/05/army-plans-dramatic-ammo-production-boost-as-ukraine-drains-stocks/#:~:text=We're%20posturing%20for%20a,spring%20and%2040%2C000%20by%202025>

55 C. Gallardo, C. Caulcutt, Ukraine's military recruits need training. Only one of Europe's giants is pulling its weight, *Politico*, 16.09.2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/uk-and-france-at-odds-over-military-training-for-ukrainians/#:~:text=Since%20June%2C%20the%20U.K.%20has.network%20of%20British%20training%20camps>

European Council (15.11.2022): Ukraine: EU launches Military Assistance Mission, Press Release, online: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/11/15/ukraine-eu-launches-military-assistance-mission/>

56 E. Schmitt, Pentagon Plans to Set Up a New Command to Arm Ukraine, Officials Say, *The New York Times*, 29.09.2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/29/us/politics/pentagon-command-ukraine.html>

critical military aid in the short term but to provide consistent political, diplomatic, financial, economic, and humanitarian support throughout 2023 and beyond. In a recent interview with Bloomberg, the Russia expert Mark Galeotti pointedly said: "Putin wants to break the Ukrainians not at the front line, where that's not proving possible, but by breaking the West's will to support them. The weak link in this war, potentially, is us. If we begin to lose the will, the capacity, and the unity to continue to supply the Ukrainians with weapons, and perhaps even more importantly with money, the Ukrainians are going to have serious troubles maintaining their war."⁵⁷ Mark Galeotti addresses the central problem that the Ukrainians, despite their battlefield successes, face and will face in the months to come. Since February 2022, we know just how wrong Putin and his intelligence services got Ukraine and more specifically its resilience and willingness to resist the war of aggression.⁵⁸ Just like many Western intelligence servicemen and military planners, the Russian leadership believed that Ukraine would collapse after its blitzkrieg-style invasion. Besides that, Putin also fundamentally underestimated the Western willingness and ability to adopt sanctions and support the Ukrainians.

However, Putin's bet on our weakening support could still turn out to be true if we fail to address the rising economic and social tensions in the West and fail to create a coherent narrative as to why the Ukrainian victory is in our common European and transatlantic interest. We must also explain why we have to stand with Ukraine over the short, medium and long term. The Ukrainians have proven that they are able and willing to defy Putin at all costs but are we in the West able and willing to go all the way and support them? In this context, Berlin's policy towards the war, due to the fact that Germany is the biggest EU member state strongly engaged in Eastern Europe, gains a particular importance.

Public support in Germany: high but decreasing

Germany at the beginning of the war opposed the adoption of quick and tough gas and oil sanctions to avoid costs for its economy. After all, it is reliant on Russian fossil fuels, especially pipeline gas, which made up more than 50 % of its gas imports. Throughout the summer, politicians, experts and business lobbyists warned of popular uprisings, the collapse of certain industries and mass unemployment in the case of a complete halt to Russian gas imports. In the absence of European sanctions on Russian gas, Russia unilaterally started cutting gas exports via Nord Stream 1 and Poland. Nevertheless, the fears and worst-case scenarios did not materialise. With the beginning of the heating season, Germany's gas storages were full and programmes to reduce gas consumption were in place.

The Russian deliberation throughout the summer and autumn was meant to drive up the gas price and thus undercut support for Ukraine in Europe and Germany, as the most dependent country. While the situation remains difficult, it is nowhere near any of the worst-case scenarios laid out by some experts and especially business leaders in spring. On a macro level, forecasts still see German GDP growth in 2022 (1.6 %) and an 0.3 to 0.6 % contraction in 2023. The December outlook of Deutsche Bank concluded

57 T. Harshaw, Putin's Ukraine War Is Entering a Terrifying New Phase, *Bloomberg*, 05.11.2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2022-11-05/putin-s-ukraine-war-is-entering-a-terrifying-new-phase?leadSource=verify%20wall>

58 G. Miller, C. Belton, Russia's spies misread Ukraine and misled Kremlin as war, *Washington Post*, 19.08.2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2022/russia-fsb-intelligence-ukraine-war/>

that growth will return in 2024 and 2025: "While the German economy is likely to contract in the current winter half-year, it will not experience a severe downturn... From the second half of 2023 onwards, the German economy will gradually recover. This is because foreign demand is expected to rise, uncertainty will abate, price pressures from energy commodities will diminish, and the rate of inflation will fall."⁵⁹

Energy prices have so far not led to the "deindustrialisation" or the collapse of energy intensive industries. But voices from these industries remain critical. Martin Brudermüller, the CEO of the German BASF group which benefited greatly from cheap Russian gas, told "Handelsblatt" that the chemical giant pays three times more for gas than in 2021 and nine times as much compared to 2020.⁶⁰ Other German export-oriented businesses report a slump in orders and remain pessimistic in their outlook for 2023 in terms of expected revenues, the consumer mood, inflation, etc. To address some of the economic fallout, the German government adopted a series of packages, most notably a 200-billion-euro package to help consumers and industries get through the winter.

Looking at much of the polling, Putin's bet on a declining willingness to support Ukraine so far has not been proven correct. When prices for electricity and gas already significantly began to rise, polls from late September 2022 showed a big majority (74 %) of Germans supporting Ukraine despite higher costs for themselves.⁶¹ On the other hand, one could observe a real darkening of the consumer mood. The ARD Deutschlandtrend November 2022 polling reveals substantial worries about prices. 66% were worried or very worried that prices will rise so much that they will no longer be able to pay their bills (+9% vs. October 2022). At the same time, the fear of nuclear escalation was still high (more than 50% fear this) and the concern that Russia could attack other countries in Europe, on the other hand, was even stronger. In November 2022, six in ten said they are worried about this. In March 2022, almost 70% said the same.⁶²

Concerns about a widening of the war could also be the reason why a majority of Germans feel that the German government's diplomatic efforts to end the war in Ukraine do not go far enough. In November 2022 55% agreed with this statement (+14% compared with June 2022). Three in ten respondents consider Germany's diplomatic efforts to be appropriate (-12%). For 4%, they go too far (-4%). At the same time, among citizens, there is no majority in favour of supplying Ukraine with more heavy weapons. Above 40% considered German support for Ukraine with weapons to be appropriate. For 30% of Germans the arms deliveries to Ukraine went too far and only one in five believed, that they were not enough. Germans also disagreed on the sanctions against Russia. For 37%, these did not go far enough, for 31% they were appropriate, while for 23% they went too far.

