


**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, ARTS AND HUMANITIES**

**DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY, POLITICS AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES**

# EUROPE AND THE 2022 RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE - A PARADIGM SHIFT FOR TRANSATLANTIC SECURITY ?

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**JANUARY 2023**




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**This thesis was submitted for distance acquisition of a postgraduate degree in International Relations, Strategy and Security at Neapolis University**

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*Sebastian Berger*

*19th of January 2023*

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**Abstract**

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine has uprooted the fundamental principles of the transatlantic security order and forced the transatlantic community and its institutions into collective action. Vladimir Putin's blatant disregard for the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Ukraine has prompted a need to re-assess the state of Europe's security architecture, transatlantic security arrangements and the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in guaranteeing peace and stability in the transatlantic region. This dissertation focuses on exploring the transatlantic community's response to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine by analyzing the historic and geopolitical context as well as the implemented measures and posture changes of its key institutions; NATO and the European Union (EU). The argument set forth underlines the significance of the events we currently see unfolding in Ukraine, with both NATO and the EU acting decisively under a remarkable degree of cohesion and unity to confront the Russian threat. Security and defense are back at the heart of the political discourse and agenda, leading to monumental policy changes in many European countries and the reinvigoration of NATO's importance in safeguarding the security of its member states. Over the course of the first two chapters, this thesis provides a solid theoretical and historical foundation of the most important milestones and building blocks crucial to the transatlantic security order as well as Russia's relationship with the transatlantic community and its institutions. It utilizes a broad range of primary sources contrasted with a substantial amount of scholarly work originating in the disciplines of international relations, political science and international law. The subsequent chapter thoroughly examines the NATO response to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, performing a structured analysis of key policy documents such as the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept and relevant summit declarations preceding the Madrid gathering. The pool of data was furthermore extended by a semi-structured expert interview with an official of NATO's public-diplomacy division based in the Brussels headquarters.

**Keywords**

Transatlantic Security, European Security, Russia, Ukraine, NATO, EU

# 1. Introduction

On the 24th of February 2022, the Russian Federation launched a full-scale invasion against Ukraine. The repressed carols of interstate-war are sounding conspicuously across the lands of a continent home to so many political leaders, strategic analysts and distinguished scholars, of whom only a few truly fathomed the imminent danger of outright kinetic military action emanating from the Russian Federation. The progressive buildup of more than 200.000 Russian combat troops along the Russian and Belarusian border with Ukraine throughout 2021 represented a clear indication that Vladimir Putin was raising the stakes for his bet to acquire Western "security guarantees" that would have uprooted the fundamental principles of the European security order. When the invasion commenced nevertheless, it took many European actors by shocking surprise. Russia's illegal war of aggression represents the largest armed conflict in Europe since World War II. Putin's blatant disregard for the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Ukraine has prompted a need to fundamentally re-assess the state of Europe's security architecture, transatlantic security arrangements and the role of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in guaranteeing peace and stability in the transatlantic region. The research interest at the center of this investigation focuses on exploring the transatlantic community's response to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine by analyzing the historic and geopolitical context as well as the implemented measures and posture changes of its key institutions; NATO and the European Union (EU). The argument set forth underlines the significance of the events we currently see unfolding in Ukraine, with both NATO and the EU acting decisively under a remarkable degree of cohesion and unity to confront the Russian threat. Security and defense are back at the heart of the political discourse and agenda, leading to monumental policy changes in many European countries and the reinvigoration of NATO's importance in safeguarding the security of its member states. The dissertation proclaims that the norms and principles of the transatlantic security order as set out by the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris, the Budapest Memorandum and the NATO-Russia Founding Act have been irreversibly violated by the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, making it necessary for the EU and its partners to adapt their strategies and measures to a new reality on the continent. A reality in which Europe's powerful neighbor in the East does not see itself restricted by international law or multilateral treaties but rather follows a zero-sum logic of strategic competition using

conventional, hybrid and cyberwarfare alongside the frequent expression of nuclear threats in pursuit of attaining geopolitical interests. However, instead of pushing back against the perceived threat of NATO moving closer to Russia's borders by means of further eastward expansion, Moscow has made a most compelling case for the unique kind of protection that at this point in time only NATO is able to offer to European nations through effective deterrence by denial and punishment. Which is to a large extent ensured by the capabilities of the United States (US), positioning the US back at the center of European security and defense politics.

