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THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT AND ITS ECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL CONSEQUENCES: A HOLISTIC REVIEW^{*1}

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*1. Appendix 1 (page 44): Publications on Ukraine

Abstract. This article provides an analysis and review of the European Union's involvement in the Russo-Ukrainian war from 2022 to 2025, focusing on its economic and geopolitical aspects and consequences. It examines the economic and strategic fragmentation within the EU, the strain on NATO cohesion and the policy failures of Germany, France, the United Kingdom and the southern European countries. The EU's initial unity in supporting Ukraine gradually eroded due to diverging national interests, fiscal constraints and political instability. Germany's constitutional limits and France's executive dominance weakened leadership, while the UK's strategic drift reduced its influence in European defense coordination. Economically, the war triggered inflation, energy volatility and industrial slowdown across the EU. Sanctions on Russia had mixed results, with Moscow adapting through Asian markets and alternative financial systems. The war-refugee crisis and lack of a unified integration strategy further strained public services and social cohesion. Geopolitically, the EU's overreliance on sanctions, neglect of peripheral regions and failure to counter hybrid threats exposed vulnerabilities. NATO faces internal disparities in defense spending and cyber readiness. The article proposes policy recommendations including a unified EU Strategic Command, a cyber defense pact, conditional peace negotiations and industrial cooperation. The final section emphasizes the need for strategic clarity and transformation. Europe must evolve into a proactive geopolitical actor capable of defending its values and interests. The choices made in the coming months will determine not only the outcome of the war but the future of the European project itself.

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked the end of the Cold War and a period of optimism

for global peace and cooperation started. NATO and the European Union (EU) were the pillars of a new European security architecture aiming to prevent future conflicts and promote democratic stability. After the outbreak of war in Ukraine in February 2022 these expectations were shattered, triggering the most significant military conflict in Europe since World War II. Russia's invasion in Ukraine, framed by the Kremlin as a "special military operation" aimed at its "denazification" and "demilitarization". The majority of the western countries clearly condemned this operation as a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and international law (Lieber & Press, 2023). Russian forces moving from multiple directions targeted key infrastructure and civilian shelters. These attacks led to mass displacement, civilian casualties, and widespread destruction. On the other hand, the European Union (EU) launched a series of sanctions targeting Russian financial institutions, energy exports and oligarchic assets. By mid-2025, EU had adopted 19 sanction packages, including measures against over 2,400 individuals and entities. Additionally, it adopted restrictions on Russia's "shadow fleet" of oil tankers and dual-use technologies. €200 billions of Russian assets were frozen and began redirecting windfall profits to support Ukraine's reconstruction. Sweden and Finland entered NATO as full members, marking a historic shift in Northern European security policy, whereas Ukraine officially launched the accession negotiations intensifying the efforts to join both NATO and the EU, in June 2024. The Ukraine's membership was strongly supported by Baltic States and Poland, whereas Hungary and Slovakia expressed a different strategy, exposing internal divisions within the EU. These measures did not affect the course of events; the war persisted and evolved into a conflict with devastating human, economic, and strategic consequences. The nature of warfare had shifted dramatically; new war features such as drone warfare, cyber-attacks and strategic stalemates defined the conflict. Ukraine launched long-range drone strikes on Russian energy infrastructure, causing significant economic disruption. Russia responded with mass drone attacks on Ukrainian cities, overwhelming air defenses and targeting civilian infrastructure.

Intensifying cyber warfare, Ukrainian hackers targeted Russian military personnel and aviation firms, while Russia deployed spyware disguised as antivirus software in intelligence warfare against domestic dissent and Western-linked entities. These developments underscored the growing role of digital and autonomous systems in modern conflict. The EU's continued involvement—through military aid, economic sanctions, and diplomatic support—revealed deep structural vulnerabilities. While initial responses were marked by unity, the war strained political consensus. Specific national interests, economic pressures and differing threat perceptions led to strategic incoherence inside EU. For instance, Germany and Italy opposed sending peacekeeping troops to Ukraine, while France and the UK supported robust security guarantees. All these different positions became visible when EU leaders failed to issue a joint communiqué during the Paris

Summit in February 2025. U.S.–Russia negotiations in Alaska further underscored concerns about Europe’s marginalization and failure in shaping the post-war order. Economically, the war has had profound and significant consequences. The disruption of Russian gas supplies led to energy price spikes across Europe, contributing to economic volatility, inflation and industrial slowdowns. The refugee crisis, with over 8 million Ukrainians seeking asylum in EU countries, placed additional strain on public services and social cohesion. Although solidarity with Ukraine remains strong, the cumulative effects of the war have tested the limits of European resilience. This study builds upon a comprehensive review of the war’s first two years and extends the analysis to the period from September 2024 to August 2025. It is a critical examination of the economic and geopolitical consequences of EU involvement, attempting to identify key policy failures—including delayed military procurement, fragmented refugee integration strategies, and inconsistent diplomatic messaging—and explores the implications of U.S. political uncertainty for European security planning. To recalibrate Europe’s strategic posture, the study offers several recommendations:

- Establish a unified EU strategic command for military coordination.
- Enhance cyber-defense cooperation with NATO and private sector actors.
- Develop a diplomatic framework for peace negotiations involving Ukraine, Russia, and U.S.
- Increase investment in defense industries to reduce reliance on U.S. military aid
- Strengthen internal cohesion through transparent burden-sharing mechanisms and democratic accountability.

The war in Ukraine is a defining moment for European security and transatlantic relations. It has exposed both the strengths and limitations of existing institutions and underscored the urgent need for reform, resilience and strategic clarity. The decisions made in the coming year will shape not only the outcome of the conflict but also the future of Europe’s role in global affairs.

2. TIMELINE OF THE WAR – KEY EVENTS (2022–2024)

The war has unfolded in distinct phases, each marked by significant military, political, and humanitarian developments. The phases of the war set the stage for the deeper economic and geopolitical analysis that follows.

2022: Invasion and Resistance

- February 2022: Russia launches a full-scale invasion from the north, east, and south. Kyiv becomes a primary target and responds by resisting occupation assisted by the Ukrainian defense and Western intelligence support.
- March 2022: Mariupol is bombed, Russia captures Kherson and parts of Zaporizhzhia.- April 2022: Bucha massacre and sinking of the Moskva warship signal a shift in tactics and morale.
- November 2022: Ukraine retakes Kherson; energy infrastructure becomes Russia's targeting set.

2023: Escalation and Counteroffensives

- May 2023: Ukraine launches drone attacks on Russian territory, including Moscow and Belgorod.
- June 2023: Ukrainian counteroffensive stalls; Wagner Group's rebellion ends with Prigozhin's death.
- January 2024: U.S. military aid halts due to domestic political gridlock.
- February 2024: Ukraine loses Avdiivka; General Zaluzhnyi is dismissed.

2024: Strategic Stalemate

- Spring–Summer 2024: Russia consolidates control in eastern Ukraine; EU debates further aid packages.
- August 2024: NATO intelligence warns of Russian cyber escalation and hybrid warfare expansion.

3. ECONOMIC IMPACT ON THE EU AND MEMBER STATES (2022–2025)

3.1. Overview of Sanctions and Fiscal Commitments

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the European Union (EU) attempted to respond with a series of sanctions targeting Russian financial institutions, energy exports, and strategic industries. These measures were supposed to weaken Russia's capacity to sustain its military operations signaling unified European condemnation of the aggression (Council of the EU, 2025). According to the sanctions plan, the assets of the Russian Central Bank were frozen, transactions with state-owned enterprises were banned, and exports of dual-use technologies essential to Russia's defense and aerospace sector were restricted. Although these sanctions have significantly impacted Russia's economy—causing a contraction in GDP, reduced foreign investment, and technological isolation—they have also had unintended consequences across Europe implying reduced effectiveness and probable poor planning.

The conflict quickly escalated (Lieber & Press, 2023). Russian forces targeted critical infrastructure and prompted a humanitarian crisis reverberating Europe. According to the European Parliamentary Research Service, Russia's GDP fell by 10–12% compared to pre-war projections, whilst personal disposable income dropped by over 20%. However, the Kremlin partially offset these losses through redirected energy exports and using the “shadow fleet” to bypass oil embargoes. In parallel with the sanctions imposed, the EU committed substantial financial and military aid to Ukraine. Between 2022 and mid-2025, the EU through its member states provided more than €150 billion in support to Ukraine, including €50.8 billion in military assistance and €100 billion in financial and humanitarian aid (BNP Paribas, 2025). This aid includes contributions from the European Peace Facility, bilateral aid from member states, and emergency budgetary support through the Ukraine Facility. Carnegie Europe (2025) emphasizes that this assistance is crucial not only for Ukraine's defense but also for laying the groundwork for post-war reconstruction, governance reforms, and economic stabilization. Considering the quick EU response in Ukraine's war one could ask about the reasons of the different EU response methodology during the debt crisis of 2010s since these commitments have placed considerable strain on national budgets; particularly in countries still grappling with post-pandemic recovery and inflationary pressures. According to the Kiel Institute, EU member states have also spent an additional €124.8 billion supporting Ukrainian refugees, further stretching public resources. According to the European Central Bank (2025) the inflation across the euro zone remained above target throughout 2023–2024. The inflation is driven in part by energy price volatility and increased defense spending. According to the IMF (2024), war-related spillovers contributed to global inflation. Supply chains disruption also further complicated Europe's economic recovery. Disruption of Russian gas supplies and rising energy costs compounded the economic burden. The alternative of LNG imports from the U.S. and Qatar stabilized supply; on the other hand, this transition imposed significant fiscal costs. Eurostat (2025) statistics show a marked decline in industrial production in energy-intensive sectors, particularly in Germany and Italy. The refugee crisis has added further pressure on the European economy. Over 8 million Ukrainians have sought asylum in EU countries since 2022. This situation requires additional housing, healthcare, and education services in order to meet their standard living requirements. The Centre for Economic Strategy (2025) estimates that member states spent over €120 billion on refugee support by mid-2025 leading to internal debates over the sustainability of continued aid. Some EU members, such as Hungary and Slovakia, have expressed concerns over the long-term financial consequences and called for greater burden-sharing mechanisms. The European University Institute (2025) warns that a ceasefire on Russian terms could fracture EU unity and undermine its strategic credibility. From a financial aspect, the EU's reliance on loans rather than grants has raised concerns about Ukraine's future debt sustainability. Although loans

offer short-term liquidity, they may pose long-term risks for both Ukraine's debt sustainability and the EU's financial robustness. Brookings Institution (2025) argues that Europe's strategic autonomy depends on its ability to balance solidarity with fiscal prudence, implying potential risks in the case of non effective planning. In conclusion, although the EU's response to Russia's aggression has demonstrated unity, the economic and political costs of sustained engagement are increasingly visible. As the conflict continues, European policymakers should seek for a balanced strategic support and Ukraine internal economic stability and cohesion.