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- 59 Deutsche Bank, Outlook for the German economy for 2023 to 2025, Monthly Report, December 2022, <https://www.bundesbank.de/resource/blob/901990/90afad2737f689d42ac53510149cc0de/mL/2022-12-prognose-data.pdf>
- 60 P. Bohrs, S. Hofmann, BASF-Chef Martin Brudermüller fürchtet um Europas Wettbewerbsfähigkeit, *Handelsblatt*, 22.11.2022, <https://www.handelsblatt.com/unternehmen/industrie/interview-basf-chef-martin-brudermueller-fuerchtet-um-europas-wettbewerbsfaehigkeit/28811806.html>
- 61 ZdF, Hohe Preise: Für die Mehrheit großes Problem, *ZdF-Politbarometer*, 30.09.2022, <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/politbarometer-inflation-wiedervereinigung-100.html?slide=166447247503>
- 62 ARD, Mehrheit sieht Verhältnis zu China kritisch, *ARD DeutschlandTrend*, 03.11.2022, <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend/deutschlandtrend-3199.html>

Generally, the picture is mixed and while the German population is increasingly concerned with the problems at home, the willingness to support Ukraine remains high. But that support should not be taken for granted and could fall sharply if not sustained by a comprehensive narrative concerning why support for Ukraine is critically important for German and European interests.

Weaponisation of winter is a test for Ukraine and the West

Since more or less day one of the war Russia targeted Ukrainian energy infrastructure. In the past weeks and especially since October 2022 it focused on the electrical grid and electricity and heat distribution. On November 17th 2022 alone, nearly 100 Russian missiles were fired at Ukrainian energy infrastructure, and about 70 were intercepted. Fifteen infrastructure objects were damaged, leaving seven million homes in 17 regions temporarily without electricity. Until today, the Russian rocket terror continues with dozens of rockets and Iranian drones fired. At least 50 % of Ukraine's energy infrastructure is damaged or destroyed.

The goal of the Russian attacks is to make large cities uninhabitable, test and possibly break the Ukrainian and Western resolve, and significantly weaken Ukraine's air defence capabilities. Despite the reported shortage of certain types of missiles, Russia retains a considerable, even if slowly decreasing, ability to inflict damage. It knows the Ukrainian electricity grid and heating system intimately well and is striking the weak points: the electrical substations and heat distribution hubs. This is causing immense suffering and could lead to more refugees leaving Ukraine toward the EU.

The US, Europe and the G7 partner countries are addressing the immediate short-term fallout of the Russian energy terror. But without proper emergency aid and a concerted effort to help Ukraine restore its grid, the Ukrainian people, state and economy will suffer. That is why the clear objective ought to be to get Ukraine the equipment and tools – mainly high voltage transformers – that it needs to stabilise the grid. Germany as a main producer of these transformers has a special responsibility. Direct talks with the producers by the Ukrainian and German governments should ensure that the producers prioritise Ukrainian needs and that deliveries are happening in earnest. As of now, the estimated costs for the entire list of Ukrainian needs are about 500 million US dollars. Compare that to the cost of housing two million refugees with a per capita cost of 2000 euros, or four billion euros per month.

Winter assistance is the first major litmus test of whether we are as weak as Putin believes us to be. Ukraine and its Western backers understand the urgency and have created an "Energy Ramstein". For weeks they have been preparing equipment, like transformers and generators. But it remains a race against time. On the one hand, the grid has to be restored faster than Russia can destroy it, while Ukrainian air defence systems should be equipped and expanded to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable parts of the systems responsible for electricity and heat production and distribution.

From adhocism to medium-term planning

For Putin's bet on our weakness not to come to pass, we have to realise that this war is likely going to last well into 2023 and probably beyond. Nine months into the Russian war against Ukraine, we are in many aspects still stuck in our Ramstein mode

of adhocism when it comes to Kyiv. As admirable as the Ramstein model created in April was in organising the ad hoc demand and supply of needed ammunition and arms, a more strategic approach is required. If we want Ukraine to defeat the Russian army on the battlefield and liberate at least the February 24th 2022 lines or more, the West needs a medium-term plan for the financial and economic survival of Ukraine throughout 2023 and beyond.

Ukraine will continue to depend on Western support. Meanwhile, access to the international financial markets is practically cut off and debt to GDP is reaching 100 %. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) forecasts that Ukraine's GDP will contract by at least 30 % in 2022, while the World Bank believes it will shrink by 35 and grow only by 8% next year. Meanwhile, yearly inflation in September reached 25 % and is forecasted by the National Bank of Ukraine to reach 28 % by next year.

In 2023, the largest part of funds of the Ukrainian budget (1,141 billion hryvnia, or 18.2 % of GDP) will be directed to national security and defence. At the same time, state budget revenues are projected at 1.3 trillion hryvnia, while expenditures are calculated at 2.6 trillion. That means Ukraine is looking at a state budget deficit in 2023 of more than 20 % of GDP. In practical terms this means that Ukraine's 2023 budget will have an annual 36.9-billion-euro gap, which it can only plug with international financial assistance. Without the timely distribution of this aid, Ukraine will be forced to print more money and this will drive the already high inflation rate up even higher.

That is why the proposal of the US and the EU to help well throughout 2023 is of central importance. In early November 2022, the European Commission proposed a macro-financial assistance package for 2023 worth 18 billion euros, which would cover half of the deficit with long-term loans at favourable rates for Ukraine. The US has pledged to cover the other half. Until December 2022, Hungary blocked the decision of the European Council on the 18-billion-euro package. On December 10th 2022, the European Council found a way to circumvent the Hungarian veto and the package was finally adopted.⁶³ This is an extremely important signal to Putin that the European Union remains committed to financing Ukraine's needs in 2023.

Conclusions

As for now, the German and US political leadership, including Chancellor Olaf Scholz, keep saying that Ukraine must prevail and that Germany will support Ukraine "for as long as necessary". That is good but not sufficient. With rising costs affecting this support, citizens will increasingly demand to pay less for Ukraine if they do not constantly hear a reason why it is worth keeping up the immense military and financial support. Without a coherent narrative as to why the victory of Ukraine is in Germany and Europe's strategic interests, we could see significant drops in support early spring.

In the looming war of attrition, Russia views the West and not Ukraine as the weak link. Through its continuous terror attacks on civilian energy, the Kremlin is trying to break the Western resolve to maintain the critically needed support for Ukraine. Without short-term aid Ukraine faces a difficult winter and millions of

63 European Council, Council adopts €18 billion assistance to Ukraine, 10.12.2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/12/10/council-adopts-18-billion-assistance-to-ukraine/>

Ukrainians might suffer from a lack of electricity, heating and water. That is why short but also medium-term economic and financial aid remain key in ensuring the country's survival. Putin's bet on our declining aid and faltering resolve will only be proven wrong if Western aid leaves the realm of the ad hoc approach. The picture of German resolve, based on polling, to stand up to the Russian aggression over the past year is mixed. This provides an unclear picture and gives both Putin and those hoping for a Ukrainian victory with continuous Western support a glimmer of hope.

