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How Russia's War in Ukraine has Altered the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood

Edited by
Adam Reichardt and Tomasz Stępniewski





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Kraków–Lublin 2023

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Table of contents

Adam Reichardt, Tomasz Stępniewski The European Union's Eastern Policy: Balancing geopolitics and war	7
Evgeniya Bliznyuk How the war has changed Eastern Europe and its relations with the EU: A Ukrainian perspective	13
Katsiaryna Lozka Between the hammer and the anvil: Belarus, its people, and Russia's war against Ukraine	25
Piotr Oleksy Moldova: Towards a new subjectivity	33
Giorgi Koberidze How has the war in Ukraine changed Eastern Europe and its relations with the EU from the perspective of Georgia?	45
About the authors	53



Adam Reichardt, Tomasz Stępniewski

The European Union's Eastern Policy: Balancing geopolitics and war

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has brought the European Union's Eastern Policy to the forefront of its agenda. This development has not only reinvigorated discussions on the expansion of the EU but also raised questions about the EU's absorption capacity and the challenges of promoting democratic reforms in these Eastern European nations. This paper provides perspective from the countries of the region as a result of the war as well as an overview of the EU's approach to these countries, and proposes strategies for effective engagement.

The EU's response to the conflict in Ukraine underscores its geopolitical considerations. In the face of Russian aggression, the EU has expedited accession procedures for Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia, viewing their potential membership as a gesture of solidarity against the common threat from Russia.

However, the rapid expansion poses challenges to the EU's integration and decision-making capacities, potentially

replicating the issues faced with Western Balkan candidate countries.

The challenge of democratic reform in these Eastern European countries remains complex. Ukraine, despite past efforts, following the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity, has not yet achieved a stable and consolidated democracy. The EU has set conditions for Ukraine's accession, but it faces a delicate balancing act between supporting democratic reforms and addressing concerns related to Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Moldova has made significant progress in its democratization, yet a limited administrative capacity and corruption remain major obstacles. The EU's conditionality framework should be accompanied by adequate tools and support for effective reform implementation.

Georgia's democratic development has been marked by ups and downs, with a dominant-party system hindering meaningful progress. The EU faces resistance from the ruling Georgian Dream party, which fears a reduction in its power through full compliance with EU conditionality. As a result, the EU has recommended candidate status to Georgia, subject to the Georgian government meeting specific criteria and priorities.

To sum up, several consequences of Russia's war in Ukraine can be identified: 1) relations between Russia and the West have experienced a drastic deterioration; 2) the war in Ukraine led to social and cultural divisions in Russia; 3) this war resulted in the mobilization of Russian society against the West and maintained Vladimir Putin's influence on the government and society. The Kremlin uses this context to strengthen its control over citizens and subordinate them to the government; 4) the invasion of Ukraine was intended to strengthen Russia's

influence in the international arena and limit the influence of the West.

Nevertheless, these effects were counterproductive, accelerating Western unification, increasing the fears of many former Soviet states towards Russia, and weakening Russia's influence in the region. Russia's postmodern totalitarian regime uses the manipulation of symbols and narratives instead of classic repression or censorship. Guided by an international perspective, the Kremlin uses foreign policy as a tool to strengthen its domestic power. Russia is developing propaganda which emphasizes the uniqueness and special role of the country, combining Stalinism with Orthodoxy, Pan-Slavism with anti-Americanism and other elements.

Yet, the current crisis in Russia has resulted from the failure to punish the crimes of the Soviet regime and the failure to reflect on this period. Russia's neo-totalitarian specificity is expressed in the lack of a coherent ideology, focusing on the creation of political narratives. Government-controlled media are used to spread propaganda, create the image of Putin as a strong leader defending Russia against Western threats, and ensure enemies are demonised as the source of problems. The war in Ukraine brought with it changes of a fundamental nature: 1) the state of war led to deepening tensions and a reversal of relations between Russia and the West; 2) the mobilization of society in the face of the conflict revealed cultural divisions within Russia; 3) The Kremlin is using the war to increase its influence over society and to weaken independence; and 4) the aggression has also strengthened Russia's influence in the international arena (in the countries of the so-called "Global South"), although at the same time it has deepened the country's isolation. In summary, the Russian

postmodern regime seeks to use foreign policy to maintain its domestic power, while lacking a coherent ideology. The war in Ukraine was an attempt to export tension abroad, but it had the opposite effect than intended, leading to further isolation of Russia and internal destabilization, as exemplified by the failed revolt of the Wagner Group under the leadership of the late Yevgeny Prigozhin.

Moreover, the war did not start in 2022, it has been carried out for nine years, with almost two years being at full scale. Putin's brutal war against Ukraine is more than just a "whim" of the Kremlin leader. It is an attempt to inscribe Russia into the annals of history as another Russian/Soviet leader who reclaims "historical lands" in the "natural sphere of Moscow's influence," thus restoring the Russian Federation's status as a superpower capable of effectively reshaping the geopolitical playing field. In this context, the crimes committed, particularly genocide, appear as a means that could facilitate the reconstruction and maintenance of the empire in the name of the *Russkiy mir*, much like the Russian nativism of the tsarist era or the *homo sovieticus* during the USSR. In this perspective, an independent Ukraine with a strong sense of identity poses only an obstacle to Moscow's and Putin's intentions.

Furthermore, several conclusions can be drawn at this stage. First, as the analysis highlights, is the incredibly significant role that Ukraine plays in the strategy of the Russian Federation. Its strategic location, rich history, and the presence of diverse ethnic groups within its borders make it a focal point in Russian geopolitical calculations. Second, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, particularly the annexation of Crimea and the Donbas conflict, has affected the geopolitical dynamics of Eastern Europe. Disputes over Ukraine's

sovereignty and territorial integrity have caused international tensions and impacted relations between Russia and Western states. Third, the paper emphasises the need to reflect on the ethical aspects of Russia's actions in Ukraine, especially in the context of human rights violations and crimes against humanity. It is valuable to consider the consequences of violating international norms and ethical standards. Finally, the crimes committed by the Russian state, akin to those of the Soviet state and the Russian Empire, particularly the crime of genocide, should be understood as a political tool aimed at maintaining the hegemony of the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet space, demonstrating a clear manifestation of geopolitical thinking (offensive realism).

The conclusions are significant not only for understanding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict but also for identifying the challenges related to maintaining peace and stability in the wider Eastern European region. Further research on this subject and the search for effective conflict resolution in the region are imperative.

Ultimately, the analysis of Ukraine's role in the strategy of the Russian Federation unveils a complex and multifaceted geopolitical context that impacts the international landscape. Reflection on this subject is crucial for a better understanding of the contemporary world and the challenges it presents to the international community.

In this context, we offer the following policy recommendations:

- **Tailored Conditionality:** The EU should adopt a differentiated approach to conditionality tailored to the specific challenges and political dynamics of each Eastern

European country. This approach should encourage cross-party cooperation on key reforms and address the local context.

