

# EU Foreign Policy Integration at Times of War: From Short-Term Responses to Long-Term Solutions

by Maria Giulia Amadio Viceré

The outbreak of Russia's war against Ukraine triggered not only a paradigmatic change in the system of international relations, putting the liberal world order into question, but also a disruption of the post-Cold war European security order.<sup>1</sup> The question of what the consequences of the conflict on the EU's role as a security provider will be, has therefore become topical.<sup>2</sup>

There is no doubt that the EU has been extremely quick and active

in addressing Russia's aggression. According to some, the war in Ukraine is likely to provide functional pressure for the EU to integrate member states' security and defence sectors. By fostering centre formation and capacity-building,<sup>3</sup> the war would inevitably push the EU to develop the necessary institutional apparatus to act as a security provider in international politics. Indeed, conflicts among EU member states and weak EU capacities in relation to specific policy issues have long been considered the two main explanatory elements for the Union's inability to act efficiently in the international arena.

But is this really the case? To make reasonable predictions about the implications of the war in Ukraine

<sup>1</sup> Stefan Meister, "A Paradigm Shift: EU-Russia Relations After the War in Ukraine", in *Carnegie Articles*, 29 November 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/publications/88476>.

<sup>2</sup> Philipp Genschell, "Bellicist Integration? The War in Ukraine, the European Union and Core State Powers", in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 4 November 2022, DOI 10.1080/13501763.2022.2141823; Nathalie Tocci, "Europe's Defense Efforts Remain Underwhelming", in *Politico.eu*, 22 November 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/?p=2322216>.

<sup>3</sup> Kathleen R. McNamara and R. Daniel Kelemen, "Seeing Europe Like a State", in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 21 November 2022, DOI 10.1080/13501763.2022.2141826.

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for the governance of EU foreign and security policy and the Union's role in international security, one should start by taking stock of the EU's responses to the war and then assess their relevance for EU foreign policy.

### Taking stock

EU security and defence policies correspond to member states' key functions of state sovereignty. As such, they are marred by a tension between member states' willingness to act collectively when faced with security challenges and their reluctance to devolve sovereign power to the EU.<sup>4</sup> This notwithstanding, in response to the Russian war against Ukraine, the EU launched new policy instruments and increased the resources devoted to security and defence. The European Council steered the EU's reaction not only through a series of sanctions packages, but also by committing to bolster EU defence capabilities.<sup>5</sup> Member states' recourse to consensus-seeking rather than hard bargaining in such sensitive areas should not be taken for granted. Such a behaviour reflects their willingness to act collectively to address complex and substantial challenges.

Significantly, with the end of the Danish opt-out from the common foreign and security policy after the

war's outbreak, the EU experienced an instance of de-differentiation.<sup>6</sup> Policy differentiation, in turn, occurred in the form of *ad hoc* coalitions of member states sustaining and contributing to EU policies. Indeed, an informal group of member states consisting of France, Germany and Italy, under French President Emmanuel Macron's leadership, steered the EU's response to the war in cooperation with the United States.

From an operational point of view, EU member states chose to activate the European Peace Facility (EPF), an off-budget instrument through which the European Commission has supported EU member states' supply of military aid to Ukraine. The EU's move to explicitly provide military aid to a third country during a war is unmatched in the history of European integration and extraordinary, given the EU's previous narrative of being a civilian power.

Meanwhile, although at different paces, member states are increasing their defence spending. Germany and France, for instance, are planning to reach and even go beyond 2 per cent of their GDP, as per NATO requests.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Philipp Genschel and Markus Jachtenfuchs, "More Integration, Less Federation: The European Integration of Core State Powers", in *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (2016), p. 42-59, DOI 10.1080/13501763.2015.1055782.

<sup>5</sup> Informal Meeting of the Heads of State or Government, *Versailles Declaration*, 11 March 2022, <https://europa.eu/ltxdCTy>.

<sup>6</sup> Danish Parliament, *The Danish Opt-outs from EU Cooperation*, updated 25 November 2022, <https://www.thedanishparliament.dk/en/eu-information-centre/the-danish-opt-outs-from-eu-cooperation>.