The war and Ukraine's economy: its perspectives and Western assistance

Yurii Gaidai is a Senior Economist at the Centre for Economic Strategy based in Kiev.

LEAD: The Russian full-scale aggression against Ukraine has provoked a dramatic deterioration in the economic situation of the country. However, its economy supported by the West has managed to survive and defend itself against Russia.

In 2022, Ukraine's GDP fell by about a third. This is the biggest economic drop in Ukraine's history. For comparison, the financial crisis of 2009 led to a 15% drop, while the start of the war with Russia – 6.6% in 2014 and 9.8% in 2015. Due to the power outages between October and November, the Ukrainian investment bank Dragon Capital recently downgraded their forecast of a decrease from 30% to 32%, while the ICU investment group changed their prediction from 32% to 35%. Projections vary for 2023, but Dragon Capital expects a 5% decline, while the Ukrainian economic ministry, whose macroeconomic forecast is a key basis for budget planning, forecasts a 3.2% increase in real GDP.

After the initial shock of the full-scale invasion, which impacted the economy via a collapse in consumption and the disruption of logistical chains, business started to recover in April and May 2022 and continued so throughout the summer. According to surveys conducted by business associations (notably the European Business Association and the American Chamber of Commerce), the share of enterprises that have fully or partially resumed work gradually increased, reaching a peak from August to September 2022. The National Bank also resumed its polls, showing an increase in optimism. However, the destruction of the country's power infrastructure and the power outages throughout October and November 2022 undermined a recovery in perceptions, especially in trade and services. This observation correlates with data on tax revenues, analysed further below. The construction industry improved relatively, allegedly expecting orders for recovery projects.

The most recent estimate of direct damages to Ukraine as a result of the war by the project "Russia will pay" amounted to 129.7 billion US dollars. This project is led by the Kyiv School of Economics, in cooperation with the Centre for Economic Strategy and a wide group of economists and experts, together with the Ukrainian government. Losses are estimated at another 162.6 billion US dollars and include a loss of revenue and additional recovery costs, such as the recovery of working capital lost due to the inactivity of business during active hostilities, occupation or power outages. The estimated recovery needs are 234.3 billion US dollars and include building new assets and resuming activity. Most of the assessed recovery needs concern residential buildings (76.9 billion US dollars), with infrastructure in second (51.3 billion US dollars) and agriculture in third (23.4 billion US dollars).



Figure 1. Business sentiment, 50% = neutral perception
 Source: National Bank of Ukraine, CES calculations

Under attack: the largest and most critical industries

Fuel and energy

The first few months of the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine were plagued by a fuel crisis. The Russian army destroyed the Kremenchuk Oil Refinery (the largest operating refinery) and several oil depots. The supply of oil products from Russia and Belarus, the leading suppliers, also stopped. Hence, Ukraine had to rebuild its fuel logistics from scratch. As the government abolished a price ceiling for fuel, Ukrainian importers and distributors were incentivised to contract and import fuels from European refineries and overseas importers. Together with direct imports via Ukrainian railways, they established a large, decentralised network of fuel imports, managing to satisfy demand in June and continuing uninterrupted supplies, despite having to avoid using large storage facilities in Ukraine.

In October 2022, Russia began systematically attacking another segment of the energy industry – the production, transmission and distribution of electrical energy. Despite multiple back-ups and reserve lines, this energy system is much more centralised and has a limited number of junctions, which is crucial for the resilience of the system. Two months after the start of the attacks, not a single thermal power plant remained in Ukraine that did not come under fire. At least half of the high-voltage transformers were damaged. As a result, Ukraine faced a shortage of electricity due to a lack of generation and bottlenecks in distribution. The national transmission operator Ukrenergo was forced to limit consumption. The whole country lives according to blackout schedules, which, moreover, cannot always be adhered to.

After each successive strike, the situation worsened, and after the missile strikes on November 23rd 2022, there was a short but total blackout. The power outages lowered business sentiment and led to a revision of macroeconomic forecasts. Due to the increase in consumption during the winter and the inability to quickly obtain all the necessary replacement equipment, the outages are expected to last until at least the end of March 2023.

Metallurgy

Metallurgy, one of the key sectors of the economy, lost about a third of its assets. "Azovstal" and Illich Iron & Steel Works, the second and third-largest metallurgical plants in Ukraine, were heavily damaged. Avdiivka Coke and Chemical Plant was also damaged and stopped operations. In autumn 2022, the largest metallurgical plant, "ArcelorMittal Kryvyi Rih", was also partially damaged. The other plants stopped and then periodically resumed production. Another critical issue for the industry was the blockade of seaports, through which travelled most metal exports. The alternative logistics channels, first of all – railroads, were (and remain) limited, as metallurgy competes with agricultural producers for free capacities, especially on the side of war damages.

This led to a strong decline in the output of this industry. Between January and November 2022, metallurgical output decreased by 70% compared to the same period last year. In the ranking of world steel producers by Worldsteel, Ukraine fell from 14th place in 2021 to 22nd according to the results of 10 months in 2022. In the first three quarters of the year, exports of ferrous metals declined to 4 billion US dollars (-62%), while ores declined to 2.8 billion US dollars (-54%).

Agriculture

In July 2022, the Russian Federation, pressured by international partners, agreed to the 120-day "Grain Initiative", which opened Odesa's seaports for agricultural exports. In November, the initiative was extended for another 120 days. In addition, traders and logisticians managed to establish supplies through the land routes. In total, since the beginning of the 2022/23 marketing year, starting in July 2022, Ukraine has exported 18 million tons of grain crops. Exports through seaports under the "Grain Initiative" amounted to 13 million tons. In monthly terms, exports caught up with last year's figures. The harvest of the country's main crops amounts to 64 million tons (for comparison, last year was a record 106 million tons). But the prospects for the next harvests are still unclear.

The winter sowing campaign was completed according to plan, at a rate of 40% less than the previous year. What happens with the next campaign will depend on the implementation and expansion of the Grain Initiative. Ukraine will have enough grain for its own food security, but the exports may significantly decrease the next marketing year. The post-war recovery of the industry will depend on the availability of working capital and the demining of agricultural land.

