

291
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THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE AND THE DAY AFTER THE WAR: a view from southern Europe

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Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine has shifted the European Union’s centre eastward – at least in security terms. But the risks of the war extend beyond the merely military, a fact that is sometimes overlooked as the discussion focuses on how to achieve victory in battle.

Southern European perspectives could enrich the debate by widening and deepening European security and including economic and social aspects. Reflections on these broader aspects of the invasion should not lead to European unity on Ukraine breaking, but aspire to complement and add value to the discussions about the responses to the war and, particularly, its aftermath.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has shocked Europe. In the words of former German Minister for Foreign Affairs, Joschka Fischer, “the Russian invasion of Ukraine not only ended a long period of peace in Europe but also the European security order on which

peace depended”. President Macron spoke of a turning point for Europe, while Chancellor Scholz claimed: “We are living through a watershed era. And that means that the world afterwards will no longer be the same as the world before”. The war, now over 16 months old, and the realisation that the end is not near, has presented Europe with two central questions: first, whether a Ukrainian victory should be pursued until total Russian defeat, regardless of humanitarian and socio-economic costs; and second, what the implications are for the new security architecture in Europe the day after the war. The latter demands consideration be given to Europe’s economic and energy vulnerabilities, its military capabilities, and to rethinking Europe’s relationship with other powers and regions, for example, by strengthening the partnerships with the Global South and constructively navigating the US–China rivalry.

The EU’s centre has been shifting eastward for an obvious reason – Russia’s imperialist ambitions pose an existential security threat. Nevertheless, southern perspectives are also important if European security is to be considered in a broader sense that includes economic and social aspects. Such reflections should not lead to European unity on Ukraine breaking, but aspire to complement and add value to the discussions about the responses to the war and, particularly, its aftermath.

Led by CIDOB, six southern European think tanks met to assess the role of southern member states in European integration and foreign affairs. Last year, the conclusions of this **joint** reflection on the EU's integration agenda after the pandemic demonstrated how a southern perspective can enrich European debates and strengthen the EU. It has been the duty of southern European member states to take an active role in shaping the EU agenda with a purposeful attitude. This joint publication by CIDOB, ELIAMEP, IAI, IFRI, IPRI and Elcano Royal Institute offers a necessary reflection for the complex days to come.

The EU's unconditional support to Ukraine should also be enhanced with some reflections on what victory means and what comes the day after the war.

Why southern Europe?

Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine has threatened the EU, European values and the security of the European continent. Ukraine, the EU and the West face a revisionist power, as Russia under Putin aims to eliminate Ukraine as a nation, to alter the European security architecture and undermine the rules-based global order. The response to this aggression has been unprecedented. For the first time, the EU has devoted funds to sustaining a war effort and has so far imposed ten rounds of sanctions (the 11th is under discussion). European unity responding to the aggression is worthy of mention, especially considering how sanctions have taken a toll on the path to socio-economic recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The narratives central, eastern and Baltic European member states have promoted over recent years and their scepticism about Russia as a reliable partner have proved premonitory. For many years, they warned of Russia's revisionist intentions. They argued that the responses to Russia's invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014 would not deter it from further aggression. They also claimed that interdependence with Russia via cheap energy and energy infrastructure, as encouraged by Germany, would end up being a liability.

Precisely because their warnings have been premonitory, their perspectives have come to dominate current debates on how to achieve military victory. While this is crucial, southern European member states feel that the war has broader implications for the EU and that it is therefore important to set about envisaging the future architecture of European security, including economic and social aspects that go beyond the war.