- **Support for Civil Society:** Recognising the role of civil society in conveying public preferences, the EU should creatively support civil society organizations and grassroots movements, especially in contexts where political power resists reforms.
- **Geopolitical Messaging:** To maintain leverage and credibility, the EU should consider granting candidate status to countries with strong public support for EU integration, sending a geopolitical message and disarming attempts to exploit nationalism.
- **Inclusive Approach:** Given the uncertainties of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the EU's enlargement strategy should be inclusive, involving active participation from the population and civil society representatives in addition to the political leadership.

The EU's Eastern Policy is at a crucial juncture, influenced by geopolitics and the challenges of promoting democratic reforms. To navigate this landscape successfully, the EU must adopt tailored conditionality, support civil society, and strike a balance between strict and flexible approaches. Ultimately, the EU's effectiveness in promoting democracy and integration in Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia will depend on its ability to adapt to the unique dynamics of each country.

Adam Reichardt, Tomasz Stępniewski
Kraków and Lublin, October 2023



Evgeniya Bliznyuk

How the war has changed Eastern Europe and its relations with the EU: A Ukrainian perspective

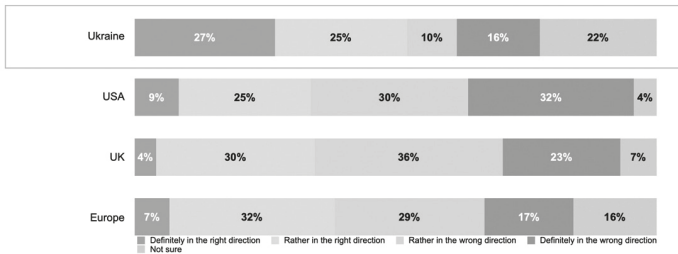
Ukrainian society has become monolithic, less diverse and more united by one goal. And all the contradictions that were specific to Ukraine before the war, including issues related to the actions of the authorities, the country's direction, and the level of life satisfaction, have disappeared. The war has placed everyone within a clear framework regarding the direction of the country's development – and that is, of course, towards the world of Western democracies. Despite the problems that Ukraine had both before the war and as a result of the war, society, not just in the majority, but in the overwhelming majority, will not accept any alternatives, because all other vectors that were possible (either non-alignment or cooperation with the former CIS countries) have now completely disappeared. That is why this monolithic strength, resistance to the enemy, and the desire to survive, strongly unite the entire population of Ukraine.

Social consolidation

According to a survey by Gradus, CYGNAL, Response: AI conducted in March 2022¹, 52% of Ukrainians believe that Ukraine is heading in the right direction, either definitely or to some extent. While in the United States, the United Kingdom, and European countries, only a little more than a third of citizens share this opinion about their own countries. In the pre-war period, these figures in Ukraine were two to three times lower.

PERCEPTION OF THE DIRECTION OF DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR OWN COUNTRY

Data from Gradus, CYGNAL, Response:AI survey (March 2022)



In your opinion, are things in your country moving in the right or wrong direction?
 Sample sizes: n=500 in the United States, n=352 in the United Kingdom, n=1772 in the main countries of the European Union, including n=205 in non-NATO Europe, and n=1000 in Ukraine. In Ukraine, the survey was conducted by Gradus Research using a self-completion questionnaire in a mobile application.
 © 2022 Gradus Research Plus

The second paradoxical trend caused by the war is the growth of optimism for the future. Subjective assessments are always a comparative category, and before the war, Ukrainians were quite pessimistic due to low living standards and incomes as well as the difficult economic situation and constant dissatisfaction with political processes. However, now we see that the level of life satisfaction has

¹ <https://www.cygn.al/cygnal-poll-westerners-feel-like-ukrainians-do-more/>

increased quite significantly, and when answering the open questions, people say that they give such assessments because they realise that it could be much worse than what we have now. The transition from a situation of uncertainty to an extreme situation also contributed to this. Despite all the problems, it has provided a clear direction. The vector of development has received a clear endpoint – the end of the war. Accordingly, all of its components gained meaning in how to approach the end of the war.

Horizontal society

The third trend we identify is the development of horizontal ties. They are strong and are not subsiding. What we saw as isolated outbreaks during the Revolution of Dignity before the war, has been waning and decreasing over time. This relates to the social cohesion and mutual assistance, and the very high speed in solving any problems when connections at the person-to-person level are able to influence national processes. Ukraine is now a horizontal system and demonstrates speed, initiative and horizontal resources. A striking example is the fundraising for four Bayraktars attack drones in three days.

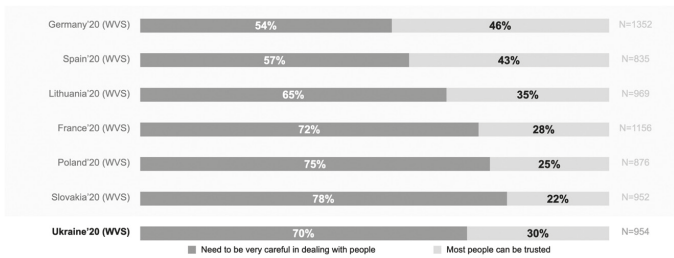
As for horizontal networks, trust is a basic condition for their emergence and functioning. Without trust, it is impossible to communicate with strangers, transfer money to other people's bank accounts, make donations, and start living with random acquaintances. In other words, horizontal relationships do not work without trust.

The level of general trust in pre-war Ukraine was fairly average for European countries. According to the World Values Survey, a third of Ukrainians (30%) believed that

most people could be trusted. This figure is comparable to the level of trust in a number of European countries: Poland (25%), France (28%) and Lithuania (35%).

LEVEL OF TRUST IN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

Gradus



World Value Survey, Wave 7, 2017-2020. Data are shown among the audience of 18-60 years old

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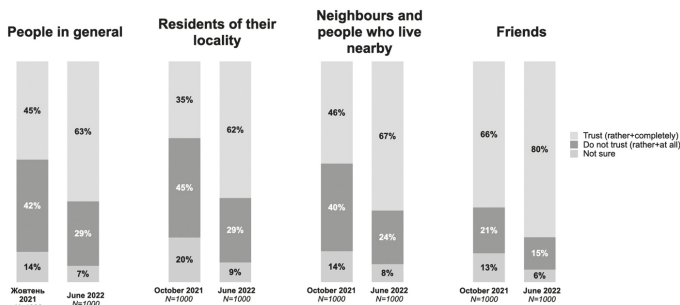
But now we see an important change. Since the beginning of the war, the general level of trust in Ukraine has increased from 45% to 63%². This is two out of every three Ukrainians. We see this phenomenon because there is consolidation. After all, if people do not trust each other, it is impossible to coordinate.

Now, a year and a half after the beginning of the war, we see very high activity when it comes to horizontal ties, and they are starting to be institutionalised. In other words, they are now taking the form of either public organisations or volunteer movements and have become more sustainable. We can expect that after the war is over, these formats will

² <https://gradus.app/en/open-reports/trust-in-ukrainian-society-during-the-war-ukr/>

LEVEL OF TRUST IN UKRAINE

Gradus



The survey was conducted by Gradus Research using a self-completion questionnaire in a mobile application. The Gradus online panel reflects the population structure of cities with more than 50,000 inhabitants aged 18-60 by gender, age, settlement size and region. Period of the survey: June 15-16, 2022, sample size: 1000 respondents.