3.2. Energy Market Disruption and Inflation

The disruption of Russian natural gas flows to Europe was one of the most immediate consequences of the war in Ukraine. Russia supplied over 40% of the EU's gas imports, making it the bloc's dominant energy supplier until 2022 (Council of the EU, 2025). The abrupt reduction in energy supply triggered a sharp spike in energy prices, causing a rising to the EU energy index from 133 points in January 2022 to 172 points by October 2022 (European Central Bank, 2025). This change was caused not only by physical supply constraints but also by market volatility and the geopolitical uncertainty. According to the European Commission, the inflation differentials across the euro area widened to historic levels in 2022, largely due to the asymmetric impact of energy shocks on member states with varying energy intensities and industrial structures. These different shocks showed also that there are structural differences among the EU members' economies, implying that there is no complete economic integration especially in the Euro zone. Although energy prices began to stabilize in 2024, they remained elevated relative to pre-war levels contributing to persistent inflation across the EU. The headline inflation rate in the Euro zone peaked at 10% in late 2022 and gradually declined to 2.3% by mid-2025. The core inflation—excluding energy and food—remained above 4%, indicating structural price pressures and long-term pass-through effects from energy costs (ECB, 2025; IMF, 2024). The household purchasing power was eroded and the cost of industrial production in energy intensive sectors (chemicals, metallurgy and automotive manufacturing) was increased (Eurostat, 2025). Recent European Central Bank reports show that: energy-intensive industries experienced a marked decline in output beginning in mid-2022 and imports of intermediate goods in these sectors rose sharply, suggesting a partial substitution of domestic production with cheaper foreign alternatives. Sectors most affected included basic metals, non-metallic minerals, paper, and chemicals, which rely heavily on natural gas and electricity for production processes. The Bruegel Institute warns that without targeted subsidies or accelerated investment in renewable energy infrastructure, Europe risks long-term deindustrialization in these strategic sectors (Bruegel, 2023). Considering the points mentioned above, the energy shock unleashed by the war except the reshaping of Europe's energy policy also exposed deep existing

vulnerabilities in its industrial base. The EU should now contend the economic shocks that continue to ripple through its inflation and manufacturing competitiveness.

3.3. A Review of Fiscal Fragmentation and Sovereign Debt Risks

The economic strain has exposed fiscal asymmetries within the EU. Germany, constraints of constitutional debt limits and judicial rulings restrict the use of special funds, facing challenges in its defense and energy transition commitments (Becker, 2025). France, meanwhile, approved budget changes under Article 49.3 of its constitution, bypassing parliamentary debate, raising concerns about democratic accountability (Gunes, 2024). Southern European countries such as Italy, Spain, and Greece have seen their debt-to-GDP ratios to rise sharply. Main causes of this sharp rise were the increased borrowing for energy subsidies and refugee integration programs. The European Central Bank's tightening of monetary policy against inflation has further increased borrowing costs, raising the risk of sovereign debt instability especially for the more vulnerable European economies (ECB, 2025). The economic repercussions of recent geopolitical shocks—especially the war in Ukraine and the global energy crisis—have shown the structural fiscal asymmetries and economic vulnerabilities within the European Union. Although the EU as a group of states has attempted to present a unified front in its response to these challenges, the internal divergences in fiscal capacity, constitutional constraints, and political mechanisms have exposed fault lines threatening the EU's long-term cohesion and economic stability. Germany, traditionally viewed as the EU's economic power, faces a paradox. It presents a robust industrial base and strong credit rating, but the country's fiscal flexibility has been severely constrained by its constitutional debt brake according to the Articles 109 and 115 of the Basic Law. The legal limits for the structural deficits as a threshold have become increasingly difficult to respect amid rising defense and energy transition costs.

The constitutional provisions were violated when the situation escalated in late 2023. The Germany's Federal Constitutional Court ruled about the government's reallocation of €60 billion in unused pandemic funds to the Climate and Transformation Fund (Becker, 2025). This budgetary maneuver cast doubt on the legality of other special funds used to bypass regular fiscal rules. As reported in German Press (*Der Spiegel* and *Handelsblatt*), the German government was forced to freeze new spending commitments and revise its 2024 budget, resulting to key investments delays in renewable energy infrastructure and military modernization. The implications of the above action are profound. Germany's pledge to meet NATO's defense spending target and its commitment to phase out coal by 2030 now face significant delays. Finance Minister Christian Lindner has warned that a constitutional reform or a suspension of the debt brake is necessary, otherwise Germany risks

falling short of its strategic obligations. This fiscal rigidity, while rooted in a culture of prudence, has become a liability in times of systemic crisis. France's response to the economic strain has been shaped by its semi-presidential system. Under Article 49.3 of the French Constitution, the government can pass legislation without a parliamentary vote unless a motion of no confidence is adopted. Prime Minister Borne invoked this article to approve the 2025 budget, bypassing heated debates over pension reform and energy subsidies (Gunes, 2024).

This mechanism has sparked widespread criticism over democratic accountability. Opposition parties and civil society groups argue that repeated use of Article 49.3 undermines parliamentary sovereignty and public trust. According to *Le Monde* and *France24*, protests erupted across major cities in late 2024, with demonstrators calling for greater transparency and participatory governance. With public debt hovering around 112% of GDP, the government has prioritized deficit reduction while maintaining subsidies for households affected by rising energy prices. However, the lack of parliamentary scrutiny has raised concerns about the long-term sustainability and legitimacy of these measures. As Gunes (2024) notes, France's reliance on executive fiat during fiscal crises may erode democratic norms exacerbating political tensions and polarization.

Southern European countries—particularly Italy, Spain, and Greece—have borne the burden of the economic fallout from recent global shocks, with high debt-to-GDP ratios due to increased borrowing for energy subsidies, refugee integration programs, and post-pandemic recovery efforts. According to Eurostat data from early 2025, Italy's debt stands at 137.3%, Spain's at 107.7%, and Greece's at 161.9% (Eurostat, 2025). These figures reflect structural vulnerabilities and the fiscal burden of emergency measures implemented since 2022 as well. The ECB's Financial Stability Review from November 2024 warned of elevated sovereign risk. The main points of this warning were the widening bond spreads and the declining investor confidence in peripheral economies (European Central Bank, 2025). Bloomberg analysts have echoed these concerns, suggesting that Italy's fiscal path may require activation of the ECB's Transmission Protection Instrument. Italy, under Prime Minister Meloni, has struggled to reconcile spending promises with EU fiscal rules. Despite repeated warnings from the European Central Bank, The government decided to extend energy subsidies into 2025, has raised concerns about fiscal slippage. Italy's bond yields have risen sharply, prompting fears of renewed market volatility reminiscent of the 2011 sovereign debt crisis. Italy's fiscal trajectory is further complicated by demographic decline and sluggish growth. According to the IMF's Fiscal Monitor, Italy is projected to run a budget deficit of over 5% of GDP through 2026, with limited prospects for consolidation without significant policy shifts. Greece, while no longer under formal bailout supervision, remains heavily reliant on EU structural funds and concessional financing. The country has attempted to attract foreign investment and improving its credit rating. According to the IMF's Article IV Consultation, Greece's public debt-to-GDP ratio

has declined significantly since 2021. However, the costs of integrating tens of thousands of refugees and transitioning to green energy have strained public finances. The European Commission reports that Greece continues to rely heavily on the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF) and other EU instruments to support refugee integration, housing, and social services (European Commission, 2025). Despite these efforts, the HELIOS+ housing program covers less than 6% of eligible beneficiaries, leaving many at risk of homelessness and social exclusion (Refugee Support Aegean, 2025). The Greek government submitted its Medium-Term Fiscal-Structural Plan (MTFSP) in October 2024, outlining reforms and investment priorities through 2028. The plan aims to maintain a downward debt trajectory while enhancing competitiveness and resilience. According to the Ministry of Finance's Annual Progress Report, GDP growth is projected to remain solid at 2.3% in 2025, driven by tourism, digital infrastructure, and foreign direct investment (Ministry of Finance, 2025). Yet, challenges persist since youth unemployment remains high, and regional disparities continue to hinder inclusive growth. The IMF and European Commission both stress the need for continued structural reforms, particularly in labor markets, public administration, and climate resilience (IMF, 2025; European Commission, 2025). Spain presents a more nuanced picture. The country has benefited from labor market reforms and a diversified economy, with strong performance in tourism, renewable energy, and digital services. However, regional disparities and youth unemployment remain persistent challenges. The government's fiscal strategy has focused on targeted subsidies and infrastructure investment, funded in part by EU Recovery and Resilience Facility grants. As *El País* notes, the expiration of these grants in 2026 may expose underlying fiscal weaknesses. Spain's debt trajectory has been relatively stable compared to its southern neighbors, but concerns remain about long-term sustainability. According to S&P Global, Spanish banks are among the euro zone institutions most vulnerable to declining net interest income as ECB rate cuts loom, potentially reducing lending capacity and slowing growth (S&P Global Market Intelligence, 2025). The government has pledged to maintain fiscal discipline, but political fragmentation and regional tensions—particularly in Catalonia—could complicate budgetary negotiations.

3.4. E.U. Labor Market and Migration

Russia's invasion into Ukraine encouraged the third largest refugee movements in Europe after World War II. Millions of Ukrainians have fled their homes, more than five million of whom are seeking refuge in European Union (EU) member states (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2025). This was an unprecedented wave that put usure on the national system of European countries, especially in housing, healthcare, and education. While the activation of the EU's Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) in March 2022 provided immediate access to residence

permits, careers, and social services, long-term integration of refugees, however, remains a convoluted challenge (EPRS, 2025). Countries such as Poland and Czech Republic are experiencing considerable economic comforts as a result of labor supply increase. In Czech Republic, the refugees accessed labor market immediately upon their arrival, which proved measurable labor force expansion (Postepska & Voloshyna, 2025). However, this glory is shared affecting various aspects of the meaning of the continent as benefiting ones. Such countries include Southern Europe and in particular Spain, Italy, and Greece with other associated economic structural weaknesses, language barriers, and an impasse in bureaucracies, thus failing to absorb refugees into the formal labor force (UNHCR, 2024). Most alarming is the rising youth unemployment across the region. By May 2025, youth unemployment in Spain had risen to a stratospheric level of 25.4%, while Italy recorded a scare jump to 21.6% (Eurostat, 2025c). Apparently, the sluggish growth and job creation activities hinder integration of both native populations and refugees. The mismatch between labor market requirements and skills of many Ukrainian refugees-women and children-based vulnerabilities already exists (German Economic Team, 2024). Moreover, the unequal distribution of refugees across geographical space triggered social tensions. Conflict over public services and housing in urban centers with a higher concentration of displaced Ukrainians has also sometimes aggravated political polarization and anti-immigrant sentiment (UNHCR, 2024). Municipalities generally struggle with coordination of integration endeavors, lacking funding and institutional capacities to implement holistic (UNHCR, 2024). But even with these circumstances many Ukrainian refugees have been able to have a positive conversion to employment portraying a movement pattern typical of pre-war behavior, showing a strong work ethic (EPRS, 2025). Within countries with strong frameworks in their labor markets, like Germany and the Netherlands, refugee access to retraining programs and job opportunities is considerably easier than in those countries mentioned above. However, there is no unified strategy at EU level, except for an extension of temporary protection until March 2026, which leaves a question about the long-term situation regarding those people (EPRS, 2025). It doesn't make the plans of some of the refugees to return more specific either. By April 2024, already about 1.2 million Ukrainians returned, either temporarily or permanently, to Ukraine, in spite of the ongoing conflict (German Economic Team, 2024). This fluidity poses challenges for both host countries and Ukrainian policymakers preparing for the potential reintegration and reconstruction efforts. Given the current conditions, this humanitarian crisis could define the demographic and economic topology of the EU in the years to come. Some have used the large influx of people to fill labor gaps within their economies, while still others struggle with systemic barriers to getting these individuals integrated. Their challenges require coordinated policy responses, sustainable investments on the front of local infrastructure improvement, and most definitely strategy implementation that acknowledges the differentials in the needs of refugee populations. Failure to implement this approach would seriously risk

increasing the levels and consequently aggravating the social divide as well as cost-effective European solidarity.