Financial sector

On the first day of the Russian invasion, February 24th 2022, the National Bank of Ukraine fixed the official exchange rate at 29.25 hryvnia per dollar. This decision, together with the restriction on cash withdrawals, helped to avoid a panic collapse of the hryvnia and a raid on banks. The speed of implementing these policies, which were introduced just a few hours after the first Russian missiles began to fall on Kyiv, shows that the NBU was ready for military challenges and had various response scenarios worked out. However, the discrepancy between the official and market exchange rates soon became apparent, reaching its peak in June, when the dollar exchange rate on the "black market" was 6 hryvnias higher than the fixed official rate. Along with the need to "sterilise" huge volumes of monetary financing concerning the budget, the need to maintain a fixed exchange rate forced the NBU to spend

billions of US dollars from its foreign exchange reserves. In June, the NBU sold almost 4 billion dollars and bought only 3 million.

This situation was unsustainable, so on July 21st 2022 the NBU adjusted the exchange rate, raising it to 36.6 hryvnia per 1 US dollar. The convergence of the official and market rates eased the pressure on the need for foreign exchange interventions. However, the gap still remains and the situation with the dual exchange rate (and the corresponding hidden tax on exporters) is not sustainable and needs to be addressed. The banking system has generally shown its resilience since the beginning of the full-scale war. Only 4 banks left the market, 2 of which were Russian and 2 more were declared insolvent by the NBU. The remaining 67 banks continue to operate. The banks' net assets during 2022 did not fall but increased by 5%. This became possible due to systemic reforms and the improvement of the health of the banking sector, carried out by the National Bank of Ukraine since 2014.

However, lending remains depressed, and the interest rate transmission mechanism is not working. Consumer loans are issued only for the current needs of customers, and mortgage and car lending have almost totally stopped. Corporate lending has been growing for some time, but only at the expense of loans from state-owned banks and mainly for the replenishing of working capital.

Fiscal policy and foreign aid

The fiscal policy of Ukraine during this existential war has focused on the ability to efficiently finance expenditures concerning the army and law and order, social support for citizens, and healthcare. It also aims to maintain and restore infrastructure that is critical for the security and functioning of the economy. This is particularly true regarding energy and logistics networks.

The fiscal policy in the first 9 months of the war was clearly very soft and stimulative. Due to the economic downturn and tax exemptions on imports from April to June 2022 (adopted to avoid a deficit of basic goods and to support businesses), tax revenues for the first 10 months of 2022 amounted to 769 billion hryvnia, compared to 856 billion hryvnia for the corresponding period in 2021. At the same time, cash expenditures of the state budget exceeded revenues by 2.5 times and for 10 months amounted to 1,979 billion hryvnia, against 1,070 billion hryvnia a year earlier. The growth was caused by the great increase in military spending, which could not be balanced by severe austerity measures taken by the government in other sectors (see Figure 2).

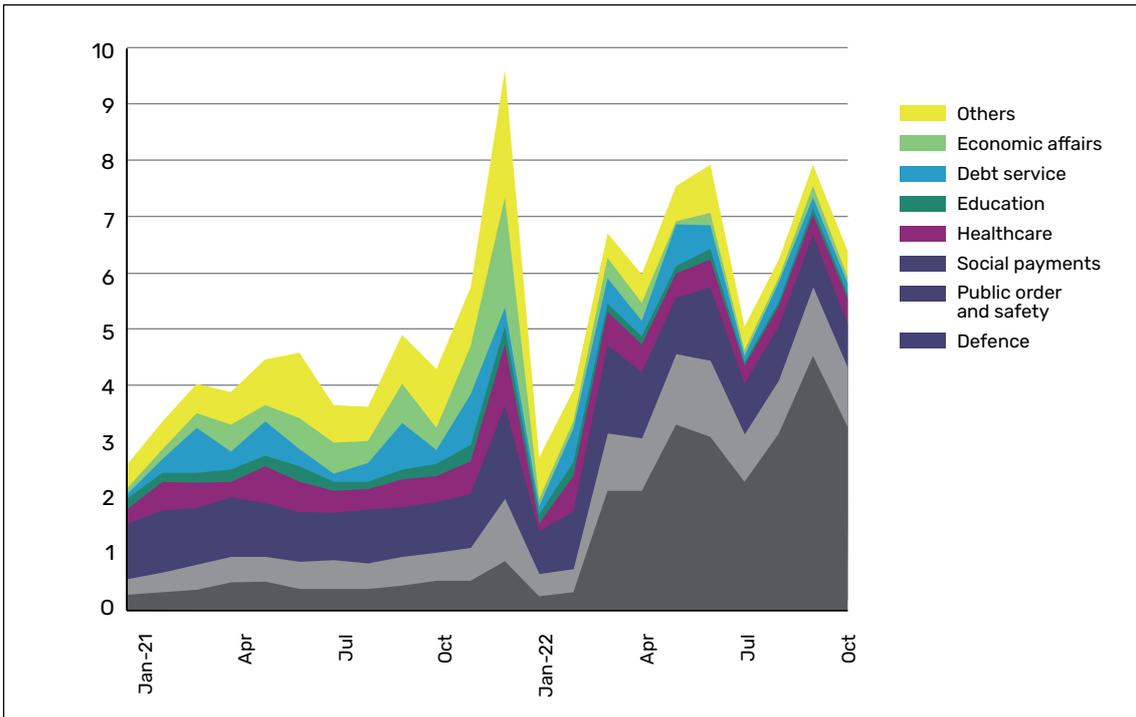


Figure 2. State budget expenditures by state functions, billions of US dollars
Source: NBU

This huge deficit could not be financed from the debt markets, as the price of new debt for the wartime government makes it unsustainable to finance. Hence, Ukraine relied on foreign aid in the form of grants and non-market loans, and the remaining deficit had to be financed by the issuing of war bonds and monetary financing, that is – the “printing” of money (see Figure 3).