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remain, and this is positive as they will help control both the social and political developments of the country.

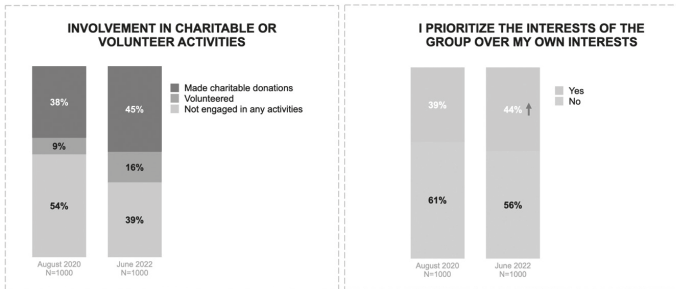
In conditions of danger, any community is structured into a rather rigid vertical, and this is exactly what Ukrainian society and Ukrainian politicians are going through now. However, the fact that social activities and public formations have not disappeared under these conditions suggests that after the situation stabilises, even if martial law is not lifted, it will lead to the restoration of public control over the actions of the authorities; and the Ukrainian authorities are clearly aware of this.

Horizontal networks are also characterised by the ability to take on new forms that meet external requirements, and as a result, by their vitality and ingenuity, a will to live that often surprises Ukrainians themselves. This is a characteristic of Ukrainian business and Ukrainian society in general. After the first shock, when people realised the scale of this war and the extent of the brutality, it led not to panic or a willingness to give up, but to a very quick adaptation

to the new reality and to establishing life under new conditions. I guess, it was one of the main keys to the resistance that Ukraine was able to show at the beginning of the war and is showing now.

The interests of the group are becoming more important than individuals' own interests. Previously, Ukrainians prioritised their own interests over social harmony. Now we can state that the level of altruism and involvement of Ukrainians in helping others is growing. A total of 64% of respondents reported their participation in charitable or volunteer activities, compared to 47% in 2020. More people have started to put the interests of the group above their own interests: in August 2020, 39% of Ukrainians chose this position, and in June 2022 – 44%³.

LIBERAL VALUES
DYNAMICS AUGUST 2020 — JUNE 2022



The survey was conducted by Gradus Research using a self-administered questionnaire in a mobile application. The Gradus online panel reflects the population structure of cities with more than 20 thousand residents aged 18-60 by gender, age, settlement size, and region. Survey period: June 2022. Sample size: 1000 respondents.

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Common challenges have united the nation around the most important things and made volunteering an integral part of our lives. Businesses, both large and small, did not

³ <https://gradus.app/en/open-reports/liberal-values-ukr/>

stand aside. In general, Ukrainian businesses are actively engaged in solving social problems.

84% of Ukrainian businesses surveyed say they are somewhat involved in social issues⁴. Most often, businesses help by providing goods or services related to their activities (43%) or supporting social initiatives financially (36%). Another common form of aid is the volunteer work of employees (32%).

Helping the military comes first for 41% of surveyed business owners and managers. Most prominent are companies engaged in wholesale or retail trade. At the same time, Ukrainian companies also contribute to community development (29%) and allocate funds for social protection (27%). More than half of the respondents (53%) declared that they contribute to solving social problems by providing financial assistance directly to the recipients. One-third of respondents (37%) also help through a partner charity or public organisation. Independent social programs are implemented by 27% of surveyed businesses.

Even small companies with an annual turnover of up to 100,000 Ukrainian hryvnias (EUR 2,500) find the opportunity to donate to social causes on a monthly basis with products, money, or volunteering. Moreover, the vast majority of surveyed businesses are ready to continue these social initiatives even after the end of the full-scale war. This again demonstrates the strength of horizontal ties in Ukrainian society which began to sprout during the Maidan and have blossomed now.

⁴ <https://gradus.app/en/open-reports/how-much-do-businesses-donate-and-how-else-do-they-help-solve-social-issues-ukraine-during-war/>

Migration experience

More than one third of Ukrainians (mostly women and children) were forced to leave their places of permanent residence because of the war. 82% of them migrated within the region or inside Ukraine, while 18% moved abroad⁵. So nowadays, a large number of Ukrainians are either permanently residing in EU countries or traveling between Ukraine and the EU, and this definitely helps with integration into the European community. In fact, migration due to the war has led to the kind of “European integration in action” that is happening now, ahead of the formal process. Europeans are learning about Ukrainians, and Ukrainians are learning about Europeans. I believe that after the war, Ukraine will become multilingual, because both children and their mothers who find themselves in Europe will learn a second or third foreign language and receive a European education. And these people will feel free to communicate, find a job and succeed in their future lives.

Meanwhile, Ukrainians are not only learning from Europeans but also introducing their ways of life to European cultures, which appear distinct even to our neighbours in Eastern Europe. But this can definitely be the basis for the further development of the European Union. Ukrainian migration will have a certain impact on tracking systems and will encourage European countries to improve both the tools for controlling migration flows and the systems for the cross-exchange of data between EU countries. This will definitely be a point of development for European countries in terms of security and social policy because it is a unique

⁵ <https://gradus.app/en/open-reports/gradus-research-war-wave-7-ua/>

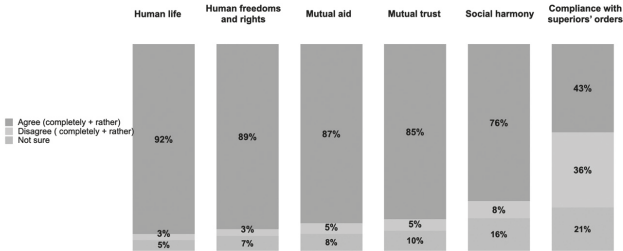
social phenomenon – Europe has not seen such massive migration shifts as we saw in 2022 since the Second World War.

Ukrainians also demonstrate high adaptability in Europe. Despite the fact that they left under such extreme conditions and often found themselves in countries where they did not speak the language, they quickly began to learn the new language and look for work there. However, this has a somewhat indirect effect on the intention of Ukrainians to stay in Europe as permanent residents, as most Ukrainian migrants still have quite significant points of gravity within the country. Over the entire period of social screenings since the beginning of the war, the rate of desire to return home at the earliest opportunity among respondents who have moved abroad has consistently remained high, at least 70%⁶. The main barrier to returning is the security situation, especially for Ukrainians with children, as they are unwilling to expose their children to the traumatic experience of war. From this, we can conclude that as soon as the security situation allows, people will return home, already with the experience of living in European countries.

Ukrainians are also active in terms of business – they are starting new businesses in Europe, relocating existing ones, or expanding the geography of their companies. This will have a positive impact on our relations with Europe; they will become more sustainable. Business is not a migration situation that stops as soon as security allows people to return home. It's about longer-term relationships and partnerships. And the fact that Ukrainian businesses are now entering European markets, building their networks

⁶ <https://gradus.app/en/open-reports/gradus-eu-wave-12-ua/>

WHAT IS THE HIGHEST VALUE?