3.5. Strategic Autonomy, Industrial Vulnerabilities and Risks in the European Union

The Ukraine war profoundly transformed the geopolitical and economic landscape of the EU. One of the more immediate consequences has been the accelerated discontinuation of the use of Russian energy sources. While this shift lessens dependence on them due to political instability, it nonetheless exposes new vulnerabilities within Europe's industrial and technological base (European Commission, 2025b). China's large suppliers of critical raw materials, semiconductors, and battery components, along with those from Taiwan and South Korea, have turned the EU's gaze toward its strategic autonomy amidst soaring tensions in the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea (Cerutti & Nardo, 2023). The European semiconductor supply chains are extremely frail. Over 75% of the advanced node semiconductor production gets concentrated in Taiwan and South Korea, whereas nearly 80% of input suppliers based in the EU are heavily reliant on business partners from outside the EU (Dimas & Tsakanikas, 2025). Such geographic concentration puts Europe at risk of being shaken by adversarial politics, disruptions in trade, and bottlenecks to resources. The European Chips Act was introduced in 2022 and further enriched in 2024 to help mitigate this dependency by incentivizing domestic fabrication capacity and strategic stockpiling. Nevertheless, the slow pace of implementation hindered shared progress, especially with the fragmentation of regulations concerning the member states (European Commission, 2024). The EU's more encompassing industrial policy has failed to keep pace with these challenges. The ReArm Europe initiative, launched in March 2025, aims at mobilizing about €800 billion worth of defense spending through national fiscal flexibility and a newly set up €150 billion SAFE loan instrument for joint procurements (European Parliamentary Research Service, 2025). Despite its ambition, the delayed execution and lack of coordination have greatly limited its effectiveness. These member states have channeled substantial investment away from green energy, digital infrastructure, and industrial innovation toward the defense and security sectors (Global Policy Watch, 2025). These sources tell us that industrial output in some key EU economies is in a declining path. Between 2023 and 2025, the German manufacturing sector shrank by approximately 6.2%, whereas France suffered an estimated 4.8% decline (Eurostat, 2025d). The numbers portray the triple-blow effects of supply chain disruption, energy cost inflation, and weak external demand, particularly in the heavily globally competitive automotive and machinery sectors, which all depend on external inputs (INSEE, 2025). Germany's industrial decline seems to have been structural with the war's

economic aftermath increasing its severity. While France has shown more resilience, it has faced setbacks due to reliance on imported components and energy-intensive production. These shifts in investment priorities have provoked a great deal of discussion across the EU. Though defense spending is argued to be central to geopolitical stability, critics warn it may reduce finance for climate transition and digital competitiveness. The European Green Deal and Digital Compass initiatives have lost some traction, with some member states delaying infrastructure and clean energy projects to accommodate defense budgets (Baker McKenzie, 2025). This could hamper long-term sustainability goals and dilute Europe's clout in the new tech space. The absence of a union industrial strategy has resulted in fragmentation. While some countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden have focused their incentives on semiconductor and battery production, others remain dependent on the coordination at the EU level. The Defense Omnibus Simplification Package which is expected in late 2025, is planned to streamline permitting and procurement across the board, but its limited coverage is restricted to the defense industry (European Commission, 2025b). While the Ukraine war has triggered crucial changes in European energy and defense policies, it has also laid bare deep structural weaknesses in the EU's industrial ecosystem. To contend with these weaknesses will require a balanced approach: one that strengthens strategic autonomy while not compromising sustainability and innovation. A more coordinated industrial policy with parallel investment in critical technologies and infrastructure will be necessary to buttress Europe now and into an uncertain future worldwide.

4. GEOPOLITICAL ANALYSIS – STRATEGIC FRAGMENTATION AND NATO COHESION (2022–2025)

4.1. Strategic Fragmentation within the European Union

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the European Union's response to it have exposed the cracks in its strategic coherence, displaying both institutional shortcomings and diverging national interests. The first response to the aggression in 2022 was one of unprecedented unity—swift sanctions, coordinated humanitarian and military aid, and diplomatic alignment. However, already by the third year of the war, this unity began to fade. The war's protracted nature has tested the EU's capacity to act as an integrated geopolitical actor, revealing the boundaries of its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as well as centrifugal tendencies engendered by its Member States. One of the more visible signs of fragmentation has been divergence among Member States regarding threat perception and strategic prioritization; Eastern European nations, particularly Poland, Lithuania,

and Estonia, have consistently called for aggressive deterrence and maximum support for Ukraine. The geographical proximity of these countries to Russia, coupled with their historical experiences of being dominated by the Soviet Union, has engendered a security posture that views this war as an existential threat to European sovereignty and stability. Having pushed with great vigor for increased defense spending, timely deliveries of military aid, and enhanced NATO integration, this view has strongly marked their approach toward the conflict. By contrast, Southern European countries such as Italy, Greece, and Spain uphold diplomatic resolution and economic stabilization. Being farther away from the immediate threat of Russian aggression, they are much more concerned with the war's economic impact: inflation, energy insecurity, and migration pressure. Their strategic conception has leaned toward negotiation and conflict de-escalation, often antagonizing the Eastern hardliners (GLOBSEC, 2025). Public and parliamentary debates, voting patterns in the European Council, and public opinion have all reflected this divergence. To give an example, Poland and the Baltic states supplied Ukraine with tanks and other advanced weaponry. Together with making it difficult to sustain an EU-wide strategy, absence of scarce shared perception of any threat is proving detrimental to the functionalities of the EU, with burgeoning costs of war and rising domestic pressures. Germany and France, traditionally considered the strategic powers of the EU, have struggled to provide consistent leadership during the crisis. Germany's response has been hampered by constitutional constraints on military engagement. Despite Chancellor Olaf Scholz's announcement of a "Zeitenwende" (historic turning point) in German defense policy, implementation has been slow and uneven. Berlin's hesitancy to deliver Leopard tanks and its cautious approach to energy sanctions has drawn criticism from both allies and domestic opposition (Becker, 2025b). France, meanwhile, has faced its own set of challenges. Domestic political instability, including widespread protests and a fragmented parliament, has undermined President Emmanuel Macron's diplomatic initiatives. While France has attempted to position itself as a mediator between Ukraine and Russia, its efforts have often been perceived as ambiguous or self-serving. Macron's repeated calls for "strategic autonomy" have clashed with Eastern European demands for deeper NATO integration, further complicating the EU's internal dynamics (Gunes, 2024b). The absence of a clear Franco-German axis has left a leadership vacuum at the heart of the EU. Smaller Member States have filled the void with ad hoc coalitions and bilateral initiatives, but these efforts lack the institutional weight and legitimacy to drive EU-wide policy. The result has been a patchwork of national strategies that undermine the EU's collective credibility. The EU's institutional architecture has also contributed to strategic fragmentation. The CFSP, while designed to foster unity in foreign policy, remains intergovernmental in nature, requiring unanimity among Member States. This procedural rigidity has led to delays in decision-making and diluted policy outcomes. For example, the adoption of sanctions packages has often been slowed by internal negotiations over exemptions and carve-outs, particularly in the energy and

finance sectors (Genini, 2025a; Pinggen, A., & Wahl, T. 2025). Moreover, the lack of a unified foreign policy apparatus has encouraged Member States to pursue bilateral engagements outside the EU framework. Germany's energy deals with Qatar, Hungary's diplomatic overtures to Russia, and France's independent arms negotiations express this trend. These actions not only bypass EU institutions but also send conflicting signals to external partners, weakening the Union's strategic coherence. The European External Action Service (EEAS), tasked with coordinating the EU's foreign policy, has struggled to assert its authority amid competing national interests. Its limited mandate and resources have made it more of a facilitator than a driver of policy, unable to enforce compliance or resolve disputes among Member States. As a result, the EU's foreign policy has become reactive rather than strategic, shaped more by crisis management than long-term planning.

The strategic incoherence within the EU has not gone unnoticed by external partners. The United States, while appreciative of the EU's initial support for Ukraine, has expressed frustration over delayed decisions, inconsistent messaging, and lack of operational coordination. American officials have privately criticized the EU's inability to match its rhetoric with action, particularly in areas such as defense procurement and sanctions enforcement (Moens & Barigazzi, 2024b). Ukraine, too, has voiced concerns about the EU's fragmented approach. While grateful for financial and military aid, Ukrainian leaders have called for more predictable and unified support. The delays in delivering promised equipment, coupled with mixed signals from European capitals, have complicated Ukraine's strategic planning and undermined trust in the EU as a reliable partner. This erosion of credibility has broader implications for the EU's global standing. In a world increasingly defined by great power competition, the EU risks being perceived as a divided and indecisive actor. Its ability to influence outcomes in regions such as the Western Balkans, the Sahel, and the Indo-Pacific Ocean depends on its capacity to present a united front. The war in Ukraine has exposed the fragility of that unity, raising questions about the EU's future role in global governance. Despite these challenges, there have been efforts to recalibrate the EU's strategic posture. The European Parliament's resolution of March 2025 reaffirmed unwavering support for Ukraine and called for deeper integration of defense and foreign policy mechanisms. The European Council's extraordinary session in March 2025 also emphasized the need for institutional reform, including proposals to move toward qualified majority voting in foreign policy decisions. Additionally, the EU has launched new initiatives to bolster its defense capabilities, such as the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA) and the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence. These measures aim to streamline procurement, enhance interoperability, and reduce dependence on external actors (European Commission, 2025c). However, these initiatives face significant hurdles. Political will remains uneven, and national interests continue to dominate strategic calculations. Without a fundamental shift in governance structures and a shared

vision of European security, these reforms may fall short of addressing the root causes of fragmentation.

4.2. NATO Cohesion under Pressure. Strategic Cohesion in a Fragmented Security Landscape

The Russian invasion of Ukraine put NATO under severe tests, and operational capacities and collective defense seriously undermined. Though there was a remarkable sense of unity in the initial phases of support to Ukraine, the fissures began to open. Such considerations have included burden-sharing, differences in strategic priorities, and, now, assessing the limits of NATO's cohesion in a hybrid-warfare era of geopolitical realignment. One of NATO's most overt responses to the war is its enlargement. The accession of Sweden and Finland was historically a change in the posture of the Alliance, providing reinforcement to its northern flank, and re-emphasizing commitment to deterrence. However, enlargement was unable to put to rest internal divisions. Rather, it has opened debates regarding escalation risks, concerning strategic ambiguity and unequal burdens of military responsibility placed on its members. While the 2025 NATO Summit in The Hague reaffirmed Article 5 and pronounced a new defense investment norm of five percent of the GDP by 2035, concern remains whether all members will be able to live up to such lofty aspirations.. Even though the UK is out of the European Union, it remains a crucial power in NATO. Its strategic tilt toward the Indo-Pacific is in its successive Integrated Reviews and reaffirmed in the 2025 Strategic Defense Review but has occasionally clashed with continental Europe, which has been focused on the eastern flank and Russia . UK bilateral defense agreements, with particular reference to Japan and Australia, serve as a strong indication of the broader reorientation of its foreign policy. This strengthens NATO's global reach but could also dilute the Alliance's focus on immediate threats in Europe. Contradictory behavior from Turkey is another actor complicating alliance diplomacy. Turkey has begun to exercise strategic autonomy, balancing its NATO commitments with regional interventions in Syria, Libya, and the Caucasus. As a result, its growing ties with Russia and aggressive stance in the Eastern Mediterranean have cast doubt on its reliability as an ally. (RAND, 2025). The refusal of Turkey to align completely with the NATO sanctions regime and its tendency toward alliance politics in a transactional angle-de-laying Swedish membership underscores a unitary coalition challenge in a diverse coalition. Cyber security and hybrid warfare have emerged as innovative areas of contestation. NATO does not have a unified cyber doctrine and real-time threat-sharing mechanisms to safeguard its states against Russian disinformation campaigns, infrastructural sabotage, or electoral interference. The NATO Summit in 2025 has acknowledged these vulnerabilities and stressed the need for coordinated action to contend against hybrid threats.

