



SPECIAL ISSUE: THE EU AT A CROSSROAD

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1993-2024 THIRTY-ONE YEARS OF POLICY FORMULATION AND ANALYSIS

THE EU AT A CROSSROAD



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Undoubtedly, the EU currently faces multiple challenges. It will not be an exaggeration to say that in addition to euroscepticism we are also faced with populism which at times may lead to dangerous outcomes. Yet, despite much criticism on multiple themes, the EU remains one of the most desirable, if not the most desirable place, in the world to live in. Consequently, the critical approach that is expressed in this article has as a major objective to modestly contribute to actions which can make the EU an even better place, as well as an effective international political entity which inspires credibility and respect.

I divide the history of the EU into three periods. The first one from the Treaty of Rome in 1958 until the end of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany. The second one from the Treaty of Maastricht until the introduction of the Euro in 1999. And the third one from the beginning of the new 21st century until today.

The objectives set in the first period were more or less fulfilled. There was healing of past wounds, economic reconstruction was achieved, Western Europe had an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity and the future seemed promising. The European Community by 1991 had become the European Union, Germany was reunified without war, the Soviet Union disintegrated and communism collapsed.

With the Treaty of Maastricht, a major goal was to achieve a common currency, the Euro. This objective too was implemented. It should be noted though, that there was a strong reaction by Britain, which opted to stay out of the Eurozone although it fulfilled the criteria. Some years later Greece became a member of the Eurozone, although it is still questionable whether it fulfilled the criteria. This was a time when there were voices from the Left throughout Europe that European integration was associated with social disintegration. It was during this time that there was also criticism for the architecture of the Eurozone. In the 1990's we also witnessed the violent disintegration of Yugoslavia. The EU could have played a more constructive role in this major crisis.

The record of the EU since the beginning of the 21st century had been more problematic. The economic crisis was not handled well. The policies of the Troika were unnecessarily harsh, creating more problems than those resolved. In the cases of Greece and Cyprus, this harshness was unparalleled. And it would not be an exaggeration to say that there was no solidarity nor social sensitivity. That there was a need for economic restructuring and rationalisation there is no doubt about it. However, this could have been done with a lower social cost. After all, in both cases there were both endogenous and exogenous factors for the crises.

The COVID-19 crisis was an additional turning point for the EU. It was understood that the consequences would have been devastating if the EU insisted on the terms and conditions of the Stability Pact. In April 2020 at the Eurogroup meeting, decisions were made for monetary and fiscal easing. At the same time there was a statement admitting that the way the Eurocrisis was handled could have been better.

Brexit was another setback for the EU. During the economic crisis several actors and analysts expressed the view that eventually Greece would withdraw from the Eurozone. This did not happen, despite the very harsh policies of the Troika and the heavy socioeconomic cost imposed on the Greek people. Instead, we had Brexit. This was not a good outcome – neither for Britain nor the EU. It is essential to understand the causes of this development. Inevitably, these include British perceptions about the Union as well as the way the Eurocrisis was dealt with. Over time, Britain was an uneasy partner; at the same time though a useful one. It is not a positive development that today in Germany part of the population considers the withdrawal of the country from the Union as an option.

One can also raise the issue of the immigration crisis. Most people feel that this issue is not addressed in the best possible way. And inevitably this leads to socioeconomic and political repercussions.

The war in Ukraine was a great setback for the EU. The EU today has less security and less prosperity. I have no doubt that the Russian invasion and the war could have been prevented. With strong European leadership, an agreement could have been reached, which would have been much better than the current situation. Such an agreement could have taken into consideration the security concerns of all parties involved.

At the same time, I cannot avoid the temptation to mention that the EU fails to adopt the same standards in relation to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the continuing Turkish occupation of the northern part of Cyprus. We should recall that the Republic of Cyprus is a member state of the Union since May 1, 2004.

Given the relevant developments, what are the issues that the EU is facing?

1. It is essential to think about a new socioeconomic model which provides more opportunities to people and also reduces inequality between and within countries.
2. There is no doubt that an environmental policy is imperative. Nevertheless, given that the transition to the green economy entails a huge transaction cost it is essential to revisit how this will be promoted in the best possible way. Indeed, the hastiness to replace hydrocarbons without socially balancing acts may prove counter productive.
3. The EU should reassess the dilemma between deepening and widening. The answer to this dilemma depends on the priorities of the Union.
4. It is of utmost importance to think about a new European security architecture. Given that the geographical position of Russia cannot change, eventually this issue must be addressed accordingly.
5. Immigration is a complex issue and requires a comprehensive policy approach. At the same time, it is important for the EU to consider ways which would lead to the reduction of migrant flows. Indeed, peace, reconstruction and development in Africa and the Middle East would be major strategic steps in the right direction. The challenge for the EU is to find ways to contribute toward this desired outcome.
6. The EU has been facing issues relating to democratic deficits. It is essential that these are addressed effectively.
7. Last but not least, it is important that the EU pays particular attention to issues of public accountability and legitimization.

Indeed, the EU is at a crossroad. It must act in ways which reestablish its vitality and credibility internally and externally.

THE EU AT A CROSSROAD: MORE THAN A TYPICAL CLICHÉ



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Stating that the EU is at a crossroad sounds like a typical cliché. Since the inception of the European integration project, in the 1950s, Europe has moved against the odds. Only a few years before the Schuman Declaration (1950) and the conclusion of the foundation of the European Coal and Steel Community (1951) Europe was a war-torn place where human life and dignity meant very little. Back then, nobody could seriously guess that, one day, traditionally fortified European states would agree to yield sovereignty to an international institution that places human rights at the very core of its dominant ideology. In June 2024, Europe holds elections for the European Parliament, an EU body with decisive legislative powers. European peoples have been electing their representatives since 1979. For 45 years, the Europeans have been acting as a unified electorate, while maintaining their national identities and, of course, there is no sight of conflict among them, neither has been any since the end of World War II. Would anybody put her/his money on such a bet, back in 1945? Alternatively, is anybody willing to make such a bet for the Middle East, nowadays? Reasonably, every crisis that the EU faces looks like fatal, taking into account the fragility of this supranational enterprise, thus the frequent use of terms like “the EU at a crossroad” or “crucial elections”. Practically, the EU is constantly at a crossroad and this is more salient in election years. So far, the project has been resilient, probably because of this constant state of urgency, or because its operators have been learning from their mistakes. In fact, this is the very purpose and contribution of this volume: to keep us alert and to point to our mistakes.

The challenges are too many and complicated, so unavoidably this special publication cannot handle all of them. However, we are making a decent effort to touch upon some of them. I.e., the war in Ukraine. It is a war in Europe that threatens European stability in many ways. Among them, the return of perceptions of a looming Russian threat against Europe. At the same time, the war (and the way the EU deals with it) boosts anti-establishment perceptions that feed populist far-right movements throughout the Old Continent. The expected shift to the right across Europe in the upcoming elections for the European Parliament is probably a related symptom. Against

this backdrop, the potential return of D. Trump in the White House implies a murky future for Transatlantic unity, which has recently reached a new high as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In the economic realm, the long-lasting inflation trend seems to be reversing. However, the challenges are still very serious: de-industrialization in Europe is on the rise, largely due to aggressive decarbonization and other policies that de-prioritize economic profit in favor of public goods like the management of climate change and human rights. The EU has been a noble pioneer in these sectors, but in some cases the price is too high and it calls for re-balanced approaches. As economic power rapidly shifts away from the collective West, Europe could find itself critically weakened in the not-so-far future, deprived from valuable power sources at the global decision making level and unable to finance the human-centric policies that have generated its attractiveness and comparative advantages. Europe has no option but to establish an economic model that combines sustainable growth and competitiveness with the protection and further advancement of European values.