Southern European member states' contributions to the debate are important because they can conceive Europe–Russia relations with the geographical and conceptual distance that comes from not having Russia as an immediate neighbour and having never perceived it as a direct threat to their existence. This should complement European perspectives on the war and its aftermath that have had greater influence on policy thinking and action. But it does not mean complacency. Since the war began, southern European member states have defied the perception that Russia is a second-order security priority for them: the record shows the extent of their material and political contributions to the Ukrainian war effort. So far, southern European member states have sent aid worth €3.72 billion (financial, military and humanitarian) individually, without counting what they have channelled through the EU. Prime ministers Costa, Sánchez and Meloni

(like her predecessor Draghi), and presidents Macron and Sakellariopoulou have all paid visits to Kyiv, where they made statements of political support that have translated into aid channelled bilaterally and through the EU, joining the coalitions to send heavy weaponry and continuing to back and implement the sanctions on Russia.

This unconditional support should also be enhanced with some reflections on what victory means and what comes the day after the war. In Europe, the focus has shifted from supporting Ukraine's defence against the invasion to assisting until victory is assured. It is a shift that has been led by eastern European countries, who have been particularly adamant about the need for total military victory over Russia. In Poland, for example, 41% of people prioritise total Russian defeat. Yet, non-eastern European member states have other views on how to move forward. In Italy (52%) and Germany (49%) the public leans towards stopping the war, according to an **ECFR survey**. Europeans agree that it is necessary to contain Russia and pursue a Ukrainian victory, but there is no consensus on what victory means in practice.

Thinking about the practical implications of victory is an important exercise for discussing its effects and broaching questions that require a delicate balancing act. Is the West willing to support Ukraine for as long as it takes to recover all of its territory, including Crimea? Is Ukrainian victory possible without enabling the country's leadership to take revenge on defeated Russian forces and people? Could a prolonged war and a gradual exhaustion of both warring sides bring even more instability to the region? The southern perspective encourages European leaders to reflect on the implications of victory and the effects of providing sustained economic and military support to Ukraine.

European leaders insist that Ukrainians should be the ones to define the terms of victory, but the war can only be sustained as long as Western financial and material aid keeps flowing. Support has been provided using national budgets and material member states already held. Will the common position from EU member states and aid be sustained over a long period of time if the war drags on and both sides refuse to cease hostilities? Other emergencies may require attention. There is a risk that member states need to prioritise national needs and emergencies. The debate therefore needs to move on from solidarity with Ukraine – as necessary as that is – and towards joint mechanisms of support and investment that can also be sustained with European resources.

Thinking about the aftermath of the war

Military considerations must form a key part of the next phase of European integration, but they are not the only factor in Europe's security. The war should, thus, also be related to broader debates on how to achieve greater European strategic autonomy. At least four policy areas should be considered vis-à-vis the war in Ukraine and its aftermath: 1) building economic and energy resilience to address EU vulnerabilities; 2) integrating EU and member state military capabilities; 3) rethinking the overall role of the EU regarding the Global South; and 4) navigating the US–China rivalry. In these areas, southern European member states have unique perspectives that can enrich the discussions beyond the Ukraine–Russia war.

Economic and energy governance: addressing the EU's vulnerabilities

To continue supporting the Ukrainian war effort militarily and financially, as well addressing the crises to come, the ways to address energy, industrial and economic vulnerabilities should be given greater consideration. Investment and reform are needed in the energy, industrial and fiscal policy areas. This will allow the EU to be energetically sustainable, economically competitive and to secure investment.

In the field of energy, southern European member states should make the case for sustainable economic and social guarantees when implementing the EU's targets for the energy transition and the measures in the "Fit for 55 package". On industrial policy, the goal should be to preserve the integrity of the internal market. To that end, southern European member states should aim to limit the relaxation of the state aid rules as far as possible (in both scope and timing), while demanding European solutions that improve the competitiveness of European economies.

Finally, reforming the Stability and Growth Pact is the cornerstone of enabling investment. The reform should support the definition of a new framework that, while maintaining the necessary budgetary discipline, allows fiscal room at both national and European level. This is essential for member states to finance investments in the energy and digital transitions and any other field such as renewing military equipment. In any case, the Stability and Growth Pact should not constrain the needed investments. Building on these reforms, the EU will enhance its strategic autonomy and meet the targets and undertake the digital and green transitions set by the European Union in agreement with member states.