Base: all respondents, N=2000
 To what extent do you agree with the statement: Human life is the highest value / Human freedoms and rights are the highest value / Social harmony is the highest value / Compliance with superiors' orders is the highest value / Mutual aid is the highest value / Mutual trust is the highest value

there and seeking new opportunities will certainly provide a boost and fresh perspectives for the European market, among other benefits.

Values

European values are crystallising in Ukrainian society. In difficult times, the importance of having “healthy” moral values and worldviews is growing in society. The war, with its many losses and sufferings, has helped Ukrainians become more aware of the value of human life, humanistic principles, and constructive relationships. Did the war make us like this? No, not exactly. All of this did not appear after February 24; Ukrainians have lived with a similar perception of the world before, but it is now starting to crystallise. The vast majority of Ukrainians (92%) consider human life to be the highest value⁷. The top answers to the question of what the highest values are include freedoms and human

⁷ Ibid.

rights (89%), mutual assistance (86%), mutual trust (82%), and social harmony (71%). More than 90% of Ukrainians declare that respect for human rights and human dignity, the principles of freedom, and equality between people are important to them. Also, 85% chose the principles of democracy and 80% – the rule of law.

After experiencing stress, chaos, large-scale mobility, and uncertainty, Ukraine and Europe will definitely be different. Because for anti-fragile systems, the pressure of change is the path of evolution “as the wind extinguishes the candle and lights the fire”.



Katsiaryna Lozka

Between the hammer and the anvil: Belarus, its people, and Russia's war against Ukraine

Since February 2022, Belarus has found itself dragged into Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, assuming a new and – for many – unexpected role in the conflict. While the Belarusian Armed Forces are not directly engaged in military operations, the country has become a crucial staging ground for Russia's missile attacks on Ukraine, serving as a training centre, medical support hub, and logistics base for Russian soldiers. This newly acquired role marks a stark departure from Belarus' previous position as a relatively detached observer of the protracted conflict, which has plagued the region since 2014.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the extent of Belarus' involvement in the war is met with resistance from the majority of the Belarusian population. Public opinion polls consistently show that more than 80% of the

population do not support it¹. Furthermore, the 2020 anti-authoritarian protests and the resulting ongoing political crisis has shed light on the deep-rooted discontent among society, with the subsequent escalation of war further complicating an already challenging domestic situation. Caught between the grip of their own repressive regime and the growing influence of Russia, Belarusians have to grapple with the burdens of their government's decades-long alignment with Moscow.

This paper discusses the transformative impact of the war between Russia and Ukraine from the perspective of Belarus, particularly in light of Belarus' involvement since February 2022. It argues that the escalation of Russia's war against Ukraine has not only intensified the vulnerabilities of Lukashenka's regime but also laid bare the consequences of its long-standing dependence on Russia. Simultaneously, the war has showcased the agency and resilience of the Belarusians, who persistently voice their opposition to the regime's trajectory. Despite the growing isolation of Belarus and its deepening entanglement into the "Russian World", the resistance of the Belarusian population highlights that the conflict between the archaic regime and the modernising population² that came to the surface in 2020 remains unresolved.

¹ <https://belaruspolls.org/wave-8>

² <https://muse.jhu.edu/pub/280/article/878559/pdf>

Policy U-turn? Belarus in the wake of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine

Prior to 2020, Belarus remained largely absent from the mental maps of the international community. However, the crisis triggered by the disputed presidential election of 9 August 2020 and the subsequent unprecedented violence, torture and killings unleashed by the regime of Alyaksandr Lukashenka brought Belarus into the global spotlight, eliciting solidarity from Europe and beyond. The scenes of peaceful resistance, chains of solidarity and attempts at strikes echoed the memories of the transformative events of 1989 across Central Europe³, while others immediately drew comparisons between the Belarusian protests and Ukraine's Maidan⁴. However, Belarus proved to be distinct from any of these historical parallels. If anything, the events of 2020 shattered preconceived notions of Belarusians as a conservative and apathetic nation, revealing a vibrant civil society and an engaged population striving for basic rights, freedoms and a voice in shaping their country's future.

However, the launch of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, including from Belarusian territory, marked a sudden and significant shift in the international perception of Belarus. Overnight, the Belarusian people, who had been fighting against their own repressive regime supported by its Russian counterpart, found themselves complicit in a neighbouring country's invasion. This shift in perception has

³ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/slavic-review/article/echo-of-1989-protest-imaginaries-and-identity-dilemmas-in-belarus/B590F9290CF7D14287583DD3EE5BF853>

⁴ <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2020/10/23/a-second-ukraine-in-belarus-european-narratives-concerning-the-belarusian-pro-democracy-movement/>

had tangible consequences for Belarusians, as they have witnessed a U-turn in various aspects of their lives – from the rejection of Belarusian applicants at European universities to the removal of Belarusian books from bookshelves⁵.

Even more importantly, this new association led to a troubling conflation of Belarus and Russia, overshadowing the major differences between the two. As an example of contrasting societal responses, during the final days of February 2022, more than 1,100 individuals were detained in Belarus⁶ for protesting against the war, compared to over 2,000 detentions in Russia⁷. These numbers reflect a significant difference, considering the population disparity, with Belarus having approximately 9.5 million inhabitants compared to Russia's population of over 140 million.

In this context, it is important to draw attention to the complex situation around Belarus, where the state is being further dragged into the Russian orbit, while the population strives to maintain their links to the broader international community and preserve their culture and history.

Belarus as a state: In the grip of Russian influence and domestic repressive policies

Since the onset of Russia's full-scale war in February 2022, Belarus has played an active role as a belligerent state, allowing its territory to be used for launching missile attacks on Ukraine and facilitating the advance of Russian soldiers

⁵ <https://theconversation.com/belarusians-are-facing-discrimination-and-blame-for-russias-war-in-ukraine-192828>

⁶ <https://d367r2zjs5oyeba.cloudfront.net/310936>

⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/police-detain-more-than-900-people-anti-war-protests-across-russia-monitoring-2022-02-27/>

into northern and central regions of Ukraine. This active involvement serves as a culmination of the Lukashenka regime's long-standing dependence on Russia across various domains.

Economically, since 2022, Belarus has lost its position as a transit hub and now finds itself completely dependent on its eastern neighbour. Russia has remained the primary destination for the majority of Belarus's exports, the sole provider of oil and natural gas, the primary source of external financing and the dominant holder of public debt⁸. In the informational sphere, Minsk has ceded its informational sovereignty to Moscow and adopted Russia's propaganda narratives. While Belarusian propaganda attempts to emphasise non-involvement in the war, it has significantly aligned its messaging with that of Russia, effectively synchronising their content to a large extent. Politically, the regime has lost its Western foreign policy vector and has embarked on a new course. As a form of reciprocation towards the Kremlin, it has initiated engagements with territories such as Georgia's breakaway region of Abkhazia and played host to Denis Pushilin, the so-called "leader" of the Russia-sponsored Donetsk People's Republic.