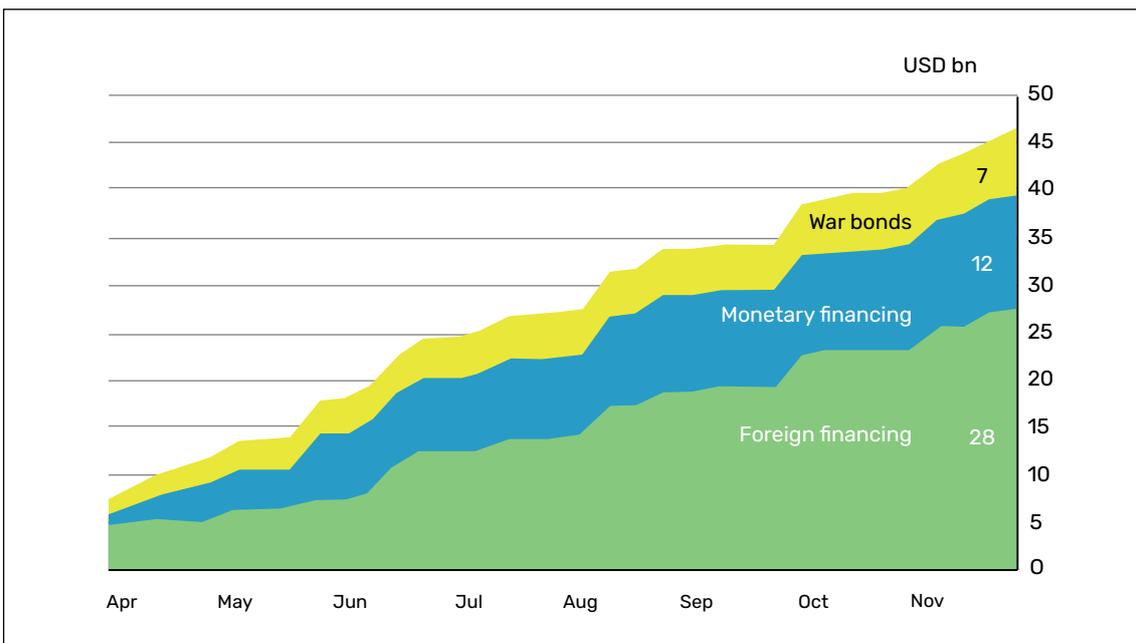


Figure 3. Sources of additional financing for the state budget of Ukraine during the war, cumulative, billions of US dollars
Source: Ministry of Finance as of 14.12.2022

Due to external grants, loans and monetary emission, government spending significantly exceeded tax revenues, stimulating domestic demand and supporting households and businesses. This partially mitigated the economic shocks caused by the war, but also added pressure to the trade balance and increased inflation. The adopted budget for 2023 with a deficit of up to 20% of GDP and expectations of international aid inflows suggest that fiscal policy will remain highly stimulative in the future. The irregularity of revenues and the discrepancy between the pledged and disbursed amounts of assistance are the main problems faced by Ukraine in the context of foreign financial assistance.

The amount of budgetary aid pledged by foreign donors in 2022 was 36 billion US dollars. Considering that 31 billion US dollars has already been disbursed, this leaves 5 billion US dollars that has been pledged but was not transferred to Ukraine in 2022. Most of this sum is 3 billion euros from the EU, part of the 9 billion US dollars that the European Commission promised Ukraine back in May. The rest of these funds are smaller pledges from various bilateral donors, agreements that for one reason or another have not yet been finalised. The lack of consistency in inflows complicates expenditure planning and makes it necessary to resort more often to debt financing and, even worse, to emission deficit financing.

The inflation and devaluation, sparked in summer 2022 by the monetary financing of the deficit, and this issue's multiplied negative impact on the economy, could have been mostly avoided had Ukraine received 1.5 to 2 billion US dollars of monthly financing between April and June. This roughly corresponds with the pledged amounts which were not provided to Ukraine in 2022 (see Figure 4).

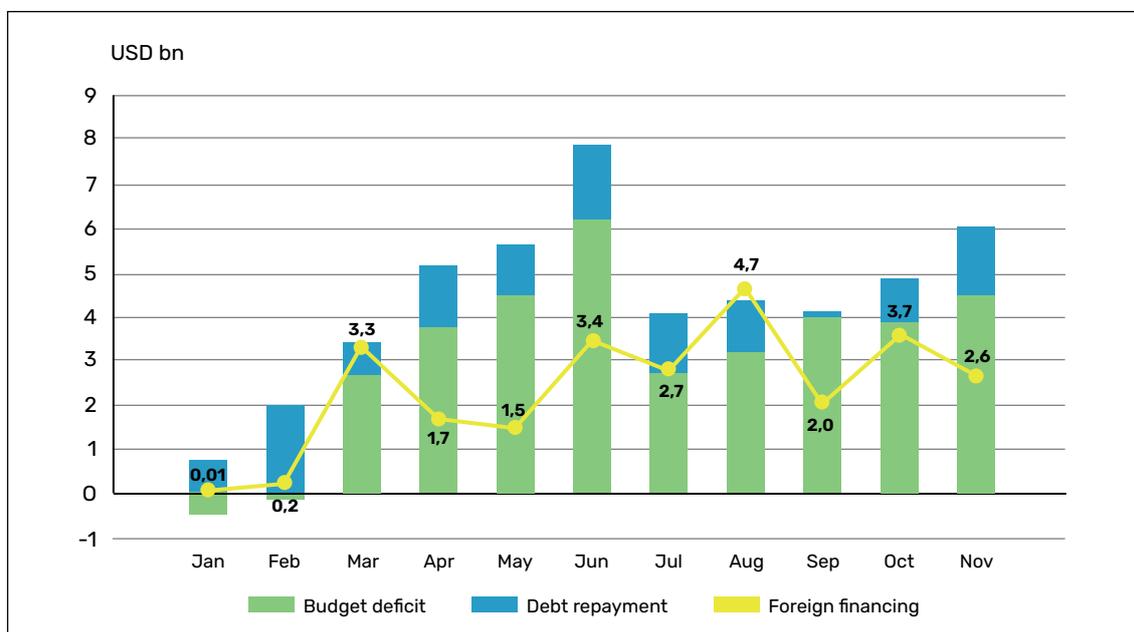


Figure 4. Inflows of foreign funds and financing needs, 11 months of 2022, billions of US dollars
Sources: Ministry of Finance, NBU, CES calculations (we consider the financing of the state budget of Ukraine at the expense of grants from international partners to be deficit financing, not a source of revenue).

The largest donors to the state budget of Ukraine in 2022 were the United States and the European Union, which as of December 14th 2022 provided 10 billion US dollars and 7.9 billion US dollars respectively. The US and the EU are also expected

to become the main donors in financial assistance next year. Ukraine expects to receive 18 billion US dollars from the US and another 18 billion euros from the EU in 2023.⁶⁴ The process of allocating these EU loans has faced resistance from Hungary, which blocks almost any assistance to Ukraine. However, this issue was overcome and on January 17th 2023 Ukraine already received the year's first tranche of EU macro-financial assistance worth 3 billion euros.

