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## ONE YEAR SINCE RUSSIA INVADED UKRAINE



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**The Russian invasion of Ukraine has had a global impact: on the strategic competition between the United States and China, on global resource markets, as well as on Ukraine's own institution-building.**

**Russian aggression has made Ukraine stronger. Never before has the Ukrainian civic identity been more assertive and more widely shared.**

**The invasion and subsequent adoption of sanctions by the West have caused the sharpest global economic slowdown in almost 50 years, behind only the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2008 global financial crisis.**

**O**n February 24<sup>th</sup> 2022, the conflict in Ukraine became a war with global impact. The Russian army's rapid entry into eastern Ukraine also hastened the breakdown of what remained of the post-Cold War order in Europe. Security architecture paradigms have changed dramatically at both global and European levels. US-China strategic competition, global resource markets and even Ukraine's institutional construction have all been shaken by the war.

As the conflict continues to escalate on the ground, this CIDOB *Nota Internacional* analyses its impact in the geopolitical, economic, technological and migration fields. With no path to resolution in sight, the threat of a long war or a frozen conflict is the worst-case scenario for both Ukraine and Europe.

### **Ukraine and complex geopolitics**

**Pol Morillas, Director, CIDOB**

If *permacrisis* is the word that best **defines** the state of the world today, *complex* is probably the most fitting description of the geopolitical consequences of the war in Ukraine.

The West has coordinated its military aid to Ukraine and gradually raised the offensive capacity of its shipments. Meanwhile, Sweden and Finland's membership applications have reinvigorated NATO as a collective defence mechanism. Taboos have been broken – Germany has agreed to send Leopard II battle tanks and EU funds have been used to supply war materiel to a country in conflict. However, unity is not the only story in the Western bloc: cracks have formed in the transatlantic relationship due to strategic divisions over the future relationship with Russia, the scope of the aid to Ukraine and the United States' response in the form of the Inflation Reduction Act, while the 2024 American presidential elections loom.

Despite their pre-war declaration of "no limits" friendship, China and Russia have become an odd couple, and their present level of alignment might

be described as “rhetorical support, strategic caution”. Adding further complexity, middle powers like Turkey and India prefer to improve their regional status than systematically align with one side or the other.

The same is true at multilateral level. The inactivity of the United Nations Security Council contrasts with the General Assembly’s plural activism. The Security Council, where Russia retains veto power, has managed nothing more than a presidential **statement** expressing “deep concern about the maintenance of peace and security in Ukraine”. By contrast, the **General Assembly’s various resolutions** condemning Russia’s aggression and the illegal annexation of territories, suspending its membership of the Human Rights Council and demanding war reparations, show the plurality of views on the war in Ukraine that exist around the world. The number of votes backing the resolutions demonstrate broad rejection of the invasion, even as the world’s most populous countries and much of the Global South abstain.

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### **Resistance and nation-building in Ukraine: Putin’s defeat**

**Carmen Claudín, Associate Senior Researcher, CIDOB**

Russia’s aggression has strengthened Ukraine. Moscow sought to subdue the country and return it to the status of a formally independent state that is in practice subservient to Russia’s interests. But none of the results of the Putin regime’s neocolonial policy have been in the Kremlin’s interests.

Ukrainian society is paying an extremely high price for the right to make its own decisions and decide its own future, but its civic identity has never been more assertive or more widely shared. So not only has the *de-Ukrainisation* the Kremlin seeks to achieve via *de-nazification* failed, it has produced the exact opposite. Collective resistance has reinforced an identity that is inevitably being constructed, at least partially, *against* the aggressor, in other words against the Russians. This means that when the post-war period arrives, a key challenge for Russian society will be to convince Ukrainian citizens forged in this resistance (including those with Russophone roots) that some degree of friendship or at least coexistence can again flourish between them.