These developments have ignited widespread doubts concerning the autonomy of Lukashenka's regime, fuelling narratives that portray Belarus as a country under occupation. This erosion of sovereignty across different domains unfolds against a backdrop of persistent state-sanctioned repressions, with an average of at least 17 daily detentions

⁸ <https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781666925982/Russian-Policy-toward-Belarus-after-2020-At-a-Turning-Point>

since 2022⁹. Furthermore, Belarus has witnessed a growing trend of militarisation of education, intensified persecution of the Belarusian language, and a deepening russification of its history in the public sphere. These multifaceted challenges have cast a shadow over the country's once-promising re-emergence in the East-Central European political landscape, relegating it to a state of relative obscurity once again.

Voices of resistance: The Belarusian people's struggle against repressive regimes

The escalation of the war in Ukraine has introduced a new dynamic into the ongoing struggle against Lukashenka's authoritarian regime. The protests that erupted in 2020 were primarily driven by domestic grievances and a desire for justice and democratic reforms. However, Russia's brutal attack on Ukraine has compelled the Belarusian population and pro-democracy forces, led by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, to reassess, if not change, their stance on geopolitical issues. As a result, there are several discernible trends that illustrate the transformative impact of the war on the popular movement.

Firstly, Russia's war against Ukraine has become a powerful wake-up call for many Belarusians. On the eve of the invasion, Chatham House opinion polls revealed a strong opposition among the population towards any engagement in the war, with people recognising the potentially catastrophic consequences it could bring to their country¹⁰. Remarkably,

⁹ <https://belarusabroad.org/en/2023/01/belarus-2022-a-minimum-of-17-people-per-day-were-detained-on-a-politically-motivated-basis-at-least-6-381-have-been-detained-in-the-course-of-the-year-information-about-repressions-in-the-years-2020/>

¹⁰ <https://belaruspolls.org/wave-9>

over the past year and a half, despite differing viewpoints on the war itself, public opinion has remained unwavering in its rejection of the idea of Belarus' participation in it.

Consequently, starting from 2022, a multitude of resistance efforts have further developed within Belarus. These acts of defiance encompass a wide spectrum, ranging from railway partisans carrying out strategic disruptions of Russian equipment, to a number of Belarusian men and women voluntarily enlisting in Ukraine's Armed Forces. Furthermore, people across Belarus have demonstrated their support for Ukraine by displaying Ukrainian flags throughout the country and by taking to the streets in various forms of protest, be it through solitary pickets or massive gatherings, as was seen on February 28th¹¹. Simultaneously, the three-year-long crisis and ongoing war have brought about a mix of emotions among the population. Disillusionment and fear loom large, contributing to a sense of caution and de-politicisation among a segment of the population.

Secondly, the outbreak of the war has affected the pro-democracy movement and the Belarusian diaspora, triggering a process of geopolitical awakening. Many started to view the war in Ukraine as an integral part of the domestic struggle for freedom, recognising that the defeat of Russia could potentially bring about the downfall of Lukashenka's regime. This realisation has sparked a surge of solidarity with Ukraine among Belarusians, ranging from demonstrations around the world, financial contributions, such as donations towards a Polish bayraktar, to the purchase of vehicles and supplies for Ukraine and its armed forces.

¹¹ <https://balticworlds.com/where-society-is-deprived-of-power-but-not-agency/>

In addition, the discourse of the pro-democracy forces has undergone a transformation. While in 2020, Tsikhounoukaya attempted to appeal to Russia, in 2022 she began to voice the pro-European aspirations of the Belarusian people. As a result, Russia's war against Ukraine has reshaped the landscape of resistance in Belarus and spurred a re-evaluation of geopolitical alignments within the pro-democracy movement.

Russia's war, Central Europe, and dilemmas for Belarus

Russia's brutal war against Ukraine has increased the visibility and influence of Central European states. However, for Belarus, the war has created a precarious and uncertain situation. Aspirations for democratic development and reintegration into the international community clash with political developments and Russia's growing influence, leaving Belarus isolated and vulnerable.

The war has brought into sharp focus the undeniable truth that Ukraine is not Russia. However, another fundamental reality seems to remain overlooked: Belarus is not Russia either. Rather than relegating Belarus to the shadow of Russia in conferences and political discussions, it is imperative to elevate its voice and perspective. With Belarus having re-emerged on the official world map over three decades ago, isn't it time we also place it firmly on our mental maps, acknowledging its distinct identity and aspirations?



Piotr Oleksy

Moldova: Towards a new subjectivity

On the eve of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova commenced a process of reforms which were aimed at battling corruption and building a well-functioning state in line with the development model promoted by the European Union. The start of this process was triggered by the Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) winning enough seats in the July 2021 parliamentary elections to form a majority government. Maia Sandu, the party's de facto leader, had already won the Presidential Elections in December 2020. The Russian invasion of a neighbouring state and the aggressive behaviour towards Moldova itself (energy blackmail, attempts at political sabotage, information warfare) affected the reforms in two ways. On one hand, the process was hindered by the refugee crisis, which was particularly noticeable in 2022, and by the increase in energy prices, leading to social discontent, which formed a basis for protests organised by pro-Russian forces. On the other hand, Russian pressure gave additional impetus to the governing

camp and its western partners to act towards development and increase the subjectivity of Moldova.

Firstly, they succeeded in solving the problem of energy dependency on Russia. Secondly, there was a significant change in Moldova's position on the international arena. The country obtained EU candidate status along with substantial financial assistance. It additionally increased its visibility on the international arena, for example by organising the European Political Community Summit in Chişinău on 1 January 2023. Thirdly, a taboo in relations with Western partners was overcome, namely support for Moldova's security and robustness, which arose from the hitherto mistaken association with the question of the country's neutral status. Fourthly, a major shift occurred in the relations between the Moldovan authorities and the leaders of the separatist Transnistria region, with Chişinău reinforcing its subjectivity and achieving new means to wield pressure.

Later in this text there is a more detailed analysis of two of the aforementioned questions which are of fundamental importance for Moldova's international position and its future – the problem of energy security and the matter of relations with the separatist republic.

Energy reorientation

The energy resilience of the Republic of Moldova increased significantly at the end of 2022 as a result of efforts by the country's government and the EU during a period of over a year. Russia's ability to carry out energy blackmail decreased considerably.

The complexities of the energy game

Around 1/3 of the natural gas consumed by Moldova each year is used by production plants located in Transnistria, particularly the Moldovan GRES power plant owned by the Russian state company Inter RAO. The electricity generated by that plant is then bought by Moldova, and in recent years it covered around 80% of the needs of the entire country. The remaining 20% was purchased from Ukrainian power plants. As a result of Russian attacks on its energy infrastructure, in October 2022 Ukraine ceased exporting electricity. At the same time, Moldovan GRES reduced the amount of power generated, blaming this on a fall in gas pressure. This caused an energy deficit in Moldova, which was made up by purchases from Romania, which was possible thanks to the previous synchronisation with the European power grid. Electricity from Romania, however, was more expensive – ranging between EUR 190 and EUR 348 per MWh, compared to the USD 66 per MWh which Moldova had paid Transnistria.