There still remains, however, the absence of a joint EU-NATO cyber command structure to obstruct operational coherence. (Valeriano et al., 2024b). The influence operations are being intensified by the Russians and the Chinese, targeting NATO's credibility and exploiting its internal divisions. AI disinformation and routine cyber-espionage have been added to sabotage of critical infrastructure. The Baltic States, Poland, and Germany remain particularly vulnerable, with incidents of rail disruptions and energy grid interference recently attributed to Russian hybrid actors.. NATO's actions have involved counter-hybrid support teams and curricula for resilience, but implementation has been uneven across member states. Defense spending disparity and military readiness gap have additionally strained alliance cohesion. Poland reached 4.48% of GDP on defense spending for 2025, thus becoming NATO's biggest spender in relation to economic output. Warsaw has invested significantly in various equipment, including tanks, air defense systems, and drones, mainly from the United States and South Korea.. Nevertheless, Germany has only very recently crossed the 2% threshold, and even that only after years of systematic underinvestment. The *Zeitenwende* in Berlin implies that more money is being spent, but doubts remain as to whether these expenditures will continue for the long term (NATO Review, 2025; Hutagalung, 2025b). It is this imbalance that creates perceptions of unequal commitment and strategic free-riding. Small states like the Baltic three and Finland have somehow exceeded targets, whereas larger economies like Italy and Spain have fallen behind. The new 5% GDP target—split as 3.5% for core defense and 1.5% for resilience—aims to level this playing field; yet political will fluctuates across capitals. . Meanwhile, NATO's internal political dynamics have become increasingly complicated. Several member states with rise of Euro-skeptic and nationalist parties have posed challenges to consensus-building, especially regarding issues like Ukraine's membership and defense industrial cooperation. Each new American government, however, seems to make a swing that defies full support but also full strategic retrenchment, causing European allies to think again about whether they can afford to rely on American guarantees. But NATO is an institution that stands the test of time. Its capability to evolve into new threats-whether through technological innovation, strategic enlargement, or enhanced resilience-will determine its relevance in the coming decade. So far, the Alliance needs to balance global ambitions with regional imperatives, build a robust cyber and hybrid warfare capability, and ensure equitable burden-sharing across its membership. The war in Ukraine put NATO's resilience to the test and helped define the contours of a new security order. In this new order, deterrence would no longer rely solely on tanks and troops but would include data, infrastructure, and societal cohesion. This is the future of NATO: how it will be able to manage this complexity with its drama, agility, and strategic clarity.

4.3. The EU's Strategic Overextension and Its Geopolitical Consequences

From the Intricate Regional Context to Ukraine: This is the unintended consequence of Russia's importing full-scale invasion into Ukraine in 2022 on the European Union. On the other hand, just as support for Ukraine has turned out to be vital for the safeguarding of European security as well as upholding international standards, EU's lopsided attention to Ukraine has created certain strategic vacuums in other locations-East or Western Balkans, Northern Africa, and Eastern Mediterranean. Rival powers including China, Russia, and Turkey exploit these emerging areas more and more by capitalizing on such sources as investments, military cooperation, and soft power diplomacy (European University Institute, 2025b). These competing initiatives include the Open Balkan initiative championed by Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia, which indicates a growing desire for pragmatic cooperation outside the EU framework that will ultimately result in fragmentation and diverging political trajectories (Joseph, 2022). The EU now scaled down its diplomatic and developmental engagement in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean, allowing other actors to fill this vacuum. China built extensive port infrastructures as well as energy projects across Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco with investments in its belt and road initiative. Russia still has military positions in areas like Libya and Syria, and Turkey strengthened its relations with Tunisia and Algeria using cultural and religious affinities to establish influence (Gruarin, 2024). Besides failing to establish a coherent strategy in these regions, the EU Neighborhood Policy has failed to recognize or counter selective engagement and neo-colonialism perceptions. Georgia and Moldova, at present official EU candidate countries, find themselves facing increasing pressure from Russia, with Moldova affected most notably by disinformation campaigns and forced interference in its elections, while the self-proclaimed separatist region of Transnistria remains a hotbed of instability (RAND Corporation, 2025). For example, recent reports illustrate that, despite public demand favoring EU integration, the erosion of democratic institutions and civil liberties has led many to question Georgia's European credentials (European Parliament, 2025b). Nonetheless, it must be noted that EU support for these countries has been symbolic rather than tangible, and they have therefore received limited material assistance and insufficient political leverage; for example, no definite measures were undertaken, as in the case of sanctions against authoritarian leaders or serious support for civil society that would often lead to perceptions of abandonment or given the deteriorating scenario, perceived diminished effectiveness of EU influence. Symbolic engagement contrasts with the more booming strategies of rival powers, which offer actual benefits and immediate political support (Kennedy and Dunbar, 2025). At the same time, the overstretching of the EU's strategies has been causing a pinch in the institutional capacity. Absorbing the onslaught of military aid to Ukraine, processing vast numbers of war refugees, enabling energy transition, and enforcing sanctions has placed massive demands upon EU resources and coordination mechanisms.

E.U. adopted 18 sanction packages against Russia, targeting energy exports, financial institutions, and individual oligarchs (Skadden, 2025; DLA Piper, 2025). Simultaneously, achieving reduced dependence on Russian gas and advancing the green transition requires multi-billion-euro investments, while migration flows from Africa and the Middle East continue to present systemic challenges to border management and asylum systems. Altogether, these forces have bred in the EU a state of institutional fatigue that has rendered it less able to respond to emerging crises. However, the lack of a unified defense strategy, different policies at national level, and slow decision-making processes are creating inefficiencies in the EU as a geopolitical actor. Otherwise, geopolitically, the EU ends up exhausted, with a concomitant decline in influence globally (European Parliament, 2025b). Besides, the internal cohesion of the EU is becoming increasingly conditioned by different interests among member states. On the eastern flank, security and deterrence against Russia are higher priorities among the countries; Southern members are primarily concerned with migration and Mediterranean stability. Northern states, in turn, speak about climate goals alongside fiscal discipline. All of these competing agendas generally complicate the ways in which a coherent foreign policy can be produced and dilute the EU's strategic messaging. These inherent differences have also been amplified by media focus. As the Politico (2025) wires, EU diplomats have been complaining that the bloc's "Ukraine-first" approach seems to undermine partners in the Balkans and Africa who feel sidelined to the rules of the game dictated by a single geopolitical theater. The Financial Times (2025) reports that Chinese and Turkish investments in North Africa shot up just when the EU withdrew from long-term commitments in development. Meanwhile, according to Deutsche Welle (2025), civil-society groups in Georgia and Moldova are increasingly dependent on U.S. and UN support because EU funding has become sporadic and conditional.

The event of changing surroundings should call for an immediate strategic rebalance. There should again be a reaffirmation of the EU's commitment to its neighborhood policy through a renewed engagement with the Western Balkans, North Africa, and the Eastern Mediterranean-diplomacy, development assistance, and security cooperation. Apart from that, Georgia and Moldova should be offered more substantial support, including capacity-building and democratic safeguards as well as economic integration. Lastly, the EU needs to better streamline its institutional processes to make them agile and responsive. This will involve much-needed reform of EU decision-making mechanisms, investments in joint defense capabilities, and greater solidarity among member states. Thus, the EU has to deal with internal fragmentation and external neglect in order to maintain its place as a global strategic actor. Certainly, however, the support of the EU for Ukraine cannot be at the cost of the stability of the region at large. There should always be a concern for the neglect of vital neighboring areas as this creates power vacuums that competing actors would rush in to fill.

The credibility, influence, and long-term security of the EU as a whole will require a proper balance multi-theatrically.

5. CASE STUDIES – GERMANY, FRANCE, AND THE UNITED KINGDOM: STRATEGIC BEHAVIOR AND POLICY FAILURES

5.1. Germany: Constitutional Constraints

A German reluctance to support weapons development has marred its role in events within Russia and Ukraine, which is usually perceived to be some due internal divisions. Since Germany is the largest economy in Europe, as well as a principal member of NATO, it should have had a characteristic strategic posture developed. Even the first reticent requests for heavy weaponry were soon followed by a muted stream of super-narrowly focused assistance. That's pretty much where the world met some of the historical sensitivities deep in the psyche of the country and political caution. Some of these ambivalent conditions come from the post-World War II pacifist tradition of Germany and the constitutional constraints that have determined public and policy-making perspectives for decades when it comes to military interventions. In 2023, Germany pledged to meet NATO's 2% defense spending target, a shift viewed by many as symbolic of further movement toward greater military responsibility. However, by mid-2025, it still remained below that threshold because of constitutional limits to deficit financing and a landmark ruling by the Federal Constitutional Court that restricted the reallocation of special COVID-era funds (Becker, 2025). Such a ruling effectively blocked attempts by the government to use leftover pandemic relief funds to bolster defense expenditures, forcing Berlin back to a regular budgetary process that is subject to political negotiation and fiscal conservatism. A bit of an understatement, lagging course in uptakes of defense capacities has resulted in shoddy performances from NATO members. It is expected that Germany's economic strengths have a lot to do with making European security sustainable. This pattern of fiscal rigidity hinders Berlin in responding flexibly to evolving security needs. In contrast to other NATO members that have stepped up military support for Ukraine, Germany's piecemeal approach has often fallen short of the real-time developments on the battlefield. After much international goodwill and domestic debate, Leopard 2 deliveries finally materialized. Critics say this cautious course has undermined deterrence and emboldened Russian aggression, while supporters insist that such a methodical procedure guarantees legal and democratic accountability. Also, even before the war began, Germany was dependent on Russian energy, especially through the Nord Stream pipelines, which revealed its vulnerability. For decades,

Berlin relied on the principle of *Wandel durch Handel*, thinking that economic interdependence would lead Russia to reduce its bellicosity. That theory spectacularly backfired when Russia weaponized its energy exports, causing supply shocks and political embarrassment. Yet, while significant achievements have been realized in diversifying sources of energy, the process itself has proved costly, resulting in industrial slowdown and inflationary pressures (European Central Bank, 2025). Rising input costs and shrinking competitiveness among German manufacturers in energy-intensive sectors such as chemicals and automotive have now sparked fears of deindustrialization.