Migration flows constitute another issue of increasing centrality. This is not the first time in history that excessive migration flows are reaching Europe and, generally, liberal democracies. A consolidated culture of human rights protection, generous policies of financial support for refugees and the dream of a better life make millions of people in Africa and Asia willing to take the risk of using irregular migration routes, operated by ruthless traffickers and supported by excessively corrupted regimes and authorities. However, this time it is exacerbated by the rise of populist and anti-EU ideas, in conjunction with alarming demographic trends and all the damage that porous borders could inflict on states and local societies. At the same time, excessive migration and domestic perceptions of it offer Europe's neighboring "frenemies" valuable political leverage against Brussels, at the expense of common European interests.

Another challenge lying ahead is the upcoming enlargement. 2024 signifies the 20th anniversary of the biggest enlargement wave that added 10 new member states (plus another 2 in 2007), mainly from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet camp. The official narrative is often jubilant on its success. Indeed, the Big Bang Enlargement was a great achievement, in many different ways. However, there are also some grey areas that need to be accounted for. I.e., the upcoming addition of more member states well under the EU economic average. After 2004 (and 2007), the EU faced the unprecedented challenge of embedding all these former communist countries in the common European welfare, economic and monetary system while, at the same time, the already weak Southern EU economies were marching outside the Stability Pact lines and towards the cliff of the financial crisis that eventually erupted in 2008. At the same time, the accession of Cyprus added

one more challenge: for Cyprus (and Greece), the accession of the *de facto* divided (and partially occupied by Turkish troops) island state was a strategic triumph, because it offered Nicosia valuable diplomatic means to fight for the end of Turkish occupation and for the reunification of the island. However, to the rest of the EU (especially those member states that wish to enhance relations with Turkey) Cyprus' membership constitutes a constant trouble. In a similar vein, the debate regarding the future accession of Ukraine should take into account the possible implications for the EU, should Kyiv joins the Union prior to the settlement of its ongoing dispute with Russia, due to the latter's invasion and occupation of part the Ukrainian territory.

The articles that follow delve into these and other relevant issues. The In Depth editorial team hopes that this special issue will contribute towards a fruitful dialogue and wise decision-making.

THE RISE OF THE FAR RIGHT IN EUROPE



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Europe, as a political and economic entity, is undoubtedly one of the most interesting cases in political and economic history. This is because its most fundamental characteristic is the repetition of mistakes and bad practices, which repeatedly lead to wrong choices, by European leaderships. In the past, mistakes were attributed to Louis and Napoleon. But in modern democracies, who is responsible? The European citizens or the European leaders? And to what extent?

Let's start from the beginning. The stakes of this year's European elections are democracy and the rise of far-right parties. We constantly hear in public discourse about the negative impacts of the rise of the far right on democracy. However, we haven't heard any self-criticism, nor a whisper of the real causes that drive electoral behavior to the edges of political axis, since the neoliberal governments are so successful that they can't justify why citizens are giving to their vote characteristics of negative expression and protest. If someone believed that citizens turned out fascists or antidemocrats would be at least naïve. After all, such a thing would be impossible, since the majority of people are trained from a young age to be faithful to principles like freedom and democracy.

Without a doubt, Europe continues losing its orientation regarding integration. The stagnation in the economic and political sector is due to a lack of leadership and to the hypocritical stance of member states and their conditional adherence to the so-called "solidarity" as well. These two elements are fueling the rise of the far right and its establishment in the political system. Europe not only fails to maintain its role as a global power, but instead appears to be "dragged" into choices dictated by third countries or by necessity. Here are some points that support the above position.

1. Economic instability, inflation and unemployment along with the failure of traditional parties to address economic issues, have driven voters to seek for alternatives in the far-right wing. According to Eurostat, the Eurozone is in the midst of another recession, with almost zero economic growth. The constant excuse from European governments is

that the war in Ukraine is to blame. However, they fail to provide a convincing answer as to why the EU did not protect its energy independence. Moreover, why Germany restarted coal-fired power plants. Isn't that contradicting the green agenda and the so-called Green Deal? Why the use of renewable energy sources hasn't been prioritized since the past decade, or at least since Russia's intervention in Crimea in 2014? And if, according to European Parliament data, the EU turned to third countries like Saudi Arabia to balance its energy deficit, why is there still uncertainty in the energy sector, causing energy prices to rise? And due to current instability in the Middle East, what stance does the EU intend to take towards Israel and the Arab world? Unfortunately, short-sighted analyses, similar to those of the 2007 financial crisis, continue to be disconnected from reality yet still influence decision-making.

2. There is much discussion about the participation of European forces on the side of Ukraine. Concepts such as "global peace", genocide, and the unjust displacement of indigenous populations are prominently featured. Meanwhile, the genocide of Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh is underway with Turkey's blessings. In this case, the EU engagement is only in providing 500.000 euros in humanitarian aid. The Eurobarometer, in the security, defense, and external relations sector, makes a special mention of the EU's involvement in Ukraine but ignores the instability that prevails regionally.
3. Solidarity must be mutual and unconditional. It is still a question on why European partners pressure Greece, in the name of solidarity, to send vital and crucial military equipment to Ukraine, while at the same time Spain is equipping Turkey's war industry, which in turn bolsters the violations of Greek national airspace.
4. It's time to talk about the "elephant in the room". This "elephant" is the national interests that shape -or not- the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) as well as the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). So far, stagnation prevails due to the Franco-German opposition on security issues in Ukraine. This is clearly due to the misalignment of national priorities and interests of the countries. Ukraine is just one example. The deterioration of Greek-Turkish relations has never brought the need for unified defense cooperation to the forefront, as Ukraine has. As long as the neoliberal governments tend to ignore that the behavior of states is governed and determined by national interest and power, reality will continue to prove them wrong. But this requires self-criticism and the acknowledgment that must be a shift towards a more realistic framework of cooperation, without the cover of integration, solidarity, and other fairy tales.

In conclusion, if the mandate of European citizens is for less Europe, or a Europe à la carte, then the leaderships, if they respect popular sovereignty, should adopt policies that move away from integration unless there are other

forces or stakeholders who have special interests maintaining this narrative. If the benefits of European integration are not reaching its citizens, then Europe should search deeper than enhancing its communicative skills, since the problem seems to be fundamental, and the need for change becomes imperative. Referring to the words of Noam Chomsky, *"Nothing is inevitable—the future can be different. But you can't change things if you don't at least start to understand them"*.

A SHORT COMMENTARY ON THE FUNDAMENTAL EU GAPS AND THEIR POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES



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The current challenges EU faces because of “external shocks” (e.g. climate disasters in various regions as well as the wars in Ukraine and Palestine), provoke its institutional and structural deficiencies and enhance the existing gaps and disparities in various economic, social and political fields. Being, mainly, a geopolitical entity which is based more or less exclusively on common market and monetary rules but with no direct legitimation of its sovereign power to the “European citizens”, EU, very often, is presented in the public as a giant with thin legs.

Unfortunately this is a realistic point-of-view expressing the political disadvantages of EU authorities because of the well-established legacy of unanimity in all crucial issues apart from economics (market, financial and monetary rules). The doctrine of unanimity in major strategic decisions is not feasible to overcome in the projected future, unless the various national interests will become harmonized under the rubric of the common EU political identity legitimated in the popular and sovereign recognition of the common origin and fate of Europeans against the others (“barbarians”), that is the non-EU states and regions.

The last condition presupposes minimal regional and national disparities which is not the case and does not seem to be in the near future. An alternative scenario, for the enhancement of EU institutions’ effectiveness, is the materialization of a strong and generous redistribution mechanism in Brussels or in Frankfurt which is at the present, an utopia imagined only by the pro-European optimists.

The recurrent enlargements of the common market and other EU communities since their set up in the Treaty of Rome without tackling effectively the disparities added each time an enlargement took place, have created well embedded deficiencies which constrain any effort to strengthen cohesion and prosperity unless will be overcome the differences in development between the core and peripheral member states.

Those discrepancies are further deepened because of the war in Ukraine and Gaza which increase the cost for energy in EU countries as well as the globally retailed goods and trigger inflation and high rates of unemployment in several EU member states. Many basic goods are, nowadays, unaffordable for millions of EU citizens and the strict monetary and fiscal rules in the eurozone become, one more time, a strong loop in less developed member-states.