In October 2022, Gazprom confirmed earlier expectations by limiting gas supplies to Moldova to 5.7 million cubic meters per day. This meant that deliveries fell by around 70% compared to the contracted amounts. In November and December the Russian company maintained the same daily gas supply. This represented a reduction of 50% and 43% compared to the contracted volumes in October and November respectively.

As a result, Chişinău suggested cutting deliveries of gas to Transnistria to 3.7 million cubic meters per month. Tiraspol did not agree to produce electricity based on that volume as that would necessitate a reduction in the operations of other industrial plants. As no agreement was reached, Moldova

limited gas supplies to the left bank to just 2.3 million cubic meters. Moldovan GRES responded by halting electricity production.

Consequently, in November, Moldova bought its entire electricity requirement from Romania. This led to a huge rise in costs and an increased strain on the state budget. The price of electricity for regular customers also rose, exacerbating the existing socio-economic crisis. It is worth remembering that during the period from September 2021 to September 2022, the price of gas for individual customers rose sevenfold (this fuel is the main source of heat for most households, and the increase in raw material prices was one of the main causes of the social unrest).¹ Russian bombardment of the south-western region of Ukraine was an additional problem. Although Moldova was importing electricity from Romania during that time, those attacks resulted in power being cut off in the entire country. This was because the only high-voltage line connecting Moldova and Romania runs through Ukrainian territory, and during the attacks it had to be disconnected to prevent an outage of the entire grid.

Diversification and Agreement. On 4 December, the Moldovan gas operator Moldovagaz announced that from the following day the country would permanently obtain its gas from two sources. Apart from the existing purchases from Gazprom (a five-year contract had been signed in 2021), a total of 3.7 million cubic meters would also be supplied

¹ P. Oleksy, M. Paszkowski, *Moldawia: trudna sytuacja energetyczna i rosyjskie groźby*, "Komentarze IES" 2022, no. 690, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/moldawia-trudna-sytuacja-energetyczna-i-rosyjskie-grozby/> [9.08.2023].

by Energocom, the state energy trading company. This entity owns reserves gathered in recent months and stored in Romania and Ukraine. Their total amount is estimated at around 250 million cubic meters. In addition to this, Energocom will make regular purchases of natural gas via the Trans-Balkan Pipeline and the Iași–Ungheni–Chișinău pipeline, connecting Moldova with Romania. It was announced that the raw material bought from Gazprom would be used exclusively for the requirements of the left-bank separatist republic (including the power plant located there), while the supplies delivered by Energocom would meet the needs of Moldova on the right bank. This enabled an agreement to be reached regarding renewal of electricity supplies by Moldovan GRES. The price according to the new contract is EUR 73 per MWh.²

Support from the West. On 10 November 2022, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen announced an aid package for the Moldovan energy sector totalling EUR 200 million. Half of that amount was provided in the form of loans, and half as grants. A further EUR 50 million was allocated as assistance for the state budget. Meanwhile on 21-22 November 2022, the Moldova Support Platform held a summit in Paris – this is an international collaboration which also includes key European financial institutions. During the meeting, the European Investment

² E. Ceban, *Moldova popala v energeticheskuiu lovushku? Chto vyigral Kishinev, proigrav Tiraspoliu*, Newsmaker.md, 6 December 2022, <https://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/nebezvas-chto-vyigral-kishinev-proigrav-tiraspoliyu-energeticheskuyu-igru/> [9.08.2023]; E. Ceban, *Gazovaia igra Moldovy i Kremliia. Sleduiushchiiy hod za Kishinevom?*, Newsmaker.md, 14 December 2022, <https://newsmaker.md/rus/novosti/im-kazhetsya-chto-oni-nas-davyat-pochemu-sdelka-kishineva-i-tiraspoliya-ne-delaet-prosche-otnosheniya-moldovy-s-gazpromom/> [9.08.2023].

Bank announced a continuation of support, after having invested EUR 280 million in key sectors of the Moldovan economy in 2022 alone. In 2023, this support will be concentrated in the energy and transport sectors. The EU is also providing significant substantive assistance. This mainly concerns expanding the capability to function on international markets and energy exchanges, and transferring knowledge about the details of creating and negotiating gas contracts. Smaller and more dispersed, yet still numerous and important, actions are also being taken by individual EU member states. The United States is also proving to be of great help – in early January 2022, support worth USD 30 million was announced for the Moldovan energy sector, provided by USAID.

Perspectives for the Development of Energy Security. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Moldovan energy sector developed at a revolutionary pace. Moldova went from total independence on gas from Russian suppliers and electricity from separatist Transnistria, to a position allowing it to make use of a variety of energy suppliers. Gas and electricity purchases are now simply a matter of money, and not infrastructural dependency. Of key significance for this reorientation were the construction and activation of the Iași-Ungheni-Chișinău pipeline, activation of south-north transmission through the Trans-Balkan Pipeline, and synchronisation with the European electrical power grid.

Diversification of energy supplies to Moldova would have been impossible without the major, consistent and well-planned support of the EU. A great deal of hope is connected with the activation of transmission via the Trans-Balkan Pipeline from south to north. This enables Moldova to be

supplied with material from Azerbaijan, and natural gas imported in condensed form (LNG) from ports in Greece. Its transmission capacity would enable the country's entire demand to be satisfied (including that of Transnistria). It is predicted that in the future, joint gas purchases by Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova will be possible through that route. What is more, that pipeline will also be able to supply Ukraine.

Chişinău's Transnistria dilemma

Russian aggression against Ukraine exacerbated and further revealed the divergence between the interests of the Russian Federation and those of the elite in unrecognised Transnistria. Since 2016, the separatist republic, run by local oligarchs connected with the Sheriff concern, have strengthened their economic links with the European Union. The most important tools of Russian influence on Transnistria were the Russian military presence, the free gas, which forms the foundation of the economy's competitiveness, and the strong effects of its media and symbolism on the local population. As a result, the unrecognised republic functioned in a system where relations with Moldova and the EU enabled its business to develop and allowed it to become gradually less dependent on the Kremlin, while Russian influences prevented it from being absorbed by Moldova.³

The war has made it clear that those influences are losing importance. The actions of Russian soldiers in Ukraine,

³ P. Oleksy, *Naddniestrze wobec rosyjskiego ataku na Ukrainę*, "Komentarze IEŚ" 2022, no. 529, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/naddniestrze-wobec-rosyjskiego-ataku-na-ukraine/> [9.08.2023].

above all, their low morale and competence, have cast doubt on the discipline, loyalty and capabilities of the units stationed in Transnistria, particularly since the vast majority of those troops were born and raised in the unrecognised republic. Russia's commodity policy, including its gas blackmail of Moldova and breaks in gas supplies to the West (including the cessation of deliveries through the Nord Stream pipeline), clearly indicate that in this field the political factor is of far more importance than the economic one. This is a signal for the Transnistrian elite that their gas supply may be halted as part of the broader rivalry with the West, as cutting off deliveries to Moldova would also deprive Transnistria of gas.