Energy crisis has typically had far-reaching ramifications. The scramble for alternative supplies, from LNG in the US and Qatar, has caused shifts in German foreign policy perspectives and discord with some environmentalists at home. There has been contention surrounding accelerated LNG terminal construction and the renewed temporary use of coal-fired power plants with climate commitments and long-term sustainability. The balancing act for Germany has been increasingly tricky: energy security, economic stability, and environmental responsibility. Strategically, Germany failed to take the lead within the EU. Its prudent diplomacy and hesitant decision-making have irked allies and have somehow tarnished the perception of European unity (Moens & Barigazzi, 2024). For various reasons, France and Poland have often taken the more assertive positions concerning Ukraine, resulting in Germany being reactive. A clear absence of leadership from Berlin seems to be making efforts for a cohesive European response to the war more difficult concerning military and sanctions policy. Nevertheless, whereas Germany has contributed largely to humanitarian aid and accepted a high number of Ukrainian refugees, its hesitance to take any bold geopolitical stands has diminished its strength in Brussels. Furthermore, the dynamics within Germany have been increasingly complicating its foreign policymaking. The coalition in power, composed of Social Democrats, Greens, and Free Democrats, continues to find it hard to keep a united front on Ukraine. Deep internal divisions concerning arms deliveries, defense spending, and energy policy have led to public spats and even reversals in policy. The "Zeitenwende" speech of Chancellor Olaf Scholz in early 2022, which promised a watershed moment for German security policy, still lacks a strategic framework for coherent action. A widening gap between words and deeds has bred skepticism both domestically and abroad. All in all, the response of Germany to the Russo-Ukrainian war looks like one trying to come to terms with an identity from the past and demands from the present. It has been seen making important advances in respect of rethinking its defense posture and energy strategy, yet the speed at which these changes take place and their coherence remain in doubt. Just as the war keeps remolding the security landscape of Europe Berlin's ability to adapt and lead will be vital not only for Ukraine's prospects but for the entire EU and NATO's credibility as well.

5.2. France: Political Instability and Diplomatic Overreach

From the late 1940s, France led the post-conference renovation, stressing from its intellect, authority, and insight its view of European sovereignty and defense autonomy. Macron's early calls for a "European Political Community" and outsized overture to Russia were France's attempts to be in the middle, and reflect its desire long held to present itself as Europe's geopolitical counterweight to both American and Russian spheres of influence. The French President's vision had an undertone of insistence that Europe should actually never just be acting in response to world developments but should actually set the security architecture for itself. But all those efforts were undermined by a high degree of domestic instability, which directly eroded anything left of France's credibility in international terms. The French government collapse of mid-2024 alongside Michel Barnier's installation as interim Prime Minister did lead to executive-dominated environments, wherein critical decisions were made under Article 49.3 of the French Constitution—legislating without parliamentary approval (Gunes 2024). Although this constitutional option was actually legal, it constituted highly controversial—enabling the government to enact legislation by avoiding a vote in the National Assembly. This set in motion demonstrations that further aggravated political polarization. Critics maintained that the use of Article 49.3 undermined democratic legitimacy, sidestepping public debate when national unity became paramount. The political chaos distracted from France's foreign policy goals and raised questions about its ability to lead a coherent European response to the war. Despite domestic challenges, France's support to Ukraine has been robust and military. It has sent supply systems of artillery, air defense systems, and comprehensive training missions for Ukrainian forces. These contributions have been vital for improving Ukraine's defensive capabilities and working as a testament to France's commitment to European security. However, the French attempt at diplomatic outreach to non-aligned countries—specifically Africa and the Middle East—have again raised questions about strategic coherence. The intent was to build broader coalitions and mitigate dependence on the NATO comity. Still, sometimes this has opposed the will of the West consensus, resulting in a certain amount of confusion concerning France's long-term priority. Adding to the fog of confusion surrounding its strategic messaging is France's equivocal position on NATO enlargement. While officially expressing support for Ukraine's ambition, France signaled some reluctance towards rapid enlargement. It did so while speaking about the escalation and cohesion of the alliance. Eastern European Allies view NATO membership as an indispensable guarantee against Russian aggression, and such ambivalence has exasperated them. France has often found itself torn between showing solidarity as a leader and seeking diplomatic flexibility while chirping messages that further diluted its influence in transatlantic discussions. On the energy front, French progress has now lagged behind expectations. With its nuclear basis, it has had protection from the most severe gas shocks that afflicted much of

Europe after the outbreak of the war. This independence, however, has not only offered relative stability but has also spared France severe inflationary pressures faced by more gas-dependent economies. Yet, inconsistent investment in renewables and grid modernization has affected her ability to spearhead the EU green recovery (Eurostat, 2025). With nuclear energy seen as an important building block in France's energy strategy, critics argue that its limited diversification and slow roll-out of solar and wind infrastructure do not support its climate commitments. Environmental groups and local communities have also protested against many areas in France's energy policies, particularly concerning the expansion of nuclear facilities and the siting of renewable projects. These tensions are stalling implementation and illuminating the gap between national ambitions and local realities. Uneven performance by France is worrying its ability to set itself as a model for sustainable development while the EU is in search of a coordinated green transition. To sum up, France's role in the war between Russia and Ukraine has had bold visions contradicted by various quirks. France has made substantial military contributions while foregrounding the concept of European autonomy; yet at home, instability and strategic ambivalence have sapped their effectiveness. Future challenges for France will consist of reconciling various internal political dynamics with France's external aspirational leadership, ensuring that the two coincide and that France becomes, in practice, a real pillar for European resilience.

5.3. United Kingdom: Strategic Drift and Bilateralism

Although the UK is no longer a member of the EU, it still plays a central role in European security through NATO. The UK's early assertion of support for Ukraine-military aid, intelligence sharing, and the resettlement of refugees-was among the most consequential efforts on the continent. The British provided advanced arms, such as anti-tank systems and long-range artillery, and played a significant role in the coordinated intelligence operations conducting assistance to Ukraine while withstanding the Russian advance. With regard to sanctions imposed against Russia-another area in which Britain clearly led-it cemented the image of the UK being a forward-thinking and ethical guardian of European stability into the minds of other Western nations. In 2024, the UK started to lose its strategic focus. It began putting emphasis on engaging in the Indo-Pacific region and forging bilateral defense arrangements, notably AUKUS, with Japan and South Korea. These are part of its global considerations to balance out Chinese influence and secure trade routes critical to British economic interests. Following Brexit, the UK Global Britain strategy envisions an expansive new role for the UK beyond Europe. Yet this pivot, while signaling London's desire to stay a global player, is tarnishing its influence on continental European matters (Valeriano et al., 2024a). European allies increasingly view the United Kingdom as distanced from regional defense

coordination, particularly with regard to EU-led initiatives. At home, political turnover and economic stagnation have limited the country's ability to commit outlays toward defense. The frequent changes in leadership and the shift in policy priorities have made it difficult to proceed with strategic planning in the long term. The set of poor economic conditions-inflationary pressure and slow growth combined with rising public debt-have compelled the government to make tough budgetary choices in which defense modernization projects would quite often find themselves among the losers. Even though the UK keeps one of the largest defense budgets in Europe, the gap between aspiration and capability continues to widen. Procurement delays, recruitment difficulties, and aging infrastructure have cast even further doubts on the sustainability of Britain's military commitments. The UK's commitment to NATO remains strong, and it contributes substantially to joint exercises, rapid deployment forces, and intelligence sharing. British troops are stationed in Eastern Europe for NATO's deterrence posture, with the UK being a major player in transatlantic security discussions. However, the gaps created in strategic considerations and operational synergies arising from the UK withdrawal from the EU defense coordination apparatus affect the coordination of this area. The UK is no longer a member of PESCO, the EU's Permanent Structured Cooperation, or the European Defense Fund, which has reduced its opportunities for influencing procurements jointly, research, and crisis reaction strategies. This divide has made it increasingly difficult to synchronize NATO and EU efforts in 'the grey zone' where they both operate. Moreover, the limited involvement of the UK in cyber defense and energy resilience frameworks across the EU limits its ability to affect collective European responses to the threats posed by hybrid warfare. Cyber has become an important battlefield in modern warfare, with actual attacks orchestrated by states on infrastructure, communications, and democratic institutions. Even though the UK has advanced capabilities in the field of cyber with a high level of investment for national resilience, the lack of access to these EU frameworks has been a hindrance for information sharing and with that joint response planning. Similarly, in the field of energy security, the UK's ability to coordinate with the EU has left it exposed to supply disruptions and limited it from determining a shared European strategy for energy diversification and sustainable energy. In spite of these limitations, the UK still has an impressive arsenal of diplomatic and military tools. The UN Security Council seat, nuclear assets, and global networks for intelligence allow the UK to remain intractably embedded in international discourse. To remain relevant within the European security landscape, however, London will have to find new ways of associating itself with EU partners-either through ad hoc coalitions, joint task forces, or enhancing NATO-EU cooperation. Only regain trust and interoperability will allow the UK to conceivably continue to shape the future of European defense in a post Brexit environment.

6. POLICY FAILURES AND STRATEGIC MISCALCULATIONS (2022–2025)

6.1. Misalignment between Political Rhetoric and Operational Capacity

One of the most enduring failures of the EU regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war has been the gap between political rhetoric and actual capabilities. While the European leaders have stressed "unwavering support" for Ukraine time and again, the delivery of arms aid has traditionally been delayed, fragmented, or not enough. This widening gap between spoken words and action has not only impaired Ukraine's defense ability; it has also exposed the limitations and weaknesses of the collective European security framework." For instance, the EU's promise to send one million artillery shells by spring 2024 came close to 40% short because of production shortages and procurements disputes among the member states (Moens & Barigazzi, 2024). These shortfalls were not just administrative nightmares; they also highlighted the deep and fundamental weaknesses within the European defense industrial base. Many member states rely on antiquated production lines, limited stockpiling, and diverse procurement standards that complicate collective action. Moreover, the absence of a congruous defense spending and manufacturing landscape has given rise to inefficiencies and delays directly affecting battlefield outcomes. This schism not only inhibited Ukraine from acting on the battlefield but also undermined the EU's credibility as a serious strategic partner. Ukrainian forces engrossed in operational delays due to existing scenarios of untimely provisions have had their effectiveness impaired on the battlefield. Likewise, the EU's failure to meet its own targets has rendered its capability to act within a crisis questionable-not only to the allies but to the adversaries as well. Perception of European unity has also taken a beating, with some member states forging ahead with bilateral supports while others remain indecisive or subject to domestic political constrictions. This also points to more profound structural issues involving an absence of a centralized EU defense procurement system, lack of interoperability among national forces, and bureaucratic inertia in decision-making. Without a command authority or any streamline procurement mechanism, the EU fails to turn political consensus to real military support. National armies act with different equipment, standards, and doctrines, which acts as much of a hindrance to joint operations and logistics. However, the decision-making processes in EU institutions remain slow and consensus-seeking, hardly suitable to meet wartime urgency. The EU must therefore move beyond the tokenistic approach and consider radical reforms. The strengthening of the European Defense Fund, enhancing joint procurement initiatives, and improving coordination with NATO would go a long way in reducing the gap between ambition

and capability. Without these reforms the EU risks becoming nothing more than a rhetorical power in a world that needs strategic resolution.