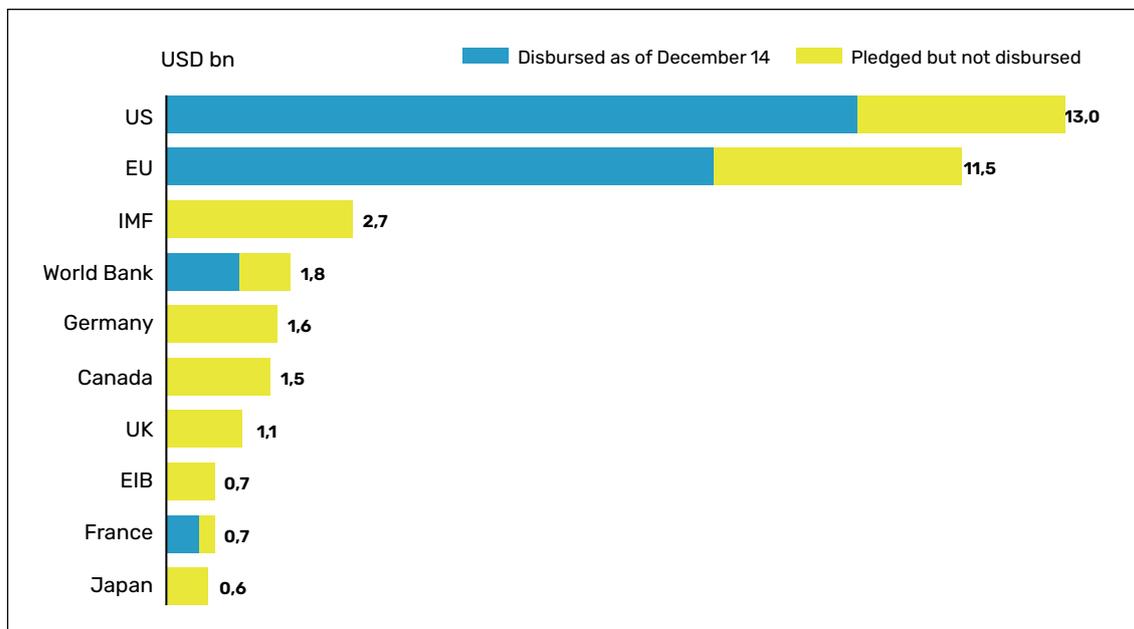


Figure 5. Main foreign donors to the state budget of Ukraine, billions of US dollars
Sources: Ministry of Finance, Kiel Institute for the World Economy, CES research

It should be noted that the further tranches of EU macro-financial assistance, as well as subsidies, covering the interest payments for this 35-year loan, are linked to the implementation of reforms. These should strengthen Ukrainian institutions, improve macro-stability and ultimately drive the European integration of the country. The reforms to which Ukraine has committed cover the strengthening of anti-corruption infrastructure, reforms in law enforcement and the judiciary system, the deregulation of permits and licensing, and the strengthening of corporate governance in the state oil and gas sector.

Conclusions

Aside from the astronomical recovery needs, reaching 250 billion US dollars, there is a need for smaller, but very urgent recovery assistance. Timely repairs and the recovery of damaged residential houses, critical energy infrastructure, healthcare and childcare facilities, as well as the provision of temporary dwellings to internally displaced Ukrainians – are crucial for avoiding the higher economic cost of further damages to assets. These costs could be the result of severe weather conditions, a worsening refugee and human capital crisis in Ukraine, the downfall of consumer demand, and the loss of the long-term ability of the Ukrainian government to finance defence and security expenses from their own revenues.

64 This amount includes the 3-billion-euro pledge from 2022. The respective amount was disbursed in January 2023.

While relatively smaller in volumes (if compared with the total scale of destruction and recovery needs), timely and targeted assistance will prevent higher long-term costs for the international community in dealing with security threats from Russia, mitigating humanitarian catastrophe and losing beneficial trade and economic cooperation with Ukraine.

The important prerequisite of efficient assistance is leadership and ownership in Ukraine. Donors tend to choose projects in line with their wider agenda, which may contradict the continuity of recovery policy. A people-oriented and decentralised approach, streamlined with recovery policy, will make a considerable impact at the community level.⁶⁵

Aside from recovery assistance, it is important to support crucial sectors of the Ukrainian economy that are contributing to the state budget and foreign currency inflows, while also creating jobs and ensuring general resilience. Ukrainian agriculture and metallurgy are in dire need of logistical corridors to export their products. The grain initiative, while a lifeline for Ukrainian agriculture, does not satisfy all the demand for means of export. This issue significantly increases the margin between the EU market and domestic prices for the grain producers⁶⁶ and pushes the local prices to levels that barely cover their operating costs.

Also, the grain initiative does not cover many other goods exported by Ukraine. The railroad capacity of bordering countries is lower than that of Ukraine, causing large queues of freight cars at transit hubs. Hence, the Ukrainian economy needs help in restoring its maritime trade capacity and supplementing it with increased exports via river ports, such as on the Danube, and via road and rail corridors, while the security limitations for maritime trade remain.

Many small and medium-sized grain producers, which suffered from the war directly and from logistical limitations, do not have operational reserves and sufficient working capital. This leads to a decrease in sowing for the next marketing year and a decrease in related businesses. We see an opportunity for targeted assistance programmes for such smaller agricultural producers, which may have a strong positive impact on the food security of both Ukraine and the EU, as well as on local communities.

65 M. Repko, Financing Ukraine's Victory and Recovery: For the War and Beyond, Center for Economic Strategy, *SCEEUS Guest Platform for Eastern Europe Policy No. 10, Guest Commentary*, 17.11.2022, <https://sceeus.se/publikationer/financing-ukraines-victory-and-recovery-for-the-war-and-beyond>

66 УкрАгроКонсалт, Ціни на зерно в Україні, <https://ukragroconsult.com/grain-prices/>

Security in the Baltic Sea region and the Russian invasion of Ukraine

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LEAD: The sustained will among NATO countries to strengthen collective defence of the Alliance and to enhance deterrence and defence in the Baltic Sea region represents a key issue which will define the security of Europe in the coming years.

Europe is in a defining moment concerning its recent history. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is an attempt to undermine the European security system that was formed after the end of the Cold War. This was based on principles such as respect for the territorial integrity of states and their sovereignty, the freedom of choice in foreign and security policy, and free membership in political-economic organisations and military alliances. These principles are not only the basis of the UN Charter but were also signed by the USSR and later recognised by Russia in the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe. This allowed the Baltic states, Poland and other Central European countries to start on the path to joining the Euro-Atlantic structures.

The European security system that was created in the nineties was open to Russia – the country was perceived as a strategic partner of both the EU and NATO in attempts to foster a new European order. However, the Kremlin under Putin's rule rejected both this opportunity and the benefits stemming from level-headed partnership. Instead, it chose a path of confrontation. After Vladimir Putin came to power in 1999, the Kremlin started to rebuild authoritarian elements in domestic policy and return to the neo-imperial foreign policy pursued by the Soviet Union. This resulted in thinking in terms of exclusive spheres of influence.