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The military capabilities of Europe and its member states

Member states have been supplying military aid to Ukraine by transferring equipment from their national stocks. They have consequently increased (or promised to increase) their defence budgets in order to reinforce their military capabilities and re-stock their equipment, adding pressure to national budgets. Moreover, while the main focus has been towards the east, other risks and threats loom in the southern neighbourhood which require urgent civilian and military action.

One of the main goals should be to develop more and better defence capabilities and advance on European integration in the field of defence. Rather than just increasing spending, what matters most is to spend wisely, coherently and in an integrated fashion. When it becomes necessary to increase military spending and re-stock equipment, this should be done smartly, potentially collaborating with other European member states to avoid duplication and increase efficiency. Considering how constrained national budgets have been in the EU since the pandemic – especially in southern European member states – increasing the military budget at the expense of other spending could be met with discontent.

The security of Europeans cannot be limited to discussions about how to counter Russian foreign policy. As NATO and the EU have long recognised, the stability of the "southern neighbourhood" is paramount to security for Europe and the transatlantic alliance. War, authoritarianism, human rights abuses, terrorism, socioeconomic injustice and other instability risks in the southern neighbourhood should be just as important. As these are not only military threats, they require a broader strategy that includes diverse instruments. As

southern Europeans have shown support for eastern security concerns, eastern Europeans should also perceive the south as an integral part of European security. The EU should lead responses to both eastern and southern crises in an integrated way.

The EU's global role: relations with the Global South

The reaction of Global South countries to the war in Ukraine confirms the difference in perceptions of the West and other international actors. Even if Russia's actions constitute a violation of the principles of international law (and thus of the international order), Russia, China and part of the Global South are united by scepticism and occasional opposition and resentment towards the West and so-called Western values. For many in the Global South, European (and US) support for Ukraine is driven more by the desire to protect Western hegemony than protecting Ukraine's territorial integrity and democracy. The fact that the West has not always respected the international order, multilateralism and liberal values only reinforces the relative indifference of the Global South to the war and reveals how Moscow's

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(and Beijing's) narratives have spread.

Countries in the Global South see international affairs differently from those in the North not because they have no values or follow different ones, but because of domestic geopolitical calculations. Global South countries may side with Europeans on some issues but not on others. Even though they agree that Russia has violated international law by invading its neighbour, they prefer to maintain good relations with Moscow – this is currently the case for, among others, South Africa, Brazil, Indonesia, Pakistan and India.

The EU would be well advised to treat these and other comparable countries as new powers that are contributing to a multipolar world order rather than as weak states needing to be dragged onto “the right side of history”. Europe must do more to convince the Global South to support Ukraine and to sanction and hold Russia accountable, and it is neither effective nor wise to do so by constructing a simplistic dichotomy of democracies vs autocracies that may reinforce the narrative of the West against the rest. The war in Ukraine has fostered cohesion in the “West” but it has also reinforced the narratives Russia and China often

emphasise about the dividing line between “the West” and “the rest”.

In this regard, southern European countries have an important dual role to play. On the one hand, as members of NATO and the EU, they should influence these organisations and convince their allies and partners to pay more attention to the Global South, given the importance of understanding their perspectives, needs and the role they can play in the international system. This will foster legitimacy to help counter Russian and Chinese narratives, explaining that what it is at stake in this conflict is Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, as much as a rules-based international order. Given their historical and special relations with many countries and organisations in Latin America, Africa and Asia, southern European member states can make a leading and decisive contribution by showing the countries and peoples of the Global South (both democracies and autocracies) that indifference and “neutrality” must not equate the aggressor with the victim.

Navigating the US–China Rivalry

Today the US–China relationship is one of structural rivalry, and the EU is caught in an uncomfortable bind. The EU is riven by two divides: one separates those who would like the EU to take a harder stance on China from those who see it as a necessary partner; the other divides those who want to move away from the US in order to develop more autonomous decision-making capacity from those who prefer to follow Washington's lead. Within all camps there are nuances that vary with each particular policy area.