A study by a prestigious Ukrainian centre for the analysis of public opinion from October 2022 **indicates** that most Ukrainian citizens (56%) believe that Russians hold collective responsibility for the military aggression. Even among respondents who use Russian in everyday life, a relative but significant majority (47%) also believe that the war is the result of ordinary Russians’ actions – or the lack of them. Appreciation for the EU, on the other hand, has grown unceasingly: another survey, from January 2023, **shows** that 84% of Ukrainians trust the EU more than all other international organisations and associations.

The way out of the war remains uncertain, but Vladimir Putin is already the surest architect of the process of Ukrainian national and institutional construction that began in 2014.

### **War as a catalyst for the third largest economic slowdown in 50 years**

**Víctor Burguete, Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB**

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent adoption of sanctions by the West caused the sharpest global economic slowdown in almost 50 years, behind only the COVID-19 pandemic

and the 2008 global financial crisis. War, inflation, monetary tightening and fears of recession brought the worst year in the history of financial markets, followed by forecasts that 2023 would bring the third-weakest economic growth since the technology bubble at the start of the century. Fortunately, the worst growth forecasts seem unlikely to come true, in part because the mild winter has meant energy rationing has been avoided in Europe.

The war’s impact also ranks third in terms of inflation. At global level, the price index saw the third-fastest rise since the 1980s and reached the very high rates that occurred that decade. This brought a strong reaction from central banks and the end of over a decade of cheap money. As excess liquidity evaporates from the system, governments, companies and citizens will start feeling the effects. Higher mortgage repayments are the first and clearest sign of the new status quo.

Tighter budgets will mean Western countries allocate a greater share of income to energy spending and to meeting their new commitments, which include: a) supporting industrial policy to promote strategic autonomy; b) increased defence spending; and c) economic and military aid to Ukraine. European states will also need to decide how to contribute to managing the debt crises emerging countries seem likely to face or whether, on the other hand, to leave other global players to take the initiative.

In this context of stretched resources and greater commitments, governments will find it increasingly hard to keep the economic policy dilemmas stemming from the war in Ukraine out of the public debate. That 2024 is an election year in the United States is potentially decisive for the future of the war.

## More defence for Ukraine – and the EU

Pol Bargaés, Research Fellow, CIDOB

Twelve long months of war have catalysed EU defence. Member states' military investment has reached **record highs**, while opportunities are being explored for **cooperation on arms**, munitions and modernising Europe's armies. And while Ukraine's rearmament is mainly coordinated through NATO, the EU has contributed military assistance in the form of lethal weapons and equipment, as well as the European Union Military Assistance Mission (**EUMAM**), which will train and reinforce Ukraine's armed forces.

How long will Europe's military support for Ukraine last? "[As] long as necessary, until Ukraine prevails", **wrote** Josep Borrell, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. But the EU's determination is not enough, according to **analysts and critics**. The voices that dominate the public debate on European involvement focus less on humanitarian wrongs and the risks of prolonging the conflict than on the supposed sluggishness or poor coordination of the EU's response. Acknowledging this, European leaders continually appeal for more to be done faster and with better coordination. Borrell demands the same from member states: "We should not just spend **more on defence** but better. And this means cooperate more. To continue supporting Ukraine; to address present needs; and to start preparing for the future".

The road to the future is via a "European" war. The head of European diplomacy says that the "**challenging**" environment established by Moscow means that Ukraine's allies are right to increase their military aid and even provide battle tanks. For the time being, no alternatives to escalation are visible on Europe's horizon. Further dark anniversaries await.

## China: an impossible balancing act?

Inés Arco Escriche, Research Fellow, CIDOB

After a year-long balancing act, China continues to walk the tightrope. It has avoided condemning the Russian invasion, refrains from recognising the independence

and illegal annexation of Crimea, Luhansk and Donetsk – with an eye on Taiwan – and has also expressed support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. It may have deepened its strategic and **economic** relationship with Russia, but its endorsements have remained within the bounds of the international sanctions and, to date, have not brought any demonstrable military support – despite **six Chinese entities'** alleged involvement in the conflict. China's official discourse has repeated Russian narratives and disinformation, taking the opportunity to suggest that its geopolitical rival, the US/NATO, caused the war. However, following Russian setbacks on the battlefield President Xi Jinping did not hesitate to **state** his "questions and concerns" to his Russian counterpart, or his **opposition** to the use of nuclear weapons.