Over the course of the first two chapters, this thesis provides a solid theoretical and historical foundation of the fundamental milestones and building blocks crucial to the transatlantic security order as well as Russia's relationship with the transatlantic security community and its institutions. It utilizes a broad range of primary sources contrasted with a substantial amount of scholarly work originating in the disciplines of international relations, political science and international law. The subsequent chapter will thoroughly examine the NATO response to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, performing a structured analysis of key policy documents such as the 2022 NATO Strategic Concept and relevant summit declarations preceding the Madrid gathering. The pool of data was furthermore extended by a semi-structured expert interview with an official of NATO's public-diplomacy division based in the Brussels headquarters, who has also been actively engaged in the development of the Strategic Concept in an advisory role to the Policy Planning Unit located in NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's office. The interviewed expert (hereafter referred to as "NATO Official") requested not to be named in the paper but agreed to the interview being recorded and transcribed to aid the quality of the analysis and ensure transparency for the thesis supervisor and other reviewers. In addition, the inquiry draws on the latest public data and academic publications concerning the economic and political ramifications of the ongoing conflict in contemporary Europe. This allows for substantiated conclusions concerning the transatlantic community's response to the war while also providing fertile grounds for interpretations that regard the macro-impact and potential long-term consequences on Euro-Atlantic security. Abbreviatedly expressed, the transatlantic security order hereby represents the dependent variable while the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine acts as the independent variable. Considering the evolving nature of the research subject, there are certainly natural limitations to the explanatory and predictive power of the findings. As the examination of relevant articles written by leading scholars in the field of

international relations and security studies has shown, many outstanding political theorists did not assess the scenario of a full scale invasion of Ukraine as even remotely likely. In a similar vein it is very difficult to provide a serious prognosis about the future course of the conflict since there are too many unpredictable variables outside the scope of a meaningful assessment. However, looking at the scarce academic literature available thus far and the extraordinary importance of this conflict for the discipline of international relations, European and security studies, this thesis aspires to make a valuable contribution to the discourse by presenting a close-up caption from a 2022 vantage point which stands to be corrected in due course when the fog of war has dissipated and the rules of transatlantic security are being rewritten by the victors.

# 2. Transatlantic security in the 20th century: From bipolarity to US hegemony

## 2.1 The UN Security Council and NATO

With Europe in shatters after two devastating World Wars that inflicted death and destruction across the globe, the victorious major powers; the United States (US), the Soviet Union (USSR), the United Kingdom (UK) and the Republic of China sponsored the 1945 United Nations (UN) Conference on International Organisation, otherwise known as the San Francisco Conference. Committed to constructing a post World War international order that would serve as an effective bulwark against future conflicts, the partaking nations agreed on a process leading to the adoption of the UN Charter and with it, the foundation of the United Nations and its subsidiary organs. The fundamental principles of this new international order as set out by the UN Charter comprise the promotion of human rights alongside an unwavering commitment to respect the national sovereignty and territorial integrity of member states and therefore the adherence to abstain from use of threat and force to gain territory (United Nations, 1945, p. 3). The UN Security Council, with its five permanent members, which also all happen to be nuclear armed countries (France, UK, US, Soviet Union/Russia, Republic of China) and initially six, by now ten, non-permanent member states, emerged as the primary institution of international law responsible for maintaining global peace and security (United Nations, 1945, p. 7). Within the realm of its powers lies the creation of peacekeeping missions, the adoption of sanctions and the authorisation of military measures (United Nations, 1945, p. 10). Article 27.3 of the UN Charter

however sets out an effective veto power on Security Council resolutions by any of the permanent members, effectively rendering the institution paralyzed whenever a disagreement between the great powers arises (United Nations, 1945, p. 7). In the 77 years since the creation of the UN, the Security Council veto has been frequently made use of by permanent members, with the USSR/Russia topping the list, invoking its veto 122 times, closely followed by the US which blocked a total of 82 resolutions (United Nations, 2022). Suffering from this inherent flaw per design, it quickly became evident that the the UN Security Council would not be suited to curtail the expansionist tendencies of the Soviet Union. When Czechoslovakia, Eastern Europe's last democracy in the post-war world, fell victim to an USSR backed, communist Coup D'Etat in 1948, countries of the the Western Union came to the conclusion that only a common defense alliance ensuring mutual assistance against outside threats could strategically shield them from Soviet aggression and destabilization attempts (Palubniskas, 2022, p.18).

The North Atlantic Treaty which is also known as the Washington Treaty, was signed shortly after on the 4th of April 1949 by its twelve founding members; Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States (NATO, 1949). The North Atlantic Treaty Organization emerged in parallel to the immense amount of economic aid disbursed through Western Europe by the US to finance the continent's recovery through the Marshall Plan Initiative (Grayson, 1949, p. 242). In its essence, NATO was formed as an alliance to contain and deter imperial ambitions of the USSR, representing a united front against coercion and providing effective security for its member states. The kind of security that could not be provided through the UN Security Council, which back then and similarly today, remains incapacitated by vetoes when decisive, collective action of the international community would matter most for global peace and stability (Palubniskas, 2022, p. 20). Even though Article 5 of the Washington Treaty refers to the right to individual and collective self-defense as set out by the UN Charter Article 52, Article 7 of the North Atlantic Treaty affirms the primacy of the Security Council in matters of international security, underlining that the treaty does not affect the rights and obligations of UN member states to adhere to the UN Charter (NATO, 1949, p. 2). While it has evidently drawn a clear demarcation line in the middle of Europe, separating the West and the US's sphere of influence from the Soviet lands and the Warsaw Pact states, NATO has proven to be an extremely effective alliance, capable of deterring armed aggression against its member states throughout the entire duration of

the Cold War and beyond. At the core of its success lies undoubtedly the extension of American military might over allied states in Europe, which to a certain degree have grown dependent on the US protectorate to effectively guarantee their security. The US in exchange has gained and maintained tremendous influence in Europe through NATO, ensuring that the region remains a stable environment for US trade and investments but also securing enormous geopolitical power given their vast access to military infrastructure and intelligence across the continent (Menon & Ruger, 2020, p. 373).