Additionally, the wars and the geopolitical conflicts surrounding Europe surge huge waves of irregular migrants and refugees whose cultures and worldviews are very different, from European traditional cultures and as a result xenophobia and chauvinism are increasing. Accordingly, euroscepticism and far-right populism are enlarged. Extreme right perceptions are fed by the reservoir of permanent unemployment and eternal austerity, established as an unchallenged creed in the Euro-area by ordoliberalism and are further reinforced by the waves of irregular migrants from Muslim countries, causing widespread anxiety and moral hazard in many European cities.

These sociopolitical streams add new constraints on the efforts to tackle domestic structural problems e.g. the ageing population, social inequalities, regional and national disequilibrium, migrant waves, delinquencies, non-sustainable communities in several regions, widespread impoverishment and so on.

The policy instruments created by European Authorities to face those challenges as well as the strategies decided to manage the above mentioned problems are, at the present, rudimentary and insufficient. The Next Generation EU, the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and National Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRPs) prioritize new investments in those green technologies that favors oligopolistic markets of very expensive to most citizens green products in the core European countries. At the same time, east and south European Peripheries transform into consumers of second hand green products (an official priority of Next Generation-EU) without safeguarding the withdrawal of polluting vehicles and other machineries used by poor people.

The green strategy in agriculture destroys rapidly the way of life of millions of small farmers and most of them are impoverishing and become depended producers from multinational retailers whilst the production of green food is controlled by agrifood conglomerates.

Research and Development (R&D) is concentrated in national firms in the core countries but mainly in foreign firms in east and south countries downgrading furthermore their national economies. In this framework, core European economies are transformed to high tech and green innovators and the peripheral nations to mass tourist economies depended on oligopolistic digital platforms. As a result, the high skilled and well paid jobs are gathered in the

core European countries and the low skills and precarious jobs in east and south.

Additionally, the expressed necessity for a common defense doctrine as it is materialized only in abstract goals for the achievement of common technical standards in armaments instead of a common defense force against possible enemies from non-EU states, favors the European (mainly French and German) war industry without safeguarding the national borders and strategic interests of the peripheral member states.

Under those circumstances, EU is configurated as a multipolar alliance instead of a cohered multinational democracy, composed by unevenly empowered clusters of nation-states which compete for the control of EU institutions and mechanisms.

Although, public opinion in EU member states is until nowadays resisting extreme ideological polarization, the wheezy European integration causes widespread anxiety in everyday life which feeds fears of personal safety and permits extreme right populists to exploit them electorally. In these circumstances, unless a generously financed redistribution mechanism will be created, the sooner the possible, the huge migrant waves, in combination with poverty and precarious lives of millions of European citizens, will expand chauvinism and xenophobia and will, also, empower the far-right political parties which will, possibly, become key players in the European Parliament and the European Council.

CONFRONTED WITH GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES: THE EUROPEAN UNION TO CAPITALISE ON ITS ASSETS AND CATALYSE REFORM OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM



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In the last few years, the EU seems to have entered a geopolitical stage; particularly two major events, the COVID pandemic and the Ukraine war, have reinforced this impression, not so much the 2019 claim about a 'geopolitical Commission'. The pandemic made everybody aware of the excessive dependence on a few suppliers of pharmaceuticals and medical equipment; more generally, it showed the vulnerability due to the disruption of supply chains and the need for re-/nearshoring of production; it gave rise to the concept of strategic autonomy. The Ukraine war and the subsequent sanctions exposed the high dependence on hydrocarbon imports from Russia, especially of Germany, prompting efforts for diversification of supplies and rapid deployment of renewables, as well as major developments in defence policy.¹

The notion of geopolitics is not unambiguous. The original meaning focuses on the role of geography in international politics; it can also refer to the strategic use of the military (as opposed to "geo-economics"), be a synonym for "power politics" (as opposed to rules in international politics) or capture a shift away from economic liberalism towards security considerations (Kundnani 2023). The various uses in journalism and in political debates, intentionally or not, blur the picture even further. Power politics and securitisation constitute major geopolitical challenges for the EU as an international actor.

The EU has long thrived in the rules-based multilateral order, while relying on the US for its security. These conditions no longer prevail; today's world is multipolar, but not multilateral, in the sense of being governed by rules

¹ In addition to EU military aid to Ukraine, the Commission proposed in March 2024 a European defence industrial strategy (EDIS) and a defence industry programme (EDIP). With the war in Ukraine the political focus has shifted from crisis management operations outside the EU to defending member states' territory in case of aggression. Defence policy will not be addressed in this article.

adhered to by all; the US is increasingly inward-looking and polarised, focusing externally on the challenge posed by China and expecting Europeans to look after their own security and their neighbourhood. Under these circumstances, the EU needs to defend its interests and protect its values relying primarily on its own resources. The EU has been widely open to international trade and has benefitted from it; by granting access to its large and potent internal market it was able to make its standards widely accepted ('Brussels effect'). Moreover, growing economic interdependence was expected to stabilise international relations and contribute to socio-economic development in other parts of the world. However, the recent trend towards 'weaponisation' of economic interdependence, where economic relations are instrumentalised for political purposes, including through threats, calls this EU approach into question. To counter this trend the EU has increasingly resorted to measures aimed at economic security, alongside other major players.

In a Joint Communication (European Commission 2023) a European Economic Security Strategy with three pillars was proposed: promoting the single market (competitiveness, resilience); protecting against risks (supply chains, critical infrastructure, technology security, economic coercion); partnering (trade agreements, rules-based economic order, multilateral institutions). Actions envisaged include: assessing risks of technologies; a structured dialogue with the private sector; a Strategic Technologies for Europe Platform; review the Foreign Direct Investment Screening Regulation; research and development of dual-use technologies; export control regulation on dual use items; security risks from outbound investments; improve research security. Key building blocks are: understanding the risks, diversification of exports and imports, targeted intervention in narrow sectors and ex-post measures to disincentivise coercion and minimise harm. (Chimits et al 2024)

The US and China have long-standing traditions of economic statecraft while economic security concerns in Japan and the EU are more recent. The US is reviving and repurposing Cold War tools for new challenges. China has shifted from a development-oriented economic policy to a security-oriented agenda, but regime security has remained a constant motivation. Japan seeks supply chain resilience and institutionalised economic security. The EU stands out with its institutional constraints as security remains a competence of member states. The lack of dedicated structures and shared risk assessments hinder the development of long-term thinking on external challenges. The single market is the main EU economic security asset both for fair competition and capacity mutualisation. The EU should draw inspiration from the Japanese concept of 'strategic indispensability' in critical technologies. (Fabry et al 2024)

Recent reports, prepared in view of the new legislature starting with the European elections in June, highlight current deficiencies and weaknesses of the single market and outline proposals for fully exploiting its potential. The Pelkmans report (2024) calls for implementation of the Services Directive (professional services, retail and construction) and for an action plan in rail freight, capital markets, banking services and energy; longer-term priority should be deepening the single market for telecommunications, spectrum frequencies, air traffic control and copyright. The Letta report (2024), in addition to the four freedoms (for goods, services, people, capital) suggests establishing a fifth freedom for knowledge and innovation, which drives future growth. The Draghi report on European competitiveness (2024) will highlight three areas: overcome fragmentation to realise economies of scale (defence, telecommunications, pharmaceuticals); provide public goods (climate action, defence, energy grids, super computing infrastructure); secure resources (critical raw materials and skilled workers); if needed, enhanced cooperation among a subset of member states in form of a 28th regime for the capital markets should be established, crucial for channelling the high private savings to finance the green and digital transitions.