These concerns are multiple and multidimensional. The Ukraine war is seen through the prism of the geopolitical competition with the United States, in which Russia is a key partner from which Beijing would struggle to separate itself. On the other hand, China is aware that it depends economically and technologically upon the West for its

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development. This ambivalent position has tarnished the Asian giant's image – except in parts of the **Global South** with similar views of the conflict – and further fractured its relationship with Europe; the transatlantic alliance is stronger, while the debates about decoupling grow. The war and the sanctions have also disrupted the Eurasian Belt and Road trade routes running to Europe through Russia and Belarus, of which Ukraine was meant to form part. Meanwhile, the war's impact on supply chains and prices place unwanted pressure on a Chinese economy facing a post-pandemic recovery in a hostile international environment.

But what really concerns China is international attention being drawn to Taiwan and the parallels with Ukraine. The US has increased support to Taipei, with the sale of a **new** arms package agreed, while the economic sanctions and the example of Ukrainian civil resistance show the problems with reunification by force. There can be no doubt that Ukraine has affected China's calculations and strategy on Taiwan.

## The digital front: propaganda and technological competition

Carme Colomina, Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB

Technology platforms have become strategic players in the Ukraine war. They are a new techno-economic

power in a conflict whose digital front has been directly impacted by a global transformation. The lines dividing conventional military force from disruptive technological capabilities are increasingly blurred. Silicon Valley giants like Microsoft and Amazon Web Services have provided cloud services, technological support and intelligence data to the Ukrainian government to combat cyber-attacks. Elon Musk's Starlink satellite internet terminals formed the "**communication backbone** of Ukraine, especially at the front lines", the magnate posted on Twitter. But Space X, which is responsible for putting the satellites into orbit, has now decided to impose restrictions on their use for military purposes – such as controlling drones or giving the location of Russian troops.

Meanwhile, thousands of hacktivists around the world have engaged in digital disruption campaigns to hack Russian media outlets and interfere with the Kremlin's online disinformation strategies, thereby also blurring the lines between civilian and military actors.

Social networks have transformed the way war can be narrated, experienced and understood. In the early

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stages of the invasion – before the digital censorship curtain imposed by the Kremlin – Telegram's audience suddenly grew by 66%. Research by Forbes.ru shows that the messaging network founded by Pavel Durov grew from 25 million users in January 2022 to 41.5 million in July 2022. Meanwhile, a study by the **Stanford Internet Observatory** showed the connection between the narratives being pushed by Russian state media and pseudo-media propaganda spread via unattributed Telegram channels.

Ukraine and President Zelensky's communication skills seem to have conquered Twitter, while Tik Tok has become the social network of the frontline, with videos of skirmishes and battles mixed in with choreographies by Ukrainian soldiers. Such displays of weaponry and camaraderie have a clear motivational purpose. But the conflict going viral also means a huge amount of potentially useful data is being generated on war crime accountability – for when the time comes.

## **MENA: the reconfiguration of the regional order accelerates**

**Moussa Bourekba, Research Fellow, CIDOB**

The war in Ukraine has hit the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) both economically and politically. Economically, higher food prices have exposed the extent to which several of the region's countries depend on Russia and Ukraine for agricultural and energy resources. In Sudan, Egypt, Lebanon and Libya – where Russian and Ukrainian wheat make up 60–90% of total imports – food insecurity has increased. At the same time, higher fuel prices have worsened inflation in countries already facing double-digit rises (Egypt, Turkey and Iran) – or worse (Lebanon). Given the correlation between food prices and the 2011 Arab uprisings, some governments in the area fear that the present situation will generate more social discontent and political instability (food riots), especially in extremely vulnerable countries like Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen, where wars are piling up along with severe political and economic instability.