Since then, Russia has been following three strategic goals. The first one has been to restore control over the post-Soviet space with the priority of subordinating Ukraine. Independent Ukraine, with its economic potential and strategic location, democratic system of governance and ties with the West, has been perceived by the Kremlin as a fundamental obstacle to its goals in domestic and foreign policy. The second strategic goal of the Kremlin has been aimed at the creation of a buffer zone in Northern and Central Europe against NATO and the EU, with countries in the Baltic Sea region having limited possibilities to ensure their own security in light of Russian interests. The third goal has been to push the United States out of Europe and give Russia a veto power in European foreign and security policy.

The outcome of the Russian invasion of Ukraine will determine whether Russia will bury its neo-imperial ambitions in foreign policy following a strategic defeat or rather there will be only a strategic pause in Russian hostilities against Ukraine and the West. The question of whether the West will stay united in its isolation and containment policy vis-à-vis Russia also remains open. The Kremlin's strategic defeat in Ukraine will involve not only a military failure. A viable mid to long-term plan

for Ukraine's integration with Euro-Atlantic structures – the EU and NATO – needs to follow short-term efforts to ensure economic reconstruction and the further arming of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The other key open question is the sustained will among NATO countries, first and foremost Germany, to strengthen collective defence in NATO and enhance deterrence in the Baltic Sea region.

NATO's deterrence and defence in the Baltic Sea region – is it enough?

Since the Russian annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Donbas in 2014, NATO has started to strengthen collective defence in general and its military presence in the Baltic Sea region, in particular. It has deployed four battlegroups of more than 1,000 troops each to the region, rotating every few months in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Poland. Similar forces have not been placed in the Black Sea region except, though only to a certain degree, in Romania, where a multinational brigade has been formed. However, this operates on the basis of a Romanian unit, with allied companies temporarily present for exercises and training. This presence was too small to ensure the defence of eastern flank countries and it was intended more as a reassurance for regional allies. Overall, it is part of the trip-wire strategy that would trigger an allied military response if necessary. Such a trip wire would only work if other elements of this strategy were in place – high readiness forces, military mobility and sound defence planning – which NATO has been developing since 2014.

In 2014 reform of the NATO Response Force was started and initiatives were taken to strengthen the readiness of national armed forces and to increase military mobility. Reform of the NATO Force and Command Structures began to enhance command and control capabilities for collective defence tasks after years of negligence. In the NATO Force Structure, division-level commands were created in Poland and Latvia. In the NATO Command Structure two new commands were created – the Joint Force Command in the US (established to protect sea lanes between Europe and North America) and the Joint Support and Enabling Command in Germany (responsible for the transport of forces and equipment within Europe). Since 2019 NATO has also been implementing a classified military strategy and the two military concepts based on it: the deterrence and defence concept and the warfighting concept. It has also started to develop more detailed military plans.⁶⁷

Nevertheless, this trip-wire strategy was the outcome of a compromise among NATO member states; some of them still wanted to unilaterally adhere to the NATO-Russia Founding Act from 1997. This document imposed limitations on the permanent stationing of substantial forces in the new member states and put limits on how the NATO presence in the Baltic Sea region has been shaped since 2014. Beyond the political wish to stick to the Founding Act as a basis of security relations with Russia, many Western allies neither saw the need to deploy larger NATO forces in the Baltic Sea region nor had the military capabilities for a more meaningful engagement. The Russian invasion of Ukraine last year led to a slight reassessment of the security situation in the Baltic Sea region and more broadly on the north-eastern flank. The eastern allies were at short notice substantially reinforced by US forces on a bilateral basis and by the Western European allies in the framework of

67 J. Gotkowska, NATO 2030: towards a new strategy, *OSW Commentary*, 23.06.2021, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2021-06-23/nato-2030-towards-a-new-strategy>

NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence. Additionally, in March 2022 four more NATO battlegroups were set up in Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria.

Further decisions were taken at the NATO summit in Madrid in July 2022 – as usual in a compromise formula. On the one hand, the 2022 Strategic Concept gave clear priority to deterrence and defence tasks in NATO, with the goal of denying any potential adversary opportunities for aggression. On the other hand, the allies took decisions to provide only limited reinforcements to the existing battlegroups and assign combat-ready forces to the Baltic states and Romania without them being permanently stationed. In total, the combined NATO forces assigned to these four countries should each reach the size of a brigade. The lack of significant changes in allied force posture in the Baltic and Black Sea regions is to be offset by the implementation of the new Force Model. NATO wants to increase the size of its higher readiness forces to over 300,000 troops, and assign them to specific defence plans, tasks and areas of responsibility with an increased level of readiness. This is to be complemented by the new positioning of ammunition and equipment, improved military mobility, investments in military infrastructure, intensified training and exercises, a faster decision-making process, and a new generation of military plans among others. Overall, the allies decided to continue with a step-by-step strengthening of NATO's force posture on the eastern flank without breakthrough changes in the overall strategy.⁶⁸

Poland has been so far the key ally in conducting collective defence operations in the Baltic states for simple geographical reasons. With the formerly neutral status of Sweden and Finland, the majority of allied effort in defending the Baltic states, if needed, would have been conducted through Poland's territory and with the help of the Polish military. Therefore, Poland has had an obvious interest in a strong allied presence not only on its soil, but also on the territory of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Another necessary element in the NATO deterrence and defence strategy for the Baltic Sea region has been Germany. German forces have been engaged in the Baltic states and are expected to participate in NATO defence efforts. However, the country has also been the logistical hub for the movement of other European and US forces to the eastern flank. German military and civilian infrastructure – air and naval bases, ports, railways and roads – as well as US military equipment stored in Germany will be used by the allies in case of a NATO defence operation on the eastern flank, including in the Baltic Sea region.

Sweden and Finland's accession to NATO – a sea change for regional security?

The accession of Finland and Sweden to the Alliance will substantially increase the level of security in the Baltic Sea region. It will change the existing political and military imbalance, which is currently beneficial for Moscow, and will strengthen NATO's deterrence policy. It will also set clear boundaries between NATO and Russia, preventing it from taking advantage of the non-alignment of the two countries (e.g., in Gotland or the Åland Islands) to conduct possible military operations against the Baltic states. It will make it considerably easier for NATO to defend Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. At the same time, however, Finland's membership would extend the

68 J. Gotkowska, J. Tarociński, NATO after Madrid: how much deterrence and defence on the eastern flank?, *OSW Commentary*, 05.07.2022, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2022-07-05/nato-after-madrid-how-much-deterrence-and-defence-eastern>

north-eastern flank of the Alliance and raise questions about the extent of NATO's presence in Finland and the defence and deterrence strategy for this country. Although this subject has not yet been discussed in Finland (or NATO), it is possible that Helsinki would be wary of a greater NATO permanent presence on its territory, instead being satisfied with formal allied security guarantees and in-depth NATO defence plans.