6.2. Overreliance on Sanctions as a Strategic Tool

Sanctions have been at the heart of the EU's response to Russian aggression. In aiming to crush the Russian economic capacity, they dictate asset freezes; trade restrictions; financial restrictions; and export controls directed at such crucial sectors as energy, arms, and technology. Yet, the effectiveness has had mixed results. Russia's GDP contracted by 4.5 percent in 2022; it began to recover in 2023 and was expected to reach prewar levels by the end of that year (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2025). This recovery poses challenges to the thesis that sanctions alone would provide any pressure to change Moscow's strategic calculus. Russia's large foreign currency reserves, gold holdings, and pivot to Asian markets have cushioned the blow dealt by Western sanctions (Council of the EU, 2025). And by diverting its trade flows toward China, India, and other nonaligned economies, Russia has kept critical revenue flows going, particularly from energy exports. Meanwhile, alternative payment systems and a greater reliance on domestic production have shielded the economy from the full impact of EU and U.S. restrictions. These adaptive strategies have allowed Russia to survive the initial shock and recalibrate its economic engagements, thereby undermining the isolating effect intended by the sanctions. Furthermore, sanctions have created unintended consequences for the EU itself. Energy price volatility, inflation, delivery disruptions, and increased costs from greater supply shortages have adversely affected European consumers and industries. When Russian gas imports drastically dropped, energy prices shot up and household budgets and industrial competitiveness felt the strain. Inflation-related pressures remained firmly entrenched across the eurozone, thereby hampering monetary policy and triggering social discontent in some member states. To navigate the new economic environment, small and medium enterprises, especially those dependent on raw materials and energy regeneration, have faced enormous barriers. The absence of coordinated global sanctions—especially with those countries trading with Russia such as India, China, and Turkey—diluted much of the strategic impact. The EU and its allies have imposed an enormous number of restrictions, while the loopholes originating from the absence of universal enforcement have been seized by Russia. The ensuing fragmentation has also laid bare the limitations of unilateral or regional sanctions within an interlinked global economy. Wider international cohesion and mechanisms for enforcement will be vital if sanctions intend to fulfill their promise. Absent such, the EU risks incurring disproportionate costs while securing rather modest strategic gains.

6.3. Strategic Neglect of Peripheral Regions

The EU's monomaniacal orientation toward Ukraine has created a truncated security picture by leaving peripheral regions ignored. While laudably firm in its commitment to the Ukrainian cause against Russian aggression, the EU's single mindedness has, perhaps unwittingly, sidelined strategic engagement with neighboring regions such as the Western Balkans, North Africa, and the Caucasus. These were once deemed key in the EU's neighborhood policy, yet they have since seen a decrease in diplomatic efforts and development funds. In this vacuum, rival powers have swarmed in, often acting against European interests and values. For example, the increased Belt and Road investments of China in Serbia and Montenegro are not only expanding economic relations with these countries but are also establishing leverage over decision-making in infrastructure and policy (European University Institute, 2025). The investments framed as development opportunities are shielded from scrutiny by ambiguous terms and conditions that constitute long-term dependencies, jeopardizing EU governance reforms and transparency initiatives. Regarding Russia, through energy diplomacy and media penetration, Moscow has amplified its influence in Georgia and Moldova. While trying to take control of strategic energy assets and influencing public narratives, Russia has effectively countered pro-European movements, cementing its strategic grip in the region. The neglect of the peripheries works against EU neighborhoods as it risks creating new flashpoints that can further destabilize the continent. The diminished EU presence in these neighborhoods not only undermines soft power but also leaves space for authoritarian players to fill with alternates of governance and economic cooperation. In the Western Balkans, halted accession talks and dwindling reform enthusiasm have opened a gate for nationalistic rhetoric and external interference. In North Africa, dwindling levels of engagement has rendered the EU incapable of addressing migration pressure, counter-terrorism cooperation, and climate resilience directly affecting stability in Europe. The Caucasus is a volatile region in need of sustained attention for unresolved conflicts and frail democracies. The EU's diminished role in the Caucasus risks emboldening Russia's revisionist agenda and weakening the West's hands in supporting channels for democratization. For a recalibration meant to restore balance, the EU must alter its foreign policy to make sure support available to Ukraine does not undermine more broadly through strategic coherence. The revival of partnerships and targeted investments plus bolstering peripheral diplomatic missions will go a long way in securing European security and influence in the long term.

6.4. Failure to Anticipate Hybrid Threats

It took the EU some time to define a full-blown strategy against hybrid threats, that include cyber-attacks, disinformation, and economic coercion, signals loud and clear from earlier conflicts. These threats mostly go below the threshold for conventional warfare, yet they are front and center in the modern conflict lexicon, which the EU has systematically lagged behind in terms of pace and sophistication in the adoption of institutional solutions. Russian cyber operations targeted critical infrastructure across Germany, Poland, and Baltic States throughout 2023 and 2024, with severe disruptions to energy grids, financial system, and government services. These attacks form part of a larger campaign formed to destabilize public institutions and frustrate democratic resistance (Valeriano et al., 2024). Despite the seriousness of his violations, an integrated EU framework for cyber defense is lacking. Member states rely on their national capabilities, which differ widely in technology sophistication, legal mandates, and strategic priorities. Hence, fragmentation has made coordinated responses difficult and has left gaps that hostile actors could exploit. Hostile narratives proliferate within the EU due to the absence of real-time intelligence sharing, joint-response protocols, and coordinated public communication. Disinformation campaigns - often funded through diffusion through social media and state-backed outlets - have targeted elections, vaccine uptake, and support for Ukraine and thus increased noise and divides among member states. The absence of a centralized cyber command or a rapid response mechanism makes it even less possible for EU member states to sit together and speak in front of one voice whenever needed. Though initiatives like the EU Cybersecurity Act and the European Cybersecurity Agency (ENISA) serve as quite good steppingstone initiatives, they are devoid of sufficient mandate as well as resources to lead a continent-wide strategy for defense. At the same time, economic coercion through carefully targeted sanctions, trade engineering, and energy blackmail has exposed weaknesses in the supply chain and financial systems of the EU, but strategic counteracting measures remain poorly developed. To deal with such challenges, the EU should focus now on building a strong hybrid threat response architecture. This includes a centralized cyber defense command, improved interoperability between national armies, and a common strategy to combat disinformation. Without the reforms, the EU may become much more reactive and fragmented when increasingly sophisticated hybrid threats face it. A proactive, integrated approach must be adopted to preserve democratic institutions and maintain strategic stability across the continent.

6.5. Inadequate Refugee Integration Strategy

By the middle of 2025, Ukrainian refugees trickled into over 5 million, stressing public services across the EU. Initial reception has been generous, with much public solidarity and emergency measures, but actual integration in the longer term has been unevenly adopted and increasingly difficult. Member states moved rather quickly in the early phase of the crisis, activating temporary protection directives and rapidly mobilizing humanitarian aid. The longer the conflict dragged on and the larger the flow of refugees, the sharper it became mixed with the gaps in national systems- and the absence of a coordinated EU approach. Poland and Romania, for example, have absorbed large populations with quite little support from Brussels. This creates extreme pressure on local infrastructure, healthcare, and education systems. Frontline- states- because of their proximity and historical ties with Ukraine- have been forced to find ways to manage without continuous financial and logistical support from the EU institutions to provide services effectively. The most acute effects of the inflow have been felt in border areas, where municipal resources became strained, and integration programs were underdeveloped. Wealthier Western European countries have also faced the consequences of being politically backlash and experiencing social frictions created by complicated refugee resettlement issues and debates regarding national identity, resource allocation, and immigration policy. The existence of such a divergent picture has produced differences in housing, employment, and educational outcomes among different EU member states, thus increasing the disparity within regions and raising the nationalistic sentiment created among citizens. In some member states, refugees have been effectively absorbed into labor markets and school systems, thereby supporting local economies and contributing their cultural diversity. In some others the result of limited vocational training and bureaucratic obstacles and barriers in language has left many displaced Ukrainians in precarious conditions. These inconsistencies have created a fragmented landscape of opportunity and exclusion that undercuts the broader commitment of the EU to solidarity and human rights. Political ramifications of uneven response exist. Populist parties across Europe have used this issue to promote anti-immigrant claims that refugees are to blame for economic hard times and less social disruption in their lives. The rhetoric has enjoyed a higher terrain in areas lacking good integration gains, which translated into worsening polarization and trust deficits against EU institutions. Without a comprehensive and equitable rubric for refugee integration, the bloc risks failing such refugees of war and eroding its internal cohesion and democratic resilience. Steps must be taken beyond emergency measures as far as possible: the EU has to invest in long-time harmonized policies furthering such integrative and truly inclusive approaches. Coordinated funding, pooled best practices, and enhanced scrutiny mechanisms will ensure the fulfillment of requisite standards for all member states, regardless of the social stability compromise during this difficult humanitarian crisis.

7. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

The strategic partnership between the United States and the European Union has been a linchpin in supporting Ukraine since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. This north-south transatlantic alliance provided the necessary military aid while coordinating sanctions and providing diplomatic backing, which were collectively useful to Ukraine's ability to stand against the Russian onslaught. The U.S. has led in supplying advanced weaponry, intelligence capabilities, and financial assistance while mobilizing humanitarian aid, economic support, and regional diplomacy through the EU. In unison, they have maintained a united front, restricting Russia's strategic options and strengthening the international rules-based order. While transatlantic cooperation remained an anchor of the resistance to Russian aggression, turbulence in U.S. domestic politics and disagreements within the EU complicated the landscape. Washington's leadership and political discord have raised alarm bells intermittently over the steady flow of U.S. support, particularly in terms of military funding and long-term commitments. Diverging national interests, economic vulnerabilities, and disparate perceptions of the threat have clouded the prospect for swift, shared decision-making among the Europe. Otherwise, the overall trend of collaboration remained strong, affirming the enduring worth of transatlantic ties. Nonetheless, the cooperation was not where the problems, asymmetries, and strategic divergences appeared. The U.S. has clung to the lion's share of military burden, which draws calls for greater autonomy for Europe in defense matters. While the European Union coordinate aid and bolster defense responses, the weaker structures are evident in European procurement systems and slow response rate. Further, Washington's consideration of global interests including the Indo-Pacific at times diverges from the regional frame of Europe focusing on Eastern Europe and energy security. These asymmetries have also been observable in sanction approaches, diplomatic methods, and post-war reconstruction planning. U.S. actions in these areas were often swift and unilateral, while EU harmonization due to consensus-building led to delays and watered-down measures. Closing these gaps would require deeper institutional alignment, common strategic planning, and renewed political commitment from both sides of the Atlantic. As the war continues to reshape the global security map, the strength and adaptability of the U.S.-EU partnership will continue to be the deciding constituent in the future of Europe and the international order.

7.1. Military and Economic Contributions

Meanwhile, Europe—including the UK, Norway, and Switzerland—had surpassed \$121.5 billion, with an additional \$84 billion pledged . This marked a significant shift in burden-sharing, with the EU assuming a more prominent role in sustaining Ukraine’s war effort. The European response was not only financial but also logistical and political, as member states coordinated sanctions, refugee support, and military deliveries. The urgency of the moment prompted several countries to take bold, unilateral actions that went beyond EU-level coordination. The EU assumed a greater burden following the delay of the U.S. \$61 billion aid package in autumn 2023, which was ultimately approved in April 2024. Countries like the Czech Republic and Denmark undertook unilateral actions, including sourcing ammunition from global markets and transferring Denmark’s entire artillery stockpile to Ukraine. Countries like the Czech Republic and Denmark emerged as notable contributors. The Czech government spearheaded efforts to source ammunition from global markets, leveraging diplomatic ties in Latin America and Asia to secure critical supplies. Denmark, in a striking demonstration of commitment, transferred its entire artillery stockpile to Ukraine, prioritizing Kyiv’s immediate needs over its own defense reserves. These decisions reflected a growing recognition among European states that Ukraine’s survival was directly linked to continental stability. Such actions also highlighted the evolving nature of European defense policy. Faced with delays in U.S. support and bureaucratic constraints within the EU, individual nations increasingly acted on their own initiative. This trend has sparked debate about the future of European strategic autonomy and the need for more agile, integrated defense mechanisms. As the war continues the balance of transatlantic support remains dynamic, shaped by political will, fiscal capacity, and the urgency of events on the ground.