What is more, Moldova has succeeded in reducing its dependence on Russian supplies, and the model described above for providing gas has meant that by reducing the amount of gas sent to Moldova, it is mainly harming the separatist republic. The roles have thus been reversed in the energy relations between Moldova and Transnistria. Until recently, the separatist republic was generally considered to be holding the mother country hostage. The economic functioning of Transnistria is currently dependent on both gas supplies from Russia and Moldova's willingness to cooperate. The autumn of 2022 showed that cutting itself off from power supplies from the left bank would be very costly for Moldova, but not impossible.

It is currently difficult to form any clear-cut conclusions regarding the attitude of Transnistria's population to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. There are, however, strong signals which can be noticed in this field. Firstly, the local authorities have not clearly sided with Russia in the conflict,

adopting rhetoric which was mainly aimed at calming the local populace and neighbouring states. All reports of attacks on Ukraine from Transnistrian territory have turned out to be false. No support by society for Russia's actions has been visible in any way. Secondly, in spring of this year, a series of what appeared to be acts of sabotage took place within Transnistria. There were no casualties, but no perpetrators were identified either. It is highly probable that these were the work of the local security services, which have strong connections with the Russian services. The aim was to create a sense of fear of Ukrainian or Moldovan aggression. Thirdly, after the Russian Federation announced partial mobilisation, Transnistrian politicians concentrated on reassuring the local population that this problem would not concern them (220,000 people in Transnistria are formally RF citizens).

The Ukrainian Perspective. After 24 February 2022, the Ukrainian authorities and public opinion watched Transnistria with concern. In the first weeks, when it was feared that the Russian offensive might reach Odessa, the involvement of units based in Transnistria, even in the form of logistical support and supplies, seemed very real. The bridge near the Kuchurgan-Pervomaisk border crossing was demolished for this reason. Opinions were voiced in Ukrainian media by influential public figures that their military should preventively seize control of the separatist republic, which from the point of view of international law is part of Moldova. The question also arises of potential benefits from such a step, which would include, most importantly, control of the post-Soviet arsenal and fuel dump, and a serious blow to Russia's image. If events developed in that way, it would leave the Moldovan government in a very uncomfortable

situation on the international stage, as well as in relation to its own citizens.⁴

Moldovan Restraint. The Moldovan authorities have adopted an expectant approach towards the Transnistrian question. Around the turn of 2022, there was a change in the position of the vice premier responsible for reintegration. Vlad Kulminski, known for advocating an active approach regarding Transnistria, was replaced by Oleg Serebrian – an intellectual and diplomat who is successfully implementing a policy of moderate dialogue and expectation. President Maia Sandu and the Party of Action and Solidarity are working on the assumption that a period of war and energy crises is not a good moment to try to resolve the conflict. Sandu has stated openly that the time for such talks will come after the war. At the European Political Community Summit in Chişinău, Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky took a similar tone.

Conclusions and perspectives for the Transnistrian question. The current political elite in Transnistria has so far been guided first and foremost by its own economic benefits. From this perspective, there are more and more arguments pointing to a western course. It no longer seems feasible for the pseudo-state, situated between a hostile Ukraine and clearly pro-Western Moldova, to base its existence on a political and military alliance with Russia. Even assuming that Russia can still win this war, remaining under its strict control does not

⁴ S. Gerasymchuk, *Analysis of the bilateral Ukraine – Moldova relations: problematic and promising dimensions of cooperation*, Ukrainian PRISM, 28 January 2023, <https://prismua.org/en/english-analysis-of-the-bilateral-ukraine-moldova-relations-problematic-and-promising-dimensions-of-cooperation/> [9.08.2023]; P. Oleksy, *Ukraine and Moldova: toward a viable partnership*, "IEŚ Commentaries" 2023, no. 832, <https://ies.lublin.pl/en/comments/ukraine-and-moldova-toward-a-viable-partnership/> [9.08.2023].

currently appear an attractive prospect for either the authorities or society. At the same time, the local elite is probably increasingly aware that a choice is taking shape – either reintegration with Moldova under Western patronage, or Ukrainian intervention. The first option seems far more beneficial from the political and economic points of view, and even for the personal security of the rulers.

A historic window is thus opening before Moldova, providing a chance to solve the problem of Transnistria. During the coming months, the authorities of that country, overwhelmed with numerous crises, will probably be unable to take any decisive steps in the matter. The pace of these processes depends on the results of battles on the Ukrainian fronts. Russian defeats will put greater pressure on Tiraspol, and vice versa. Moldova's Western partners have so far supported it in its policy of restraint. In the event of further Ukrainian successes, however, a desire may arise to seize the current opportunities with regard to Transnistria. Pressure in this matter will also depend on the tempo of Moldova's EU membership negotiations.

It is worth noting here that within the EU itself, it is increasingly heard that the very existence of the separatist republic does not have to be an obstacle towards Moldova's integration with the EU. This was confirmed publicly at the EPC summit in Chişinău by Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, referring to the example of Cyprus. Nevertheless, these considerations do not address the problem of Russian military units stationed on the left bank of the Dniester. In the event of any real action towards Moldovan membership of the EU, these will constitute a far greater problem than the actual existence of the unrecognised republic, which is already

connected economically with the Union. This is confirmation that a solution to the problem of Transnistria will depend on the outcome of Russia's war against Ukraine.



Giorgi Koberidze

How has the war in Ukraine changed Eastern Europe and its relations with the EU from the perspective of Georgia?

Reference is often made to the fact that Russia started the war in Ukraine in 2022. Yet, from the perspective of Georgia, this is not the case. An increase in the scale of the war may have occurred in 2022, but the Russia-Ukraine war began in 2014, although Russia's preparations for aggressive international military campaigns began as early as 2008 with the invasion of Georgia.

One of the consequences of the war between Russia and its neighbouring countries was the rise of Eastern European states as key players in the global arena. Countries such as Poland, Romania and the Baltic states had been warning the world about the threat of Russian expansionism and militarism for years, yet their voices were often ignored or dismissed by the major powers. When the war broke out and Russia invaded several territories (first Georgia, then Crimea and Donbas), the Eastern European countries proved to be

crucial allies in resisting and containing the aggression. They provided military, diplomatic and humanitarian support to the affected regions and also advocated for a strong and unified response from the international community. As a result, their political stance, influence and image increased dramatically, and they gained more respect and recognition from other countries.

The war in Ukraine, which started in 2014 and is still ongoing, has had a profound impact on the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe and its relations with the European Union. As a neighbouring country which shares historical, cultural and political ties with both Ukraine and the EU, Georgia has been closely following the developments of the conflict and its implications for its own security and integration aspirations. This article outlines how the war in Ukraine has affected Georgia's position and prospects in Eastern Europe and the EU and what challenges and opportunities lie ahead.