The membership of the two countries in NATO is a logical step for them given their close cooperation with NATO in both the political and military spheres in recent years. Cooperation has intensified in particular following the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, when both Stockholm and Helsinki decided that their isolationist non-alignment security policies in the Baltic Sea region were not enough to guarantee their security in the face of a more aggressive Russia. Sweden and Finland have since participated in NATO's Enhanced Opportunities Partnership, which involves a group of privileged partners working closely with the Alliance on military exercises and operations. Both countries also signed Host Nation Support agreements with NATO in 2014, creating political and military-technical opportunities for the use of Finnish and Swedish territory by NATO forces. Representatives of Finland and Sweden have also been invited to NATO meetings at the level of heads of state, foreign ministers and defence ministers. This has resulted in close political cooperation. Despite this, full membership in NATO will bring substantial changes to the security status of both states.

After joining NATO, Finland and Sweden will be covered by the Article 5 guarantees. This will mean that NATO defence planning will be extended to both countries. Joint planning will also ensure Finnish and Swedish participation in allied collective defence operations in Norway, the Baltic states and Poland. This will significantly raise the level of deterrence in the Nordic-Baltic region. Finland and Sweden will also commit to developing military capabilities in the framework of the NATO Defence Planning Process. The two countries are likely to contribute to the NATO Response Force and – in future – to the New Force Model. They will also strengthen the NATO Standing Naval Forces and take part in the Baltic and Icelandic Air Policing missions. Both countries might also send small Swedish and Finnish components to the allied presence in the Baltic states and possibly in Poland. Stockholm and Helsinki will increase their participation in allied exercises which, in the future, will also be held on their territory. The participation of NATO allies in Finnish and Swedish national manoeuvres will also be enhanced.

From a military perspective, the armed forces of both countries have a high degree of ability to cooperate with NATO due to their participation in allied missions and operations, as well as military exercises, in the region. They will bring into NATO highly capable, albeit small militaries. Finland will easily meet the requirement to spend at least 2% of GDP on defence. Due to the purchase of 64 F-35 aircraft, the Finnish defence budget increased to 1.85 % of GDP (4.6 billion euros) in 2021, with additional funds appearing in 2022. The coming years will likely see further increases. Sweden plans to spend 2% of GDP on defence per year by 2026 at the latest (in 2021 it was about 1.2 %). The new centre-right government announced that it will invest in military capabilities and the civilian components of total defence.⁶⁹

69 J. Gotkowska, Finlandia (i Szwecja) na drodze do NATO, *Analiza OSW*, 14.04.2022, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2022-04-14/finlandia-i-szwecja-na-drodze-do-nato>

Conclusions

Security in the Baltic Sea region in the coming years will depend on a variety of factors. The key question is where Russia and Ukraine will be after the end of this war. If Russia is not militarily and economically defeated and Ukraine is not on the path to becoming part of the Euro-Atlantic structures, then Russia will not cease its attempts to take control over Kyiv and undermine NATO. This would mean a continuation of crises and conflicts in Eastern Europe and the Baltic Sea region, as well as prolonged challenges of a military and hybrid nature against the West. On the other hand, an increased level of deterrence and defence is key to guaranteeing the security of the Baltic Sea region in the future. This will depend on the continuation of the US presence on the north eastern NATO flank, the implementation of recent decisions concerning strengthening collective defence in NATO, and an increase in military power on the part of the European allies. With many variables determining the European security environment in the years to come, uncertainty will probably be the new norm that NATO allies in the Baltic Sea region and beyond will have to reckon with. This uncertainty might be diminished if NATO allies individually and collectively take the following actions.

In order to achieve a credible deterrence and defence in the Baltic Sea region, NATO has to swiftly implement decisions agreed upon at the NATO Madrid summit. This includes the development of regional defence plans and their implementation in the form of regular training and exercises, reform of the Command and Force Structure in NATO, and strengthening the links between relevant forces and regional headquarters like the Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin and division level headquarters in Elbląg, Poland and Adazi, Latvia. With Sweden and Finland joining the Alliance the NATO Force Structure will need to be enhanced to cover both countries. New NATO operational headquarters in Sweden and Finland will have to be created or national ones will have to expand. The NATO Enhanced Forward Presence in Poland and the Baltic states should be developed further to the level of a full brigade permanently rotating in each of the four countries. A NATO military presence in Sweden and Finland in particular needs to be reconsidered. The NATO-Russia Founding Act should be finally declared a non-binding document. Additionally, the New Force Model needs to take shape as soon as possible. This means an increase in the readiness levels of national armed forces. For this to happen the NATO defence pledge from 2014 (the commitment to spend 2% of GDP for defence until 2024) should be fulfilled by the vast majority of member states and a debate about even higher national defence expenditures should start as soon as possible. Investments in military infrastructure across Europe are needed if NATO is to quickly react to any contingencies in the Baltic Sea region. All this is linked to an understanding in Western Europe that we are facing a definite change in the European security landscape with the relative post-Cold War stability now over. With Russia and China trying to challenge the European and global order there will be no return to the past policies of prioritising economic growth and social cohesion over soft and hard security.

Germany is key in changing the political and military mindset in Western Europe as it is the biggest and most centrally located NATO European ally. Berlin still needs to fully live up to the expectations that Chancellor Olaf Scholz raised by announcing the *Zeitenwende* paradigm shift in German energy, foreign and security policy at the end of February 2022. This includes two dimensions – military aid to Ukraine and

engagement with deterrence and defence efforts within NATO. Germany needs to enhance its engagement within the Alliance. In order to do this, it has to speed up the modernisation and reform of the Bundeswehr. After the Russian invasion Berlin established a special 100-billion-euro fund to co-finance necessary investments in the Bundeswehr and reach the 2% NATO GDP benchmark. The German defence ministry needs to introduce systemic changes to procurement procedures and accelerate the implementation of armament projects. Additionally, the postponed structural changes to the armed forces, especially in the land domain, should be introduced as soon as possible. All this should allow Germany to enhance the readiness of its armed forces and its military presence in the Baltic Sea region. Berlin could also engage financially in improving military infrastructure in NATO member states in the region.

Poland has treated the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a clear shift in national and regional security. Warsaw has accelerated the modernisation programmes of the Polish military since the start of the invasion and has been leading such efforts on the eastern flank. It has been also the leader of the eastern flank countries, favouring the strengthening of deterrence and defence in NATO. In the run-up to the NATO Vilnius summit in 2023 it needs to enhance cooperation with Lithuania to shape the outcomes of the summit. The German military presence in Lithuania within the NATO framework also provides opportunities for Polish-German cooperation including Lithuanian and US forces, which are leading the NATO battlegroup in northeast Poland. Sweden and Finland's memberships in the Alliance will provide for more opportunities for military collaboration among all the countries bordering the Baltic Sea.