7.2. Political Uncertainty and Strategic Asymmetries

Political uncertainty in the U.S. especially due to Republican resistance in Congress sparked concerns over potential aid disruption in the event of Donald Trump’s re-election . The drawn-out discussions over the \$61 billion of aid in late 2023, with the pressing approval coming only in April 2024, highlighted the fragile nature of bipartisan consensus on Ukraine. It was this uncertainty that prompted European leaders to reassess their reliance upon Washington, and realize the strategic risks of transatlantic dependency. Therefore, the need for the EU to assume a more important role in this respect would reinforce its strategic autonomy in foreign and security policy. Through instruments like the Ukraine Facility and the G7 Loan Cooperation Mechanism, the EU committed

€150 billion in support of Ukraine , signaling a shift toward long-term financial and institutional engagement. Its mechanisms designed to not only carry Ukraine through its war effort but also prepare it for post-war recovery and integration into European structures. Moreover, the EU promoted the use of frozen Russian sovereign assets to fund reconstruction efforts . Despite some legal and diplomatic hurdles, the initiative indicates the development of a stronger willingness within the EU to resort to economic instruments on behalf of geopolitical considerations. Together, they seal a decisive evolution of the EU into a security actor and a guarantor for European stability.

7.3. Transatlantic Cooperation and Frictions

In spite of the increasingly reinforced cooperation between the United States and the European Union in the mutual support of Ukraine, some friction points emerged, which revealed the underlying strategic and political differences between the parties. A key point was the U.S. decision to retain tight control over advanced weapons systems, especially long-range missiles such as the ATACMS. While Washington has been happy to provide military aid to Kyiv, it placed restrictions on how these systems could be used and where for fear of escalation and triggering a direct confrontation with Russia, a consideration that frustrated some of the Europeans and even some Ukrainian officials who felt such limitations hampered Ukraine's ability to hit critical military infrastructure deep within occupied territory. The EU had been calling for the imposition of less rigid constraints, especially after the Russian attacks on energy infrastructure escalated. European states, living with the immediate consequences of the strikes, were now advocating both for bolder military support and less operational constraints on the forces of Ukraine. The use of frozen Russian sovereign funds was another issue on which differences emerged. The European Parliament strongly endorsed a full confiscation of those funds for the reconstruction of Ukraine, calling it materially necessary and morally justified. The U.S., however, showed a more careful legal approach for fear of setting a precedent, for considerations of international law, and with concern regarding potential negative impacts on global financial stability.

7.4. Coordination through NATO and the G7

U.S.–EU collaboration was reinforced through NATO and the G7, with joint strategies to bolster Ukraine's defense and expand NATO to include Sweden and Finland . These developments were major milestones in deepening transatlantic security ties as they indicated a similar commitment against Russian aggression and the strengthening of the Alliance's eastern flank. The joining of Sweden and Finland, which were countries that had been strictly neutral, marked a historical

moment in which there was urgency for collective defense against the evolving threats. Shared positions on China and Iran also strengthened transatlantic cohesion in this regard. Both sides made some common diplomatic efforts to put pressure on Beijing for its ambiguous stance about the war, as well as its increasingly assertive attitudes concerning the Indo-Pacific. Likewise, joint sanctions and monitoring efforts targeted Iran's drone exports to Russia, thus reinforcing a common front against malign actors challenging global stability.

7.5. Outlook and Risks

The U.S.-EU relationship is undeniably critical and yet highly vulnerable. While transatlantic cooperation has done much to support Ukraine in its military, economic, and diplomatic efforts, it is presently facing growing uncertainty. U.S. elections on the horizon, especially under shifting political dynamics and a partisan divide, have raised red flags on the prospect of continued American engagement. At the same time, internal EU political instability is marked by disjointed coalition formations, resurgent populism, and uneven provision commitments by member states, making a coherent posture difficult to articulate. These issues struck the urgent need for a long-term, orchestrated vision for Ukraine's reconstruction, which would transcend electoral cycles and national concerns. To match that need, both sides must invest in new institutional tools and show political commitment over the long term. For the EU, this means preparing for scenarios of reduced American engagement through taking concrete steps to strengthen its strategic autonomy. Strengthening the European defense industry is not just necessary for military readiness, but also for decreasing dependency on U.S. capabilities. Adaptability of supply chains and a quicker shift to green will also considerably contribute to energy independence and eventually less susceptibility to future crises. Strengthening the EU geopolitical presences-deeper partnerships, engaging in a more vigorous diplomatic outreach, regional leadership would project Europe as a more assertive and resilient actor in shaping global security outcomes.

8. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE EU AND NATO (2025 AND BEYOND)

In its fourth year, the Russo-Ukrainian war emphasizes the much-needed inflection in the European Union and NATO. As established in previous sections, strategic, economic, and institutional pressure indicate a recalibration of policy as these war-stricken entities should make comprehensive recommendations toward restoring cohesion, enhancing resilience, and preparing Europe for a long-

term security threat. As the Russo-Ukrainian war enters its fourth year, the European Union and NATO are standing at a critical turning point. The strategic, economic, and institutional pressures, as outlined in previous sections, demand a recalibrating of policy. The lengthy duration of the conflict has revealed vulnerabilities within Europe's defense architecture, strained financial resources propitious to defense development, and stressed political unity among member states. The nature of modern conflict is also evolving with the advent of hybrid threats, energy instability, and disinformation—all of which necessitate an adaptive and forward-looking approach. Some comprehensive recommendations are listed below in order to restore cohesion, enhance resilience, and prepare Europe for long-term security challenges. The first of these recommendations would be deepening interoperability and joint planning by the EU and NATO to ensure military capabilities are aligned and rapidly deployable. Second, development in defense industries and supply chains would be scaled to include lesser dependency on external actors and improve procurement bottlenecks. The third unified cyber defense and intelligence-sharing framework is imperative to counter hybrid threats and ensure protection of critical infrastructure. Fourth, energy diversification with climate-resilient infrastructure needs to be at the top of priorities to prepare for future shocks. Strategic communication and public engagement would be crucial to establish and safeguard democratic legitimacy against hostile narratives. Together, these measures can help Europe sail through uncertainties ahead while reinforcing its standing as an anchoring global stability pillar.

8.1. Establish a Unified EU Strategic Command

Addressing the state of Fragmented decision-making and slow operational response it is necessary to create a centralized EU Strategic Command under the European External Action Service (EEAS), with authority over defense coordination, procurement, and crisis response. The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war has exposed critical weaknesses in the EU's defense coordination, particularly the fragmented nature of decision-making and the sluggish pace of operational response. Despite strong political will and increased defense spending, the absence of a unified command structure has led to inefficiencies in military aid delivery, duplication of efforts, and inconsistent standards across member states. As highlighted by Consilium (2025), deeper EU-NATO coordination is essential to address emerging threats and streamline strategic planning. To overcome these challenges, the EU should establish a centralized Strategic Command within the EEAS. This body must operate independently of national governments, with direct funding from the EU budget to ensure autonomy and agility. Its mandate would include overseeing defense procurement, coordinating crisis response, and managing logistics for military assistance. By centralizing these functions, the EU can reduce bureaucratic delays and enhance operational readiness. Furthermore, the Strategic Command should be fully integrated with NATO's planning structures to prevent

strategic divergence and ensure interoperability. Standardizing equipment and training across member states would improve joint operations and reduce redundancies. This reform would mark a significant step toward a more cohesive and responsive European defense posture, capable of meeting current and future security challenges with greater efficiency and unity.

8.2. Launch a European Cyber Defense Pact

Given their vulnerability to hybrid threats and cyber attacks, EU and NATO members must reach a binding cyber defence pact setting common protocols for threat detection, response, and attribution. The increasing frequency and sophistication of hybrid threats, especially cyber attacks, have come to expose critical vulnerabilities in Europe's digital and physical infrastructure. Suing adversaries from ransom ware attacks on energy grids through to coordinated disinformation campaigns targeting and undermining European democratic institutions, Europe has been found culpable for not having a unified set of defence mechanisms. According to Valeriano et al. (2024), this is a strategic necessity of unified cyber defence which keeps NATO firmly together in contested gray zones since conventional deterrence has proven to be of little effect. In order to address this situation, a binding cyber defence pact should be established among its EU and NATO members. This treaty would further formalize common protocols for threat detection, response coordination, and attribution standards in order to allow for fast and collective action against hostile actors. The development of a joint Cyber Command of the EU and NATO, which shall oversee the sharing of intelligence in real time, coordinate countermeasures, and supervise the cyber operational campaigns, shall be at the core of this project. Meanwhile, states should start investing in very concrete infrastructure for cyber resilience, especially on critical sectors such as the energy grid, transportation networks, and electoral systems. These compromised assets constitute frequent targets and require full protection in these crises to support societal stability and peace. Finally, the stipulations of the pact should provide for the fostering of public-private partnerships geared towards securing digital supply chains and countering disinformation. Cooperation with tech companies, media platforms, and cyber security companies will be a key to establish a layered defence ecosystem that keeps pace with shifting threats and preserves democratic integrity.

8.3. Promote Conditional Peace Negotiations

A diplomatic framework for conditional peace talks is necessary. The EU should clearly mark its red lines from the start: Without such clear red lines, the EU has left itself vulnerable to a prolonged status quo, ineffective in shaping the outcome of a post-war Europe and, the empty offer has left the

EU vulnerable to a longer term of instability and effectiveness-less shaping of a post-war Europe. The European University Institute (2025) warns that ceasefire on Russian terms put survival dangers on EU credibility and regional stability. It must therefore be underpinned by firm principles—the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine are among the first. Such a framework should also include phases of sanctions relief strictly linked to verifiable de-escalation and troop withdrawal on Russia's part: In this way incentives will be provided for compliance but pressure will continue be placed on Moscow. Offering long-term guarantees of security to Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, the EU must engage in the proposed "European Security Compact." The compact would institutionalize defense cooperation, intelligence sharing, and economic support within Europe in order to bolster deterrence and stability across Eastern Europe.

8.4. Develop a Unified Refugee Integration Strategy

The necessity arises for a pan-European refugee integration framework, which would harmonize member states' housing, employment, and education policies, for the balanced management of uneven refugee absorption and social tension. This influx of refugees from Ukraine and conflict zones has put somewhat uneven pressure on EU member states and has laid bare the disparities in absorption capacities and integration outcomes. While some countries with good support systems had eased the integration process, in others, social tensions, political backlash, and an overstretched public service have grown with each increase in influx. This existing ad-hoc nature can only work against EU solidarity and long-term cohesion. According to the Centre for Economic Strategy (2025), integration of refugees, whenever efficiently put into practice, promises long-term economic benefits, thereby stating that the construction of a coordinated and all-inclusive framework is a necessity. The EU needs to build a pan-European refugee integration framework that aligns housing, employment, and education policies across member states to remedy these scenarios. A cardinal feature will be the allocation of EU funds according to actual refugee population ratio and local capacity, which will promote an equitable and regionally responsive spirit of support. The framework will focus on prioritizing language training, vocational courses, and mental health support for refugees to help integrate into the host society and labor market. These are necessary for enabling refugees and minimizing obstacles to their participation. Finally, a digital platform should be created to ensure refugee mobility and labor market matches across the EU. This platform would link refugees with regions where development of their skill set is matched, thereby attaining the highest efficiency, economic-wise, coupled with social inclusion. The measures would together aim to transform refugee integration from a reactive burden into an active investment into Europe's future.