Southern European countries approach these divides with a constructive ambivalence. They see China as a partner in cooperation and negotiation, although one to be engaged with caution. There is no southern European equivalent of China's 16+1 forum for eastern Europe (although southern states Greece and Croatia are part of the 16), but instances of cooperation do exist. Italy has signed a memorandum of understanding with Beijing and joined the group of partner countries in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2018, although Prime Minister Meloni is now hinting at withdrawing from the initiative. Portugal and Greece have also joined the BRI and Chinese investment in strategic infrastructure such as Energias de Portugal and the Port of Piraeus provided welcome foreign investment at times when it was scarce. Spain is similarly interested in securing Chinese investment and maintaining a constructive relationship with Beijing, as Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's recent visit made clear.

The southern European perspective also emphasises the need to strengthen both EU–US cooperation and the EU’s strategic autonomy. Recently, the EU–US Trade and Technology Council was established to settle commercial disputes such as the one currently caused by the Inflation Reduction Act. Yet, in foreign policy some southern European member states would like to construct a position that is more independent from that of the US. France is the most vocal advocate of this, as embodied in its Strategic Autonomy agenda. The other southern European member states are unlikely to support an agenda of strategic autonomy that is seen to sideline or antagonise the US. While not fully sharing France’s conception of strategic autonomy, southern European member states see great value in defining an international role for the EU vis-à-vis other great powers.

What southern countries share is a sense of urgency regarding the need for the EU to become strategically autonomous in the fields of technology, clean energy, the international role of the euro, and public goods such as healthcare. This shared strategic goal should be central if the EU is to become more capable of surviving and operating in a world driven by geopolitical rivalry. The succession of crises the EU has experienced since 2020 requires Europeans to push for a more ambitious shared agenda to navigate the US–China rivalry.

Conclusion

Since the invasion of Ukraine, the debate over the EU’s response and its strategic considerations has largely been dominated by eastern, central and Baltic states. But, as this joint reflection demonstrates, the southern European point of view adds value to the debate. Southern European member states have shown commitment to the security concerns of their eastern allies and have been very vocal about the importance of preserving European unity. The southern European viewpoint also raises additional strategic questions that may have been overlooked in the context of the war, but are equally vital for the European Union’s future.

In this regard, southern European member states recognise that security in Europe extends beyond the military realm. It includes an internal dimension that takes in socioeconomic considerations and an external dimension that tackles the global role of the European Union.

With regards to the internal, it is imperative to address economic and energy vulnerabilities in order to enhance the EU’s resilience during the digital and green transition. To achieve this, socioeconomic concerns must be considered when implementing the measures outlined in the “Fit for 55” initiative. This entails making the EU more competitive, while safeguarding the integrity of the internal market and ensuring that reforms to the Stability and Growth Pact do not hinder necessary investments.

Socioeconomic considerations also connect to military capabilities. Increasing military spending should be done smartly, potentially in collaboration with other European member states to avoid duplication (also to avoid duplication with NATO). Europeanising integration in the field of defence could prevent contestation and avoid some pressure on national budgets. The EU should also

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give the threats looming in the southern neighbourhood the attention they deserve and understand that tackling them is a duty for all member states and that these threats will not be solved militarily.

Externally, the relations established with the Global South and the EU’s position on the China–US rivalry will be important for the global role of the EU in the aftermath of the war. Relations with the Global South should be rethought in order to treat Global South countries as powers that are contributing to the world order and avoid simple dichotomies such as democracies and autocracies. Understanding the needs and perspectives of these countries will help establish the necessary legitimacy for the EU to counter Russian and Chinese narratives. Finally, while recognising the US as Europe’s closest ally, southern European member states tend to take a more moderate, constructive and less confrontational stance on China. Additionally, southern European member states agree that in order to navigate increasing geopolitical rivalries the EU should have a stronger voice in global affairs that can be independent from the ups and downs of the US–China rivalry.

By incorporating these considerations from southern European member states, the EU can foster a more comprehensive and robust strategy for the war’s aftermath and the challenges that lie ahead.