An aspect which has attracted less attention is the international role of the single currency. As the euro turned 25, most analyses focused on the achievements, crises and lessons learned, and on reforms. However, for the EU to become a geopolitical actor, the global significance of the euro should be treated as a priority in efforts to strengthen the EU strategic autonomy. Main obstacles impeding the further internationalisation of the euro are the lack of a sovereign / state and the structural differences of the euro area member states. The international status of the euro can be improved by strengthening its role in the green transformation, by deepening and integrating the EU financial markets and by promoting the digital euro. The use as a reserve currency, as a means of accumulation and as a transaction currency determine the global role of a currency. The dollar will continue to hold a key place in the global economy as it fulfils most of the determinants of a leading currency, such as the rule of law, liquid and deep financial markets, currency convertibility, economic power and military strength of the issuer. The euro is the second most important currency after the US dollar, and this despite the fact that the euro crisis reduced the higher share reached in the first decade of its existence. It is important for the EU to achieve greater monetary autonomy and have its own payment infrastructure. Overall, further internationalisation of the euro would be beneficial for the highly developed euro area. Raising capital more cheaply would help stabilising public finances and enhance investment in the green and digital transformations. (Tokarski 2024)

The pandemic and the Ukraine war highlighted underlying trends in the international system. China has been increasingly contesting the US primacy; the BRICS and others are contesting the world order; Western dominance has

definitively ended (Borrell 2024a); middle powers tend to flexibly exploit opportunities, displaying a transactional, as opposed to a value-based approach, and avoiding long term commitments (Lippert, Mair 2024); the loss of credibility of main actors, in particular the US which was expected to guarantee a well-functioning world order, reinforced these trends.

Seen from the perspective of partners, there has been growing criticism of the EU (Balfour et al 2022); one reason is the politicisation of EU trade relations and development aid, referring to human rights, labour standards or environmental objectives. Measures related to these issues are often perceived as protectionist in the 'Global South', notwithstanding the fact that they are recognised at the UN level (sustainable development goals). The colonial past of European countries; alternative offers by other players (foremost China, but also Russia, Turkey) with no political conditionality attached; often uncritical aligning with US policies and double standards; these factors and the cumbersome EU system feed into criticism by partners. Recent EU legislation (deforestation-free Regulation, corporate sustainability due diligence Directive, the carbon border adjustment mechanism), grounded in the Green Deal, established autonomous trade measures strongly opposed by countries in the 'Global South', although they are not discriminatory; still, the EU must not lose sight of the overall effect on climate change. (Mavroidis, Sapir 2024)

The international system is in upheaval, the status quo is no longer viable. Fundamental changes are underway in the European and global order. For the EU it would be preferable to champion the drive for reforms commensurate with today's realities (Borrell 2024b) and more equitable in terms of international decision-making (Lehne 2024). There are many countries which would ally with the EU in such an effort as they would not like to see the international order either fragmenting further, which would frustrate their development plans, or being split in two competitive orders, which would reduce their freedom of action. For many reasons (its own historical experience, its internal non-monolithic structure and the absence of power temptations, combined with its large economic, financial, technological and cultural capital) the EU seems to be the ideal partner for many countries. Still, the EU must take the initiative and play a leading role in this effort. A precondition is, however, that the EU is clear about what it wants; a difficult question if there are internal divisions about the direction of change. The new order could be: cooperative or confrontational; liberal or protectionist; power- or rules-based; ideological or pragmatic. In my view, the best order for the EU would be cooperative, liberal, rules-based and pragmatic. These choices need to be transparently discussed and politically decided having the European interest and values as a guide; being explicit about the goals to be pursued is the basic requirement for an EU strategy.

The most fundamental question for the EU is whether the member states and the peoples constituting this continent-wide political entity want to be fully sovereign in their political choices. In the words of a German diplomat (Lübckemeier 2024): being able to look after its own security is what constitutes sovereignty; European sovereignty depends on the willingness and capacity of member states, jointly with EU institutions, to create European collective power; cost benefit analysis, common identity (values) and solidarity influence political will, while the effectiveness of power is limited by rule of law deficiencies.

The EU is, more than before, at a crossroad; business as usual is no longer an option (the EU is mortal, said recently President Macron); a radical change and the adoption of a classic geopolitical posture seems out of reach given institutional constraints and internal divisions. A realistic option would be to continue incremental adjustments to the new challenges, albeit with an accelerated rhythm. Such course risks to deceive many; yet, a pragmatic approach is preferable to inaction or to creating expectations which could not be fulfilled; the capability-expectations gap, a source of disappointment, would widen further. Being realistic about constraints does not imply not using existing possibilities or creating new ones. Actions in the areas of the single market and international trade to foster economic security offer good examples; strengthening the international role of the euro and creating an EU-wide capital market should be a priority. Recognising divergent interests among member states should not prevent from actively seeking common ground in order to overcome resistance to change. It is this combination of ambition and realism which made the EU what it is today; to project ambitious goals and patiently work to make them a reality is the European way to progress.

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ERDOGAN'S MIDDLE EASTERN POLICY: THE IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPE



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Hamas's October 7 attack against Israel has unleashed a wave of instability in the Middle East. Despite its NATO membership, Turkey has increasingly been involved in the conflict by supporting Hamas. Consequently, Ankara's relationship with the United States and Israel has been strained significantly. Since Turkey remains an EU candidate state, it is important to understand the ideological roots of Erdogan's Middle Eastern policy and the implications for Europe.

President Erdogan has promoted a new notion of nationalism that emphasizes Muslim identity as the defining element of Turkishness. Thus, the party has mostly drawn support from devout Sunni Muslims who were largely marginalized by the Kemalist regime for decades. This new majority shares conservative political values and feels closer to the Middle East rather than Europe. Not surprisingly, Turkish foreign policy has been influenced by Erdoğan's Islamo-nationalism.

For years, Turkey has pursued an assertive strategy towards its Middle Eastern neighbours. The Turkish military has been involved in conflicts in Syria and Iraq supposedly only to pursue Kurdish insurgents. While the Kurdish factor does weigh heavily in Ankara's calculations in the region, there is an ideological element that cannot be easily dismissed. Both Syria and Iraq are now failed states which used to be part of the Ottoman Empire. Erdoğan has coined the term "borders of our heart" to challenge the sanctity of existing borders in the region. It is also hardly a coincidence that Ankara has supported fellow Sunnis in Syria and Iraq which have always felt affinity to Turkey.

Furthermore, the AKP has attempted to export its own model of governance to other Muslim-majority countries. Following the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolutions, Erdoğan attempted to promote the AKP model in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt. Although his offer was perceived by many as interference in the domestic affairs of these countries, the Turkish leader has remained popular among the Arab public. He has developed a reputation of an honest and

straight-forward politician who supports Muslim causes. Since the 9/11 attacks, many Muslims in the region have come to the conclusion that the West has a hidden agenda against the Islamic world.

Against this background, Turkey has espoused a form of Turkish-sponsored pan-Islamism which has at its center the Palestinian Issue. During a meeting with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh on April 20, 2024, Erdoğan stated that:

“It is vital that Palestinians act with unity in this process. The strongest response to Israel and the path to victory lie in unity and integrity... Even if only I, Tayyip Erdogan, remain, I will continue as long as God gives me my life, to defend the Palestinian struggle and to be the voice of the oppressed Palestinian people”.

His emotional words indicated a deep personal commitment to supporting the Palestinian cause. The Turkish leader even tolerated the recent Iranian missile attack against Israel because he thought that it was “important to act in a way that keeps attention on Gaza”.

The level of Turkish support towards Hamas is open to speculation, however. It is a well-known fact that many Hamas leaders and operatives are based in Turkey, but they have kept a low profile since the start of the Gaza war. During a meeting with Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis in mid-May, Erdogan revealed that more 1,000 Hamas fighters have been treated in Turkish hospitals. At the same time, it is highly likely that the Turkish intelligence community has developed its own networks in the Palestinian diaspora communities in the Middle East.

On the other hand, most European governments support the Jewish State for geopolitical and ethical reasons. Although many Europeans are appalled by the suffering of the Palestinians in Gaza, Brussels cannot abandon Israel. Therefore, the new Palestinian Problem has widened the psychological chasm between Erdogan's Turkey and the European Union. While Turkey's candidacy has long been controversial, its support for Hamas cannot be easily ignored. Not only the Palestinian militant group is responsible for the killing of many innocent civilians but has also sabotaged the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians.