Georgia and its EU aspirations in the context of the war

The debate over Georgia's EU membership has been reopened by the conflict in Ukraine. In regard to the security of Eastern Europe, the war has demonstrated that Russia is prepared to use military force to further its objectives. The EU has also been more supportive of Georgia's membership bid since the start of the war in Ukraine. In 2022, the European Commission recommended that Georgia be granted the opportunity to become a member of the European Union. This was a significant step forward for Georgia, and it

is hoped that the country will be able to join the EU in the near future.

From the perspective of Georgia, the war has highlighted the importance of EU membership and strengthened the country's resolve to join the bloc. The EU has also been more supportive of Georgia's membership bid since the start of the war, and it is hoped that the country will be able to join the EU in the near future.

The first effect of the war in Ukraine on Georgia was to increase its sense of vulnerability and the urgency to strengthen its ties with the EU and NATO. Georgia, like Ukraine, is a former Soviet republic that has experienced Russian aggression and occupation of its territories (Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region, so-called "South Ossetia") since the early 1990s. The war in Ukraine demonstrated that Russia was willing and able to use military force to prevent its neighbours from pursuing closer integration with the West and that the international community was unable to effectively deter or stop it. This realisation prompted Georgia to accelerate its reforms and cooperation with the EU and NATO, hoping to achieve a membership perspective and enhance its security guarantees. Georgia signed an Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, which included a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) and implemented a visa-free regime with the EU in 2017. Georgia also intensified its participation in NATO's Partnership for Peace program, contributing troops to NATO missions in Afghanistan and Iraq and hosting joint military exercises on its soil. However, it should also be noted that after the start of the full-scale war in 2022, relations between the Georgian government and the European Union and NATO slowed

down, while the support of the European Union among the population reached a record level of 81%.

But there's another interesting aspect as well. During the early stages of the conflict, Georgian society criticised certain Western European nations for failing to provide Ukraine with military assistance, while Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia provided strong and outspoken support. All of this alters the impression that Central and Eastern Europe are becoming the geopolitical centre of gravity for the EU. Poland has emerged as a driving force for European security in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The country has played a leading role in providing humanitarian aid to Ukrainian refugees, and it has also been a vocal critic of Russia's aggression. Poland has also been a strong supporter of NATO, and it has called for increased military spending by European countries. Poland has also played a key role in coordinating the international response to the refugee crisis caused by the war in Ukraine. The Polish government has provided shelter and support to millions of Ukrainian refugees and has worked with other countries to ensure that they have access to food, water, and medical care. Poland's role in European security is likely to grow in the years to come. The country is determined to defend its own security, and it is also committed to helping to protect its allies. Poland is a valuable partner for the United States and other NATO countries, and it is an important player in the effort to deter Russian aggression.

Georgia's response to the invasion

Another effect of the war in Ukraine on Georgia was to increase its solidarity and cooperation with other Eastern

European countries that share similar aspirations and challenges. Since 2014, Georgia has been actively supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as its European integration path, both bilaterally and multilaterally. The conflict is considerably more relevant to Georgian society in light of the fact that a Georgian Legion has existed in Ukraine since 2014, serving as one of the capable armed divisions. There have been 44 deaths among Georgian military volunteers since 24 February 2022. There were 12 deaths among Georgian nationals between 2014 and 2021.

Georgia has provided humanitarian aid, medical assistance, military training, and equipment to Ukraine, as well as political support in international forums. However, even in this instance, after the full-fledged war started, ties between Georgia and Ukraine rapidly deteriorated. The reason for this was the alleged interference in the internal political activities of Georgia by some members of the Ukrainian government. Additionally, the Georgian government's rhetoric shifted and became softer towards Russia and more passive-aggressive towards the West. As if "certain forces" wished to include Georgia in the conflict, explicit support for the myth of the so-called "War Party" and the "Second Front" was also evident and prevalent. As a result, Georgia's relationships with Ukraine and its allies in Europe are strained.

The war had a significant impact on Georgian civil society. It has come to realize that its integration with the EU is not only a matter of technical negotiations and institutional reforms but also of winning the hearts and minds of European leaders, citizens, and decision-makers. Georgia has been trying to showcase its achievements and potential as a reliable partner and a democratic role model for the region, as

well as raise awareness about its unresolved conflicts and security threats. However, a lot of changes may also be seen in this instance. In June 2022, Georgia was not given EU candidate status – a very disappointing development. However, this occurrence widened Georgia's political division on the domestic front. In order to make a choice that would be advantageous to Georgia in relation to its EU candidate status, the authorities requested that they promptly implement the so-called twelve-point required recommendations. In this case, we saw the strengthening of civil activism in relation to the Georgian authorities.

Georgia's evolving path towards the EU

In conclusion, the war in Ukraine has had far-reaching implications for the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe and its relations with the European Union. From the perspective of Georgia, the conflict has emphasised the importance of EU membership and strengthened the country's determination to join the bloc. The war highlighted the vulnerability of Eastern European nations and their urgent need to strengthen ties with the EU and NATO for security purposes.

The conflict also led to increased support from the European Union for Georgia's membership bid, with the European Commission recommending Georgia become an EU member. This has provided a significant boost to Georgia's aspirations and hopes for future EU integration. However, it is worth noting that relations between the Georgian government and the EU and NATO slowed down after the start of the full-scale war in 2022.

Furthermore, the war in Ukraine has brought Central and Eastern European nations to the forefront as key players in European security. Poland, in particular, has emerged as a driving force for European security and has played a leading role in providing humanitarian aid to Ukrainian refugees and criticizing Russia's aggression. Poland's role in European security is expected to grow in the coming years as it remains committed to defending its own security and protecting its allies.

The conflict has also fostered solidarity and cooperation among Eastern European countries facing similar challenges and aspirations. Georgia has actively supported Ukraine's sovereignty and European integration, providing assistance in various forms. However, the war has strained relationships between Georgia and Ukraine and its European allies due to alleged interference in Georgia's internal political activities and a shift in the Georgian government's rhetoric.

Moreover, the war has had a profound impact on Georgian civil society, emphasising the importance of winning the hearts and minds of European leaders and citizens. Georgia has been showcasing its achievements and potential as a reliable partner and democratic role model while also raising awareness about its unresolved conflicts and security threats. The disappointment of not being granted EU candidate status in 2022 has further deepened political divisions within Georgia and spurred civil activism to meet the required recommendations for EU candidacy.

Overall, the war in Ukraine has shaped the trajectory of Georgia's position and prospects in Eastern Europe and the EU. It has underscored the need for closer integration with the EU and NATO for security purposes while also

highlighting the importance of strengthening relationships with neighbouring countries and fostering solidarity among Eastern European nations. Georgia's path towards EU membership continues to evolve, driven by the lessons learned from the war and the determination to overcome challenges and seize opportunities in the ever-changing geopolitical landscape.



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Russia's aggression against Ukraine has brought the European Union's Eastern Policy to the forefront of its agenda. This development has not only reinvigorated discussions on the expansion of the EU but also raised questions about the EU's absorption capacity and the challenges of promoting democratic reforms in these Eastern European nations. This paper provides perspective from the countries of the region as a result of the war as well as an overview of the EU's approach to these countries, and proposes strategies for effective engagement.

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