8.5. Accelerate Defense Industrial Cooperation

Through establishing a European Defense Industrial Alliance for coordinating production, R&D, and procurement, the problems of supply chain fragmentation and military readiness gaps would be solved. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has exposed the critical weaknesses of Europe's defense structures across supply chain coordination and operational readiness. Defenses in multinational weapon systems revived by different member states have made it slow for critical deliveries to be made in times of need, inconsistency in the compatibility of equipment, and non-production cycles in purchasing. Such weaknesses have undermined deterrence as noted by BNP Paribas 2025 and reduced the EU ability to respond swiftly to emerging threats. The European Union should launch a European Defense Industrial Alliance consolidating defense efforts across the continent. In tandem with this alliance, it would harmonize standards for some key military assets like artillery, drones, and air defense systems in the interoperability capabilities and reduce bottlenecks in logistics during joint operations. Further, pooled resources for strategic stockpiling and rapid deployment settings would enhance readiness within member states for efficient and agreed-upon responses to crises. Shared inventories and coordinated logistics would, therefore, reduce duplication and improve cost-effectiveness. Also, within the alliance, cross-border defense innovation and joint ventures should be promoted to strengthen technology development, industrial competitiveness, and dependence on third-party suppliers.

9. CONCLUSIONS

Indeed, the Russo-Ukrainian started as a regional conflict, but until August 2025, it has blown open to show the fragilities of the political institutions, economic arrangements, and alliances in Europe. Besides the resilience of Ukraine, the war has been a test for the European Union's ability to act in response to consistent aggression. This article has traced the trajectory of the war, analyzed the economic and geopolitical consequences, and examined the policy failures that have inhibited a coherent European response. The conflict has become a mirror of sorts for the EU's strengths and shortcomings and a catalyst for rethinking its global role.

9.1. Strategic Lessons Learned

This was the time when the EU really came together in its initiatives before Russia-Ukraine conflict; it should be known as one of those rare moments when they really came together as a bloc.

Member states sanctioned each other very quickly, provided humanitarian assistance, and started working together on diplomatic fronts. But this unity failed to continue for a long time. There are different threat perceptions for the members states, fiscal limitations, and domestic political restrictions weakening Europe's collective stance nowadays, as Becker (2025), Gunes (2024), and Valeriano et al. (2024) point out. Germany's constitutional restriction on defense spending, France's internal political instability, and the UK's drift in strategy post Brexit have created a vacuum of leadership and operational incoherence. As a result of this deficiency in centralized decision-making mechanisms, military support has been inconsistent, aid has been delayed, and diplomatic messaging has differed from what had been planned to happen. Some countries, like Poland and the Baltic states, have been aggressive in their stances, while others seem vacillated in their approaches or afraid to escalate domestically. Consequently, these factors have led to a loss of credibility for the EU, thus making it difficult for the organization to come together coherently. On the one hand, NATO is broadening its membership including Sweden and Finland and keeping its deterrence on the eastern flank intact, and on the other hand, internally stressed. Contributions toward defense, pending issues concerning cyber vulnerabilities, and mixed strategic priorities threaten the cohesion of the alliance. The absence of a common cyber strategy along with the lukewarm acceptance of hybrid warfare—often termed such as disinformation, energy coercion, and cyber attacks—gives member states exposure to non-conventional threats while the section develops (Valeriano et al., 2024; Consilium, 2025). Such loopholes reinforce the arguments for institutional reform and strategic recalibration. Also, though the transatlantic relationship has proven to be resilient, it has endured political tremors in Washington in the recent past. Recent delays in the U.S. aid package at the end of 2023 and continued debates about what follows in terms of commitments raised doubts about the reliability of American support. This has led to calls within Europe for increased strategic autonomy and a better balance in the burden.

9.2. Economic Costs and Social Strain

The war has had far-reaching and varied economic consequences for the EU. National budgets are suffering under higher energy prices, accelerated inflation and slowed industrial production, with the negative impact aggravated by greater social inequality. The war interrupted supply chains, lifted defense spending to very high levels, and compromised the pursuit of long-term development goals. Countries highly dependent on Russian energy were plunged into acute crises, leading to emergency measures and accelerated diversification efforts. While solidarity was the response to the initial refugee presence and emergency support was extended, it has now revealed a systemic incapacity to manage integration policy and an uneven allocation of resources. In all, millions of Ukrainian refugees have found their way into the EU, with frontline states like Poland and Romania

hosting disproportionate numbers. Some host countries have integrated refugees successfully into labor and education markets, while others confront the problems of housing shortages, bureaucratic bottlenecks and soaring social tensions. Given the absence of a pan-European integration framework, the peculiar result in many areas has been nationalistic rhetoric. The EU's excessive reliance on sanctions as the principal instrument of coercion has created vulnerabilities which have been exploited by the adversaries, while on the other hand, the benefits of a sound economic resilience strategy have been denied (Centre for Economic Strategy, 2025; ECB, 2025). Sanctions have surely damaged trade and commerce and affected financial markets, but have surprisingly failed to degrade Russia's strategic economic position. All through this, European industries have continued to suffer a serious loss in competitiveness and rising costs, primarily in those energy-dependent economic sectors. The shift of investment from green energy and infrastructure to a focus on defense spending threatens for a long-term stagnation and deindustrialization of the EU. Climate goals became secondary, while innovation channels were disbanded. If not equipped with some common industrial policy and with a re-energized strategic autonomy constellation, the EU may find itself in a position of heavy reliance on external suppliers, with that making it exceptionally prone to future geopolitical shocks. The hardest part would be the split between securing immediate protection and pursuing sustainable economic development.

9.3. Strategic Outlook and Imperatives

Looking ahead, the EU and NATO must confront the reality that the war in Ukraine is not likely to end soon-or with any form of decisive resolution. An extended confrontation will require not only patience, but also strategic clarity and institutional agility. To articulate the objectives of Europe whether they hope for containment, deterrence, or a negotiated solution they will have to align their resources properly. This kind of alignment cannot be reactive but must shift toward proactive strategy. The policy recommendations put forward in this article offer continuities in recalibration. First, the establishment of a unified Command would streamline defense coordination, procurement and crisis response. This would be directly funded by the EU budget and integrated into NATO's planning structures to avoid strategic divergence since this body would not operate under national governments. Second, a binding pact on cyber defense for all EU and NATO members would complete the arsenal in the fight against hybrid threats. Common rules of procedure on detection of threat, on coordination of responses, and attribution standards would ensure rapid and collective action. A joint EU-NATO Cyber Command in charge of investments in cyber resilience infrastructure and public private partnerships would make the field even more robust for digital security and protection of democratic institutions. Third, the EU should open diplomatic tabling for conditional talking about peace, such that clear red lines are protecting Ukrainian sovereignty and

territorial integrity. Switzerland and the OSCE might be in a position to help find neutral mediators that could facilitate discussion. Long-term security guarantees for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia through a “European Security Compact,” would work to reinforce deterrence and stability in the region. Fourth, readjust foreign policy of the European Union to change the neglect at the peripheries and at the same time counterbalance strategic overextension. More development aid, more of diplomatic missions and network infrastructures in the Western Balkans, North Africa, and the Eastern Mediterranean are necessary to cool down rival influence and not allow instability. Strengthening the partnership relations with the African Union and Gulf Cooperation Council will also boost multilateral cooperation. Last but not least, the priority of integrating refugees must be filed under a pan-European framework. With standardized housing, employment, and education policies, EU funds based on population ratios and local capacity would promote social cohesion and economic inclusion. A digital platform for refugee mobility and labor market matching would optimize resource allocation and create a sense of entitlement to displaced populations.

9.4. Final Reflection

For Europe, a crucial moment has arrived. Decisions taken in the months and years to come will determine the outcome of the war and the future course of the European project itself. Surely, strategic ambiguities, economic fragility, and institutional inertia can no longer be permitted. The evolution of the EU must redefine itself from a reactive coalition to a proactive geopolitical global actor, able to defend values and secure interests as well as lead the multi-polar world. This change requires political courage, institutional innovation, and societal resilience because it needs redefining the European identity not just as a market or regulatory power but as a strategic force that can change global norms or global outcomes. The war in Ukraine has demonstrated what complacency can cost and how urgently change is needed. It has caused peace and stability to seem illusory, the price paid by demanding recognition that security needs, must, be constructed through shared experiences, investment, and vision. Each of the issues to come will not only settle but may decide whether the EU remains fragmented as an actor or coheres into a resilient, influential force at the global stage.

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APPENDIX 1: Publications on Ukraine

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/395714266_EASTERN_EUROPE_BULLETIN_ON_UKRAINE_Sep_2024_-_Sep_2025

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/395713400_THE_RUSSO-UKRAINIAN_CONFLICT_AND_ITS_ECONOMIC_AND_GEOPOLITICAL_CONSEQUENCES_A_HOLISTIC_REVIEW

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384963755_THE_WAR_IN_UKRAINE_AT_A_CRITICAL_CROSSROADS_Two_and_a_half_years_of_war_in_Ukraine_and_now_what

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/379783611_THE_WAR_IN_UKRAINE_AND_THE_POLISH-UKRAINIAN_POLITICAL_RELATIONSHIP

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/373336180_THE_RUSSO-UKRAINIAN_WAR_AT_A_CRITICAL_CROSSROADS_Towards_a_new_geopolitical_and_security_architecture_in_Europe

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360258080_THE_RUSSO-UKRAINIAN_AND_RUSSO-JAPANESE_WARS_MILITARY_AND_POLITICAL_COMPARISONS_Russian_defense_malfunctions_and_geopolitical_repercussions

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361606575_THE_CONFLICT_IN_UKRAINE_AND_ITS_EFFECTS_ON_FOOD_SECURITY_IN_EGYPT

On the way of deception? The sinking of the Russian cruiser “Moskva” (available on request)

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372628482_GEOPOLITICAL_REFLECTIONS_Eastern_Europe_North_Africa_and_the_Middle_East

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/395178776_EASTERN_EUROPE_BULLETIN_ON_UKRAINE_-_August_2025

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/394267195_EASTERN_EUROPE_BULLETIN_ON_UKRAINE_-_July_2025

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/391340824_EASTERN_EUROPE_BULLETIN_ON_UKRAINE_-_April_2025

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/390477507_EASTERN_EUROPE_BULLETIN_ON_UKRAINE_March_2025

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/388699814_EASTERN_EUROPE_BULLETIN_ON_UKR_AINE_-_January_2025

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/386413808_EASTERN_EUROPE_BULLETIN_ON_UKR_AINE_-_November_2024

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385423651_EASTERN_EUROPE_BULLETIN_ON_UKR_AINE_-_October_2024

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/384785775_EASTERN_EUROPE_BULLETIN_ON_UKR_AINE_-_September_2024

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https://www.researchgate.net/publication/382800547_EASTERN_EUROPE_BULLETIN_ON_UKR_AINE_July_2024

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