Due to geographical proximity and economic ties, the EU can no longer afford to underestimate the dramatic developments in the Middle East. Turkey's candidate status does not reflect anymore the reality of today's world. Turkey's foreign policy has become part of the problem rather than the solution in the Middle East.

WHAT STRATEGIC FUTURE FOR EUROPE?



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The question of the strategic future of European countries is an enduring question. It was first asked after the end of World War II. At this time, the question was to know how independent the new European governments would be from the American as they tried to establish puppet States. Europeans thought that the European construction could be a solution and a way forward towards strategic autonomy. With the European construction, it was thought that European countries will closely cooperate, even unite and from there would be able to be an important actor on the international scene. That has been partially true, at least economically. From a diplomatic and geopolitical point of view, this has not been the case.

European countries have been trapped in NATO, a political and military organization largely funded by the United States and that aims officially at protecting Europe from the Communist threat during the Cold war; while in practice, NATO is a tool of US geopolitics. Protection of NATO was perhaps useful during the Cold War but after the collapse of the USSR, what was the point to remain in such organization at the very moment the threat it was supposedly protecting from disappeared? Staying in NATO after 1989 was a strategic mistake. While NATO exists, there will never be a strategic autonomy for Europe. Why developing a European security model (within or outside of the EU) while there is already something?

Most of European countries members of NATO do not meet the requirement of spending 2% of GDP in their defense, or when they do, it is after taking into account pensions of retired military. As such, European countries, at the exception of France and of the United Kingdom, do not have an effective army. They have parts of an army but without coherence or without equipment in working conditions. Because of this, they rely heavily on NATO and more precisely on the United States for their protection. Subsiding defense to a third actor has the advantage of being able to concentrate on the economy, like Germany has done for many years (using the saved money as export subsidies). However, the downside when a country is buying military protection, it is also buying its protector foreign policy and geopolitics. The consequence is a loss of independence and sovereignty that can lead

countries to take decisions against their own interests to please their protector.

European countries were confronted to this choice in February 2022 when Russia launched its special military operation. European countries quickly adopted the US vision of the situation (the opportunity to test the resilience of its good old geopolitical rival) without question. They also immediately adopted the unilateral coercive measures (the so called “sanctions”) to please their protector. By doing so, they renounced to a cheap and reliable source of energy (Russian oil and gas) for a hypothetical reliable supply of US shist gaz. The US did not ask for this economic suicide but it serves one of their long-lasting geopolitical interests; transforming Europe into a US periphery and alternative market. That was already the objective of the Marshall plan: reconstructing Europe, yes, but first and foremost having an alternative market to take the pressure of the US domestic market that already had all the consumption goods. In his book, *The Grand Chessboard*, Brzezinski is very clear about how US governments were seeing Europe: “A larger Europe would increase the scope of American influence (...) Europe would eventually become one of the vital pillars of a large security and cooperation structure under American aegis (...) Western Europe remains to a large extent an American protectorate and its states are reminiscent of the vassals and tributaries of the old empires”.

The war in Ukraine is very profitable to the US. First, it increased the price of oil and gas and because of that the exploitation of shist gas in the US is finally acceptable, even more as European countries are ready to buy it instead of Russian natural gas, because that would be “moral”. Then, the war opened finally the eyes of European leaders and made them realize it was very unwise not to invest in their defense. The problem, and geopolitical mistake is that most of European countries have decided to acquire US military equipment and not European ones. Buying US military equipment does not give any independence as they contain double-key procedure that enables the US to disactivate the equipment if it is used without their authorization. France experienced this during its operations in Sahel with the Reaper drones it bought. Buying military equipment from the US endangers the future of European industry.

Strategic autonomy requires many elements: having an independent vision of the world, of opportunities and of threats. It requires also a strong defense industry to design and manufacture in complete independence equipment that corresponds to the country’s foreign policy. Finally, it requires also leaders to be courageous. Perhaps, the best thing that can happen to Europe is the election to Donald Trump. If Trump is elected and carries on the policy he started to implement: making European countries pay for the US protection through NATO or dismantling NATO if they don’t, will achieve to waken up European countries. If European countries finally manage to

achieve their geopolitical destiny: being a facilitator between the US, Russia and China, then they can thank both Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump for having forcing them to become an autonomous strategic actor.

HOW SHOULD THE EU HANDLE THE EXPECTED RISE OF FAR-RIGHT PARTIES IN THE UPCOMING EUROPEAN ELECTIONS



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The rising of far-right populist parties is becoming a popular story every five years, as Europe gets ready for another round of European Parliamentary elections. These parties stand to gain a great deal in the upcoming elections, most probably because of problems that the European Union is currently facing such as the high cost of living, refugee crises and immigration policies, the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, and the danger of terrorist attacks across Europe (Wax, 2024).

The forthcoming elections in Europe will be the first after the United Kingdom has left the bloc, the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the conflict in Gaza (Mudde, 2024). In light of these factors, it would be interesting to see the outcome of the elections.

Observing the current situation in EU Member States, it is clear that right-wing populist parties are becoming stronger at national level in several countries, including France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Cyprus, being part of the government in Sweden and Finland, as well as leading the government in Italy and Hungary (Riegert, 2024). This means that these parties will play a significant role in creating the political scene after the European elections.

Many researchers predict that in the forthcoming European elections in June, the far-right wing parties will gain more seats, while the left and green parties will lose the number of representatives they currently hold (Cunningham et al., 2024).

The far-right parties are likely to be the most successful and will enhance their political influence. According to Mudde (2024) despite their national success in many EU countries, they remain to be disregarded in the European Parliament. Nonetheless, predictions indicate that the right-wing populist European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and the far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) will collectively hold 25 percent of MEPs in the European Parliament (Cunningham et al., 2024).

Notably, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) members are considered to be more suitable at forming coalitions at the national level when compared to other far-right wing parties, so this may also apply in the European Parliament (Mudde, 2024). Moreover, Fidesz leader and Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orbán, has declared that his party will join the ECR, which might have a significant influence on forming coalitions in the European Parliament (Mudde, 2024).

Nonetheless, it is suggested the rise of right-wing populist parties should not necessarily be viewed as dangerous. Right wing and far-right wing views should be evaluated and included in the discussion, as they concern critical issues (e.g. immigration) and represent the views of a significant percentage of the population. The rise of such opinions and parties should be reviewed and addressed in public fora as this part of the population obviously is in clear disagreement with current policies and regulations.

It is crucial that far-right parties should be within the spectrum of legality, otherwise they should be rightly prosecuted as it happened with Golden Dawn in Greece. In fact, the Supreme Court of Greece recently determined that the far-right political party Spartans is an incarnation of the prohibited Golden Dawn. Therefore, it was decided not to allow them to run for seats in the European Parliament at the upcoming elections. The decision was made in response to increasing concerns among European Union member states about the rise of far-right parties across Europe (Kitsantonis, 2024).

It is important to remember that not all right-wing populist parties are radical. According to Greven (2016) it is evident that many right-wing populist parties in Europe could be extremist, however, simultaneously many parties demonstrate programmatic flexibility. What remains crucial among the different and opposing political positions, is to keep the dialogue open, strengthen democracy, make the process more transparent, and more participatory, while also safeguarding human rights, the rule of law and democratic values.

EUROPE FACING THE CONVULSIONS OF THE 21ST CENTURY



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The sequence is known. Even before the new European Commission took office, Ursula von der Leyen promised to the European Parliament on September 10, 2019: *'My Commission will be a geopolitical Commission'*. The slogan hit home. Everyone detected, with enthusiasm or anxiety, an ambition to project the European Union into a power policy. A few weeks later the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, causing a severe economic and social crisis. Then, in the middle of a string of devastating effects linked to global warming, Putin launched his Ukrainian war on February 24, 2022. Forcing Europeans to react. And to suffer a new economic crisis. The fourth since the start of the century. And while the convulsions were multiplying – coups in Burkina Faso (September 2022), Niger (July 2023) and Gabon (September 2023); war in Sudan (since April 2023), Azeri offensive on Nagorno-Karabakh (September 2023) – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict resumed, with a risk of regional extension and worsening.

