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WAR IN UKRAINE

THE EUROPEAN UNION EVOLVES AS PUTIN ATTACKS

Russia's military attack on Ukraine has prompted the European Union (EU) to turn a new page in foreign, security and defence policy. In addition to imposing unprecedented economic sanctions against Russia, the EU made a historic decision to provide Ukraine with lethal materiel. It is last-minute help from Ukraine's point of view, but for the EU, the decision will have long-term consequences.

Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine compromises not only the sovereignty of Ukraine but also the credibility of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The overt military attack that started on 24 February 2022 breaks international law and shakes the foundations of the European security order. The war threatens to undermine the EU's neighbourhood policy and global partnerships by raising the question of whether a partner of the EU can suddenly be forced back onto an authoritarian regime's political leash, undermining years of political development and association with the EU. Whilst the outcome of the war remains open, it has already changed the Union for good.

The momentum for change became evident during the second day of Russia's renewed aggression, as

the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine was encouraging the residents of Kyiv to prepare Molotov cocktails to defend the capital. The need for defence materiel in Ukraine fuelled a political debate across EU member states about arms deliveries to war zones. The regulation that prohibits arms trade with conflict zones would not apply, since Ukraine's acute need implied donations instead, but the risk of lethal materiel ending up in the hands of unintended stakeholders could not be ruled out.

Many EU countries, including Finland, Sweden, and Germany, took the decision to deliver weapons. Furthermore, initiated by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission (HR/VP), Josep Borrell, the EU decided to use

the European Peace Facility (EPF) to provide aid, including lethal materiel, to Ukraine's armed forces. The sizeable support, worth around half a billion euros, constitutes a significant and historic step in the EU's security agency, as it marks the first time that the Union has provided lethal materiel to a third party.

Until recently, the EU's policies have largely ignored Ukraine's fundamental security needs, reflecting the Union's significant inability to acknowledge and respond to the risk of Russian military aggression in the shared neighbourhood. EU-Ukraine cooperation has been limited to civilian matters and has focused on developing the country's resilience, a concept in EU foreign policy that originates from the Global Strategy and implies a focus on the ability to adapt

and recover. The resilience approach was originally adopted into Western security thinking because traditional defence and stabilization approaches seemed unsuited to modern-day risks, seen as ambiguous, complex, and happening in the future. In Ukraine, the EU has therefore supported state reforms and redrafting legislation, contributed to anti-corruption efforts and leveraged civil society, in addition to aiming to boost a sustainable and modern Ukrainian economy. For Ukraine, the cooperation has essentially been about aiming to meet the requirements for EU membership one day.

The resilience approach might be appropriate for the internal development needs in Ukraine, but the EU-Ukraine association has been weaker in terms of undermining the military threat stemming from Russia. Resilience thinking views threats as complex and ambiguous, and therefore focuses attention on strengthening the potential victim: it is the victim that needs to be rendered more flexible and better able to withstand and recover in the face of different shocks. The problem is that this shifts the responsibility for problem-solving away from international organizations (and their conflict resolution and response efforts) and the perpetrator (if prevention fails) onto the resilient subject. As a result, Ukraine needs to *resilire*. And so it has done, demonstrating remarkable resilience during the initial

days of the February attack, with its resistance duly encouraging the EU to develop as a partner.

Ukraine itself has pushed for closer cooperation with Western partners in the realm of hard security, which it has accomplished most closely with the US. Pursuing NATO membership is inscribed in its constitution. US President George W. Bush already suggested granting Ukraine NATO membership back in 2008, but Germany and France objected. After the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the start of the war in Donbas, Ukraine called for a peacekeeping mission in its territory, but was let down. Instead, monitoring missions were deployed, and the EU launched an advisory mission to support civilian security sector reform in the country, alongside the Commission and delegation activities.

The EU's strong response to the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine in February 2022 demonstrates the Union's (and its member states') ability to "develop through a crisis", with the rapid adoption of unprecedented economic sanctions, the closing of EU airspace to Russian planes, and the halting of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, accompanied by the historic decision to supply arms to Ukraine. Some commentators even consider the EU's response too aggressive, increasing the risk of nuclear arms being used. The desired effect of these measures might also come too late for Ukraine's dire emergency.

The outcome of the war in Ukraine remains open. It is already clear that the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy will be revised as a consequence, with the first steps to that end already taken. The fact that Vladimir Putin's Russia is ready to aggressively wield military power in the EU's immediate neighbourhood needs to be acknowledged, adding to the larger trend of a growing need for Europeans to take responsibility for security in Europe. This is not to say that the EU's values have lost their attractiveness, nor that the EU should forego its traditional role as the civilian power in peacebuilding and conflict prevention – on the contrary. However, defending its partners and its values also requires hard capabilities. Whether a civilian power or more than that, the EU is implementing its foreign policy in a context where military force is back on the table, and the Union needs to take this into account. The time for wishful thinking in the EU's foreign, security and neighbourhood policies is over. In the short term, the EU needs to respond to Ukraine's EU membership application. Even if the membership procedure cannot be amended, Ukraine deserves recognition. Opening the membership perspective would be a major decision for both Ukraine and the EU, irrespective of which the EU will need to update its enlargement strategy in due course. /