<sup>7</sup> Laurenz Gehrke and Hans von der Burchard, "German Government and Opposition Agree on €100B Defense Spending Bill", in *Politico.eu*, 30 May 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/?p=2115108>; Elise Vincent, "War in Ukraine: France Adds €3 Billion to 2023 Defense Budget", in *Le Monde*, 11 October 2022, [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2022/10/11/war-in-ukraine-france-adds-3-billion-to-its-2023-defense-budget\\_5999938\\_19.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2022/10/11/war-in-ukraine-france-adds-3-billion-to-its-2023-defense-budget_5999938_19.html).

Others, like Poland, will probably reach 3 per cent.<sup>8</sup>

### Assessing

In its response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the EU has not only flexed its muscles, but it has also shown unprecedented unity. Such a unity, though, is not a panacea for EU foreign and security policy in the long term. Rather than fostering centre formation, the war fostered intergovernmental policy coordination. The activism and ensuing proliferation of decisions and initiatives at the EU level were possible thanks to a high level of agreement among EU member states. Yet, as unanimity formally remains in place in EU foreign and security policy, such agreement is inherently vulnerable to their contingent preferences.

The emergence of an informal grouping of member states steering EU diplomatic reaction to the war against Ukraine suggests a general absence of centralisation in EU foreign policy as well. Significantly, the coalition of member states was informal rather than treaty-based. Treaty mechanisms for differentiated cooperation among member states, such as the execution of a task by a group of member states and enhanced cooperation, were not activated. Consequently, France, Germany and Italy were not subject to EU central guidance.<sup>9</sup> Nor did any

<sup>8</sup> Maciej Onoszko, "Poland Will Double Military Spending as War in Ukraine Rages", in *Bloomberg*, 30 August 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-30/poland-will-double-military-spending-as-war-in-ukraine-rages>.

<sup>9</sup> Maria Giulia Amadio Viceré, "Informal

centre at the EU level coordinate member states' increases in spending and bilateral provision of military aid to Ukraine either. As such, these initiatives at the national level are likely to cause fragmentation in EU foreign policy in the long run.

The overall shortage of EU military capacity persists as well. Although symbolically ground-breaking, the EPF is another expression of the intergovernmental nature of EU foreign and security policy; it is, in essence, an instrument based on policy coordination among member states. Not only does it consist of member states' yearly contributions, but its activities are directed by a committee of member states' representatives. Additionally, the responsibility to deliver military aid ultimately lies with the member states.

### Looking ahead

Disregarding the degree of unity of EU member states and the EU's articulated institutional response against Russia's war of aggression would not do justice to the EU. The latter was not only resilient, but also proactive. What we witnessed was a truly collective effort coupled with an unprecedented commitment of resources. As they stand, however, the bulk of EU institutional responses to the war in Ukraine can mostly serve short-term purposes. Hence, they cannot ensure the EU's capacity to act as a security

Groupings as Types of Differentiated Cooperation in EU Foreign Policy: The Cases of Kosovo, Libya, and Syria", in *Contemporary Security Policy*, 15 November 2022, DOI 10.1080/13523260.2022.2144372.



provider in an international system marred by hard security concerns.

A long-term solution, in turn, can only be provided by a European constitutional convention addressing the lack of centre formation and the shortage of EU capacities in foreign and security policy through a substantial reform of the Union's institutional architecture. A reform that would equip the EU with a central government able to bind member states' activities in foreign affairs, while ensuring their various views are duly taken into account. And, of course, a reform that would equip the EU with sufficient military capacities to guarantee peace and stability in its neighbourhood.

At a time when great power politics has made a dramatic return to the international arena, the EU is in desperate need of a treaty change. NATO's security umbrella is of course a blessing for an actor whose foreign policy is still in the making. To address the Russian invasion of Ukraine, NATO strengthened its presence in Europe. The US, in turn, diverted personnel and resources from its pivot to Asia. Yet, given Washington's tensions with Beijing and uncertainties regarding the duration of the war, relying on the US and NATO is not strategic for the Europeans in the long term. While welcoming short-term responses, one should not forget to call for long-term solutions.

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