But the effects of the war have not been negative for everyone. Hydrocarbon-exporting countries like Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Qatar have benefited from higher energy prices to fill state coffers and buy social peace. This period of economic boom – even if temporary – has also allowed them to establish themselves as alternatives to Russian gas and oil for the EU.

Politically, not all MENA region countries have joined the West's total condemnation of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This is largely because Russia maintains a network of economic, political and military relations with various regimes in the area. But it is not the only reason. It also is also a sign that the reconfiguration of the regional order – shaped by US decline and the rise of regional and extra-regional players – is prompting some leaders to use the rivalry between Moscow and Washington to express their discontent with the White House and diversify their alliances.

## **A turning point for European migration and asylum policy?**

**Francesco Pasetti, Research Fellow, CIDOB**

The war in Ukraine presents the EU with the biggest refugee crisis in its history. In one year, over **8 million** people from the country have sought protection in

another European state. EU institutions have reacted in an extraordinary way to this unprecedented challenge.

On March 4<sup>th</sup> 2022, the Temporary Protection Directive (2001/55/EC) was activated for the first time since publication in 2001. From that day on, people who had fled the Russian invasion could count on immediate protection throughout the EU – meaning automatic access to residence permits, a suite of basic rights and services (work, housing, health, education, social assistance), and the possibility of “choosing” in which member state to receive this protection. This regulatory change has been accompanied by equally significant advances in terms of coordination, resources and executive tools deployed for its implementation.

In just over a week, something that had seemed impossible for years was achieved: a rapid, effective and coordinated response in the field of asylum and refuge. Previously, European migration policy had only proven itself capable of finding shared and effective solutions when it came to securitising external borders and reducing entry flows, but never in terms of protection and reception.

Europe’s response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis has thus shown that alternative asylum and refuge solutions based on solidarity and rights guarantees for those in need of protection are possible. On the one hand this leads us to ask **why these solutions were not used before with other groups of refugees** and, on the other, **if it will be possible to apply them in future to all foreigners in need of protection**. In other words, is this a significant change, but one that is exceptional and limited to the Ukrainian context, or is it a major turning point in European migration and asylum policy?

Subsequent decisions taken within the EU framework on migration, such as the recent agreements on **border defence infrastructure**, suggest that it is more likely the former.

## The war’s urban dimension

**Agustí Fernández de Losada, Senior Research Fellow and Director of the Global Cities Programme, CIDOB**

Ukraine’s cities have become the main target of Russian military attacks. Devastated streets and buildings in Kyiv, Kherson, Mariupol, Odesa and Kharkiv have, like Baghdad and Aleppo before, become the images of a conflict with a strong urban dimension. Russian missiles seek to destroy key headquarters and infrastructure and paralyse the country’s economic,

social and political activity – but also to decimate local resistance and undermine public spirit. The efforts to cut the country’s main cities off from water and energy supplies are a good example of this. Another is the reported kidnapping of over 50 mayors and local leaders to date. Mayors symbolise the capacity for organisation, self-protection and leadership of the resistance. Especially significant is the case of Ihor Kolykhaiev, mayor of Kharkiv, who was arrested after refusing to collaborate with the Kremlin-imposed administration post-occupation and whose whereabouts have been unknown for months, even though the city has since been retaken by Ukrainian forces.

Faced with this reality, international municipalism, especially European, has mobilised to provide support: denouncing the aggression, reinforcing sanctions, cutting relations with Russian cities and demanding a peaceful and immediate resolution to the conflict. But it has also moved into the realm of the practical by sending direct aid in the form of financial and

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material resources. Examples include hundreds of electric generators supplied within the framework of the “Generators for Hope” campaign run by Eurocities and the European Parliament, and the ambulances, fire trucks and cranes provided by Hamburg, Barcelona and Poznań.

This support nevertheless remains complementary to that given by the large national and international operators. Its added value is that coordination via networks of relationships woven over decades facilitates surgical impact on local realities. While modest in capacity, it is showing its relevance and will be key when tackling the reconstruction.