In this context, which is also one of growing and protean contestation of the international order and Western domination, has the Commission truly become geopolitical? Does the European Union see itself as a power? Can it become a strategic player? This article attempts to answer these questions, starting with a brief analysis of the responses to this succession of crises.

To be geopolitical or to appear to be geopolitical?

'Widely perceived as a response to tougher international competition',¹ the concept of the *'Geopolitical Commission'* can to some extent be seen as a response to the vulnerability of the European Union to transatlantic tensions under the Trump administration and to the assertion of Chinese power. The idea is to take account of external developments and the interactions between the various EU internal policies and external relations. This means working less in silos and mobilising the instruments of internal policies and external

¹ Pierre Haroche, Irsem, Une Commission géopolitique? (8-2-2022), [nr-irsem-121-haroche-g-ocom.pdf](https://www.irsem.fr/IMG/pdf/nr-irsem-121-haroche-g-ocom.pdf)

cooperation to carry more weight on the international stage, taking security issues into account. Embodying this change, an External Coordination Group (EXCO), involving the European External Action Service, has been set up and now meets at both departmental and cabinet level. It helps to 'discipline' departments that might have been tempted to pursue their own external agenda and to involve Commissioners more widely in promoting the Commission's official positions beyond their own portfolios.²

To some extent, the effects of this geopolitical analysis, which is still very reactive, can be seen in the development from 2020 onwards of initiatives aimed at reducing dependence on critical raw materials, first in the pharmaceutical field, then in technological fields³, including semiconductors.⁴ The same applies to the instrument designed to protect against economic sanctions imposed by third countries, proposed by the Commission in 2021 and entered into force in December 2023.⁵

Ursula von der Leyen has also sought to personally embody this geopolitical dimension by, for example, making numerous trips to Kiev since April 2022. Without always taking into account the opinion of the Member States, as was the case when she travelled to Israel after the Hamas terrorist attack on 7 October 2023. Reactions forced her to backtrack. Furthermore, there have been some setbacks, with the Sofagate in 2021, and harsh criticism, on the occasion of the signing of the migration agreement with Tunisia in July 2023.

However, the development of this geopolitical dimension remains hampered by the desire of member states to pursue their own agendas, as demonstrated by the individual visits and agreements signed in Beijing. And this despite the weaknesses of one and the others in the face of the economic and geostrategic assertiveness of Chinese power. But it is also, and above all, the treaties that restrict the capacity of the Commission and its President, with the definition of foreign policy and defence remaining the prerogative of the Foreign Affairs Council and their implementation the prerogative of the EEAS under the authority of the High Representative.

A world of crises

The war in Ukraine has had a major impact on the European system. There has been a change of mindset on several fronts, even if it is neither unanimous nor uniform, with a loss of naivety about the ideas of perpetual peace and peacemaking trade, or even about the transatlantic security guarantees, in the context of the blocking of American aid to Ukraine and the

² Ibid.

³ [Strategic autonomy: Council gives its final approval on the critical raw materials act - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁴ [EUR-Lex - L:2023:229:TOC - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

⁵ [Regulation - 2023/2675 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)

prospect of Donald Trump's return to power. It has also made Europeans aware of their capability weaknesses, resulting in a widespread increase in defence spending, which by 2024 should reach or even exceed 2% of GDP almost everywhere, even if there are still some poor performers like Belgium.

Europeans have also provided, both at EU level through the European Peace Facility, and individually, military aid to Ukraine. If the total military aid provided by all the partners in the Contact Group (UDCG) reached 95 billion US dollars at the end of April 2024⁶, the EU member states combined participation is equivalent to that of the United States. But this aid remains bilateral or intergovernmental, against a background of divergences - the absence of participation by neutrals (Austria, Ireland), criticism and abstention by Hungary - and retains an incremental character which favours the reconstitution of Russian capabilities and the prolongation of the conflict.

While nothing has really moved in terms of European defence, which, according to the Treaty, should one day evolve into a common defence⁷, progress has been made at Community level, following initiatives developed by the services of Commissioner Thierry Breton. The ammunition and missile production support instrument (ASAP)⁸ was adopted in barely three months in 2023 and, even though it took more than a year, another instrument, EDIRPA⁹, was adopted to co-finance joint arms acquisitions from the general European budget. Finally, in March 2024, the Commission put forward an ambitious EDIS¹⁰ industrial strategy, accompanied by an EDIP¹¹ programme to support the defence industry.

However, the war in Ukraine also revealed (1) a lack of geopolitical culture and analysis, in particular through the inability to conceive and anticipate the Russian attack before 24 February 2022, (2) short-sightedness characterised by insufficient stocks of arms and munitions to cope with a high-intensity war¹² and (3) a total failure to conceive of the economic and strategic risks of energy and technological dependence at national level.

⁶ [Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and Air Force General Charles Q. Brown Jr., Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Hold A News Conference Following Virtual Meeting of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group > U.S. Department of Defense > Transcript](#)

⁷ Frédéric Mauro et Olivier Jehin, *Défendre l'Europe*, Nuvis, 2019

⁸ Olivier Jehin, <https://club.bruxelles2.eu/2024/03/decryptage-asap-513-millions-pour-accelerer-la-production-de-munitions-avec-un-accent-sur-les-poudres-et-explosifs/>

⁹ Olivier Jehin, <https://club.bruxelles2.eu/2023/05/fiche-memo-edirpa-linstrument-dacquisition-en-commun-pour-la-defense-europeenne/>

¹⁰ Olivier Jehin, <https://club.bruxelles2.eu/2024/03/decryptage-la-premiere-strategie-industrielle-de-defense-de-lue/>

¹¹ Olivier Jehin, <https://club.bruxelles2.eu/2024/03/decryptage-edip-un-programme-europeen-industriel-de-defense-multirole/>

¹² It could be argued that the United States is in a similar situation. This is true, particularly in terms of industrial capacity for the production of complex weapons systems and munitions.

In Africa, and more particularly in the Sahel, Russia has encouraged the development of anti-Western protest and harvested the ripe fruit of French anti-neocolonialism. The result has been the withdrawal of French and soon American troops, the closure of European missions and worsening instability. At this stage, the twenty-seven member states have not been able to come up with any concrete response to this new situation. For France, it means a total rethink of its force model, built on an essentially expeditionary logic.

The war in Gaza highlighted the inadequacy of European action in favour of a two-state solution, as well as divisions among member states. It is true that the Houthi attacks led to a reaction in the form of operation EUNAVFOR Aspides, aimed at securing maritime traffic in the Red Sea. But the Europeans remain helpless in the face of the risk of the conflict escalating and spreading. As Thomas Gomart rightly points out¹³, the Straits of Hormuz and Bab el Mandeb, as well as those of Bosphorus and Taiwan, are three crucial strategic nodes that are insufficiently taken into account when analysing risks and planning the resources needed to respond to them. In addition to their vital importance for maritime transport and communications (submarine cables), they are potential locks for the supply of hydrocarbons (Gulf), cereals (Bosphorus) and electronic components (Taiwan).

Last but not least, hybrid attacks (cyber, information manipulation, corruption with the succession of Qatargate, Russiagate and Chinagate) against a backdrop of economic and social crisis are encouraging the rise of extremes and populism in the run-up to the European elections in June, with potential effects at both national and European level. The American elections in November are another sword of Damocles, with risks both upstream and downstream, as Russia, China and other international players will not hesitate to take advantage of any potential opportunity: a weakened US executive, contestation of the result, riots, erratic behaviour by Donald Trump, isolationism and the purely transactional logic of a new Republican majority.

From geopolitics to geostrategy

Although, as we have just seen, progress has been made in taking certain geopolitical aspects into account, the analysis of opportunities, risks and threats is still inadequate. And we still have a long way to go to move from geopolitics to geostrategy. All the strategic thinking exercises, from Javier Solana's security strategy in 2003 to the Strategic Compass of 2022, are ultimately no more than more or less comprehensive catalogues of risks, with a few structural and capability guidelines subject to cosmetic changes. Just like the rapid deployment capability (EU RDC) introduced by the Compass in

But despite this, it maintains larger stockpiles and at the same time provides military support in Ukraine, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific.

¹³ Thomas Gomart, L'accélération de l'histoire, Tallandier, 2024.

a desperate attempt to build an instrument that could actually be used rather than just contemplating the showcase objects that have been the EU battlegroups.

But at this stage, a strategy worthy of the name, i.e. the development of a capacity planning strategy (the identification of civil and military capabilities and their development, acquisition, management, maintenance and operational readiness) to respond to different crisis scenarios, remains impossible in the absence of a truly effective political decision-making system and of a military chain of command, on the one hand, and of a clear identification of European strategic interests, on the other. This identification requires Europeans to become aware of themselves in order to form a community of destiny, a social body in its own right, as Hegel demonstrates.¹⁴ Only this awareness will enable them to adopt a power policy.

Mired in national logics inherited from the 19th century, Europeans, even if they are more or less consciously aware of their individual weaknesses, have a hard time convincing themselves of the need to unite and reform their institutions to make them federal and functional. As the former Belgian Prime Minister, Paul-Henri Spaak, once said: *'There are only two types of states in Europe: the small ones... and those that don't yet know they are small'*. This is today truer than ever. Let's hope member states realise this before it's too late. Time is running out. Other crises await us and the 21st century, marked by a prodigious acceleration of history, will do us no favours.

¹⁴ Hegel, *Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*.

THE FAR RIGHT THREAT IN THE FORTHCOMING EUROPEAN ELECTIONS



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The 2019 European elections marked a significant shift in voter turnout, which increased for the first time in 50 years. Across the EU, turnout reached nearly 51%—the highest since 1994. However, this rise in voter participation coincided with a shift towards populist parties and the far right. Polls for the upcoming European elections indicate that far-right parties of various nuances are expected to win around a quarter of the seats, thus increasing further their vote share and moving closer to the ‘chambers of power’. Amidst the strengthening of populist, far-right, anti-European, and xenophobic views, the upcoming European elections in June are therefore of crucial importance. It is noteworthy that in countries like Hungary, Finland and Italy, the far-right is already in government, while in others it is contesting elections with promising prospects, positioning itself as a significant force in shaping political developments, Cyprus included.

If the aforementioned prediction about their electoral rise holds true, it will significantly affect both the internal political dynamics of member states and the functioning of European institutions, which are already experiencing problems and face intense criticism. Far right parties’ capacity to shape the overall direction of Europe will be significantly enhanced compared to what was the case until today. They will have the power to veto crucial decisions inflicting serious negative consequences on issues such as immigration, LGBTQ+ and transgender rights, foreign policy, etc. For instance, we can expect stricter immigration policies and a further weakening of the European Green Deal. Additionally, there may be diminished support for protecting minority rights and sanctioning illiberal governments within the EU. Their influence on European policies is already evident. Italy’s Giorgia Meloni is taking a leading role in negotiations with North African countries on behalf of the EU.

Far right parties have long claimed an anti-establishment identity, irreducible to Left or Right. But their recent electoral advances and participation in government coalitions via their mainstreaming also relies on winning institutional figures to their camp. For example, the former chief executive

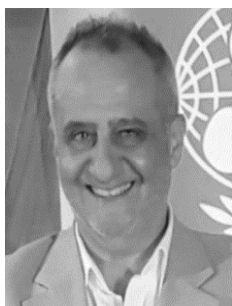
director of the EU border agency Frontex (from 2015 to 2022) is now a candidate for Le Pen's National Rally. Institutional figures embrace of far right parties illustrate a grim reality. Throughout recent decades, mainstream politicians have rallied voters by warning that far-right leaders like Le Pen would destroy the European project. Now, it seems that the supposed looming threat was already 'within the walls' and that the far right is changing the EU from within. The far right is no longer comprised solely of outsiders challenging established institutions. Instead, they have established a presence within European institutions and are leveraging their positions to welcome their allies into their ranks.

The once clear-cut divide between so-called 'Europeanists' and irresponsible 'populists' appears to be increasingly blurred, raising questions about the underlying dynamics. Are voters expressing discontent with the established European forces? Or is Europe inadvertently accommodating the far right? Perhaps the key lies in examining the circumstances facilitating the integration of far-right elements into mainstream institutions which has been extensively analyzed in scholarship. However, as Broder (2024) indicates it would be oversimplifying to equate 'mainstreaming' with 'moderation', suggesting a fixed European center to which all must adhere. Consider migration, for instance, where the mainstream has actually shifted towards more radical positions. What was once a contested agenda, focused on militarizing Fortress Europe, outsourcing border control, and allowing member states to determine 'safe' countries for deportations, is now widely accepted.

Consequently, there appears to be a convergence between center-right and far-right forces in European politics, with strides being made towards uniting various right-wing forces. Just as Italy has a longstanding coalition among Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, the Northern-regionalist Lega, and Meloni's party (referred to as the 'centre-right' pact in Italian media), there has been considerable speculation about the formation of a 'union of the various Rights' at the European level. Additionally, there is a strong likelihood that Von der Leyen will secure re-election as Commission president with support from parties within Meloni's ECR group—parties that were once considered beyond acceptance just a few years ago.

In summary, Mudde notes, the 2024 European elections are anticipated to follow the trend of the previous two elections, with an increase in members of the EP from right-wing Eurosceptic and far-right parties. However, in terms of political influence, these upcoming elections could mark a significant shift. It's conceivable that the EP may witness a right-wing majority for the first time ever. The manner in which this majority will navigate political alliances and cooperation remains uncertain. Considering the historical context of far-right dynamics within the EP, characterized by ideological and personal divisions, the formation of a far-right 'super group' appears improbable.

EUROPEAN UNION AND RESILIENCE: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES



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We examine the concept of resilience in the scientific discourse in general, as well as in the strategy of the European Union (EU) since 2016 and thereafter in the face of contemporary challenges it faces on the field: the potential re-election of Trump in the US, the questioning of the liberal international order with the rise of populism in view of the European elections, the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East, migration, green transition, and the EU enlargement. An analysis and outline of the future perspectives of the EU in response to these challenges are attempted based on resilience criteria.

The concept of resilience in general and within the EU

Resilience has gained significant traction in international politics in recent years. Scholars, influenced by Michel Foucault and governmentality (a combination of the terms "government" and "rationality" (Huff, 2020)), argue that resilience is a product of modern neoliberalism, a strategy that allows states to shirk their responsibilities in times of crisis.

However, there is also an approach that gives it broader significance in discussions of international relations, including securitization, vulnerability, resistance and political use, with the following five characteristics:

- 1) It is linked to global governance in the face of economic liberalism, globalization, and related reforms.
- 2) It has penetrated through the subfields of international development, humanitarian aid, and disaster reduction.
- 3) It appears in studies of terrorism and counterterrorism.
- 4) It appears through its relationship with neoliberalism, with some focusing on how communities, social groups, and nations maintain their well-being in the face of challenges.
- 5) The "golden mean," as Bourbeau (2015) says, is through the study of three interconnected propositions for resilience: a) it has a dark and a bright side, b) it is dependent, and c) it is socioeconomically a dynamic evolving process. (Bourbeau, 2015).

Supporters of critical theory ultimately consider resilience as a distinction between those capable and those called upon to respond to their responsibilities by accepting their vulnerability rather than demanding from society.

Crawford Stanley, a pioneer in resilience studies - initially for ecological issues - defined it as "a measure of the persistence of systems and of their ability to absorb change and disturbance and still maintain the same relationships between populations or state variables" (Lisnyak, 2015). Despite its conceptual uncertainty, resilience mainly concerns the measurement of capabilities (Hodicky J. et al., 2020).

According to Rose (2004) we emphasize inherent resilience (where the system withstands external influences) and adaptive resilience (where the system uses additional measures and efforts to recover) (Lisnyak, 2015).

According to the State and Societal Resilience to East and South included in the EU strategy adopted in 2016 "It is in the interests of our citizens to invest in the resilience of states and societies to the east stretching into Central Asia, and south down to Central Africa. Fragility beyond our borders threatens all our vital interests. By contrast, resilience – the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises – benefits us and countries in our surrounding regions, sowing the seeds for sustainable growth and vibrant societies. Together with its partners, the EU will therefore promote resilience in its surrounding regions. A resilient state is a secure state, and security is key for prosperity and democracy. But the reverse holds true as well. To ensure sustainable security, it is not only state institutions that we will support. Echoing the Sustainable Development Goals, resilience is a broader concept, encompassing all individuals and the whole of society. A resilient society featuring democracy, trust in institutions, and sustainable development lies at the heart of a resilient state" (EEAS, 2019).

Regarding the resilience of International Organizations (IOs), the relative analysis indicates that IOs with a broad and heterogeneous composition of their members are associated with greater organizational sustainability (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni, 2018). Additionally, the analysis of responses from officials of large organizations that successfully emerged from crises shows five characteristics of resilience: readiness through short- and long-term planning, adaptability/flexibility, collaboration within, trust between employees and leadership/shareholders/members, responsibility towards shareholders/members (Deloitte, 2021).

Challenges of the EU

The EU is facing serious challenges: In recent years, skepticism has arisen regarding the implementation of the 2016 European Global Strategy (which

is based on promoting resilience in the East and South) in a neighborhood increasingly threatened by governance collapse and violent conflicts. The literature notes the laxity of resilience and the contradictions of EU sectoral policies with the preferences of member states that hinder the EU's foreign policy. Thus, the idea of an "autonomy strategy" for the EU is gradually being introduced, which, however, entails risks such as unrealism and deviation from a creative and collaborative adoption of resilience with other partners (Bargues, 2021; EEAS, 2019; Mogherini 2019; Tocci, 2020). Additionally, due to the decline of multilateral relations especially since 2016, the EU seems unable to promote or decisively contribute to the successful reform of vital International Organizations (IOs) but only to defend some of them (Schuette, 2023).

The potential re-election of D. Trump in the USA has put the EU on alert due to his behavior, both in terms of rhetoric and practice.

For example, when the former President of the USA endanger the survival of NATO, the main pillar of European security, the Secretary General and the Alliance's bureaucracy utilized their institutional role, public statements, contacts, and influence with high-ranking officials within the US government to rescue the Alliance. NATO's successful response shows that amid the crisis of the international liberal order, large and powerful institutional IOs appear to be more resilient than feared, so that when their survival is at stake, institutional actors can repel such competitive attacks (Schuette, 2021a).

Another example is the successful response of the UNFCCC, the United Nations Secretariat overseeing the Paris Climate Agreement, which demonstrated resilience by leveraging the network of participating states and alliances with non-state actors when Trump attempted to delegitimize it by withdrawing from the Agreement.

Conversely, the World Trade Organization was jeopardized when Trump blocked the functioning of its key committee because it lacked the appropriate leadership and organizational structure (it had decentralized operation and fragmentation of member states) to formulate a strategic response. (Allworden, 2021; Dijkstra et al., 2021; Zaccaria, 2021)

A potential Trump re-election would lead to an anti-European, anti-NATO, and pro-Russian agenda. In the best case scenario, the USA would become like Erdogan's Turkey, a reluctant NATO partner, or in the worst case scenario, a strategic partner of Russia to draw it away from its relationship with China at the expense of an increasingly marginalized and divided -due to the strengthening of radical right-wing parties- Europe (Balfour & Lehne 2024; Heisburg, 2024).

Migration has become a major issue for the EU, which, from the softening of borders during its integration process, aligned with individual rights and therefore with the Liberal International Order (LIO), is now moving towards their reinforcement, which for many questions the EU's liberal credentials and distances it from a normative factor of the LIO. The search for a new balance towards more inclusive approaches, especially after the rise of the far right in Europe, would contribute to a more legitimate, inclusive, and just world order (Fassi et al., 2023).

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 caught the EU off guard, while sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines showed the extent of the hybrid consequences of the war, which on one hand urgently raised the need for disengagement from Russia, while on the other hand, it endangered the decarbonization strategy due to its economic impacts. The crisis showed that Europeans must remain united, as with the Covid-19 crisis. There are no national solutions to energy and the economy. Energy transition requires healthy economies and development that can only be fueled by a well-designed process of disengagement from fossil fuels. Two translations of resilience appear: Either transformation through crisis will prevail, or endurance of pain. In other words, Jean Monnet will defeat Vladimir Putin with Europe improving and strengthening its resilience on the path to its completion (Tozzi, 2022).

The war in Gaza has divided the EU, revealing serious weaknesses in its external policy both at the level of its leadership and among member states. It consumed a large part of its capital as soft power, irreparably in the future, while the conflict between Israel and Iran destabilizes the region more broadly, which is completely contrary to the interests and strategy of the EU, while simultaneously increasing the risk of terrorist reprisals on EU soil, with all that implies in terms of security deficits and the strongly emerging risk of a significant rise of the far right in the upcoming European elections (Scazzieri, 2023; Lynch, 2024).

The European Green Deal (EGD), that is, to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent, also poses a major challenge for the EU. This is because the EU will need to transform into a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy with zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 (at least 55% less by 2030), economic growth decoupled from resource use, and inclusive, leaving no person or region behind. However, it seems that the EGD is being challenged in areas such as energy consumption, its footprint, and greenhouse gas emissions from land use, which are in the red (European Commission, 2024; Yrjö-Koskinen, 2023).

The discussion about **EU enlargement** was rekindled after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This process becomes crucial for the Union from a geopolitical perspective and for the candidate countries, especially those

neighboring Russia, with Ukraine at the forefront. An appropriate adjustment of the EU's policy, which is the main tool of its foreign policy, is necessary. From 1999 to 2022 eight countries of the western Balkans and Turkey (but with frozen discussions) were declared candidate countries for EU accession. The challenges of enlargement are many: the economies of these countries are far below the European average, with significant development needs, weak armed forces, and large cultural and social differences, while some are directly threatened by Russia. Summarizing the challenges: speed vs. reliability, national interests vs. geopolitical and economic imperatives, heterogeneity vs. unity of purpose and institutional function, diversity of interests vs. ability to act decisively and coherently, preserving the union vs. dwindling support from citizens (Adam, 2023; Hughes, 2024; Stanicek et al., 2023).

Prospects of the EU in the face of challenges

A successful example where the EU responded correctly and effectively to a major external challenge that endangered its cohesion was the handling of Brexit and the negotiations accompanying it until reaching an agreement. In contrast to other crises such as the debt crisis or negotiations with Greece, where the EU proved inadequate, the establishment of Task Force 50, as it was named under the experienced Barnier, who conducted the negotiations organically and politically under the leadership of the Commission, had a catalytic effect (Schuette, 2021b).

It had been previously observed that when an organization demonstrates laxity during crises, such as the EU during the Eurozone crisis in 2015 and the World Health Organization in the 1990s, they can regain control if there are few obstacles within the organization and states have centralized monitoring mechanisms and reliable sanction systems, such as through budget restrictions within the UN (Heldt, 2017).

Based on the above, we observe that the EU possesses several resilience criteria that we have already mentioned, such as a broad and heterogeneous membership composition, readiness based on planning, size and institutional power, networking and alliances, and the ability of states to have monitoring mechanisms and sanction systems, but it lags behind in others.

Whether the former proves effective against the specific challenges we briefly mentioned requires further study. Furthermore, the feasibility of applying resilience criteria of other international organizations in the EU requires further investigation. A positive answer to this would allow us, based on the above theory, to be optimistic that the EU, with the appropriate adjustments, will possess all the conditions to meet the many and varied challenges towards a brighter future for its citizens and those of other countries worldwide.

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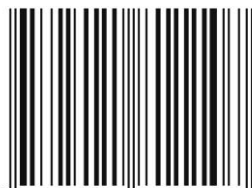
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