### 2.2 Norms and principles of transatlantic security

The foundations of the transatlantic security order were agreed upon in the first half of the 1970s, when Canada, the US and 33 European nations, including the Soviet Union under the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev engaged in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, a centerpiece of the détente process leading to the adoption of the Helsinki Accords also known as the Helsinki Final Act (Kaldor, 2022, p. 2). Despite not holding the status of a legally binding agreement, the Helsinki Accords set out a series of principles to govern European security, enshrining national sovereignty and self-determination of people, territorial integrity and the inviolability of borders alongside a commitment to fundamental freedoms and human rights (Helsinki Final Act, 1975, pp. 4-6). The Accords furthermore consecrated ambitions to implement confidence-building measures, enhanced security dialogue and disarmament as well as the aspiration to intensify cooperation in the fields of trade, industry, transport, technological advancement and education (Helsinki Final Act, 1975, pp. 10-56). Almost 15 years later, following four decades of Cold War order defined by bipolarity and power balancing between the US and the USSR, a series of mostly peaceful revolutions swept through Eastern Bloc countries in 1989. These uprisings expelled communist governments and ultimately led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, an event that Vladimir Putin would later refer to as the "greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century" (Putin, 2005). Another hallmark agreement crucial to the security of the Euro-Atlantic region was signed by 31 European countries, the US, Canada and Michael Gorbachov for the USSR in France (Charter of Paris, 1990). The principles of the charter subscribed the signatories to more comprehensive security cooperation, democracy and the rule of law, with members of NATO and the Warsaw Pact affirming to no longer perceive each other as adversaries but instead seek collective security

through collaboration and transparency, leading to a significant reduction of US and Russian tactical nuclear weapons (Richter ,2022, p. 4).

### 2.3 Post Cold War evolution of transatlantic security: Russia and the West in a unipolar world

In the years succeeding the collapse of the USSR, Western countries directed billions of dollars in medical aid and food supplies towards Russia and the emerging post-Soviet states while also undertaking strong efforts to integrate them into the global economy and the institutions of the international system, hoping that lasting peace could be achieved through democratization and international cooperation (Palubniskas, 2022, p. 20). The dissolution of the Soviet Union marked a historic paradigm shift in international power relations, allowing the US and its conception of a liberal international order to rise towards hegemony for almost two decades before its decay commenced with the outset of the economic crisis in 2007/2008 (Mankoff, 2022, p. 131; Fukuyama, 2021). For scholars of international relations it was clear that Russia's grand strategy hardly followed any different aim than restoring its great power status and securing dominance within its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet and wider Eurasian region. An objective that given its significant natural resources, conventional and nuclear capabilities as well as its community of skilled scientists "should be regarded as given" (Fakiolas & Fakiolas, 2004, p. 385). However, the demise of the USSR has left Russia in a deep economic and political crisis, resulting in a pronounced divergence between its self-perceived great power status and its factual means to retain it (Fakiolas & Fakiolas, 2004, p. 398). With the USSR out of the picture and the former Warsaw Pact states comparably free to choose their own destiny, it did not take long for a vivid discourse to develop, essentially centered around the question of whether or not NATO should be enlarged by welcoming neighboring countries from the East. Given the traumatic experience that many of the former Warsaw Pact nations had made in their time under communist rule it should not be surprising that effective protection from a potentially revanchist and in due time re-emerging powerful Russian Federation, by means of being under the umbrella of NATO radiated a strong appeal on these countries. In the Western world, heated debates revolving around the costs and benefits of extending the Alliance took place with leading political figures such as Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski arguing in favor of enlargement, fearing the potential disintegration of NATO if the opportunity was missed

(Kissinger, 1994; Brzezinski, 1994). In contrast, important strategic thinkers such as George Kennan issued stark warnings against accepting any new members from the Eastern Bloc (Kennan, 1997). President Clinton's defense secretary William Perry also argued against a fast-paced NATO expansion, cautioning that it would severely damage the prospects of meaningful relationships with Russia in the future (Perry, 2015, p. 127). Overall there was a clear understanding and well known narrative, that NATO eastward expansion could have severe repercussions on the security architecture of the European continent. The Russian leadership vocalized its objections clearly and on multiple occasions, however the balance of power between Russia and the US in the aftermath of 1991 was significantly tilted towards the latter, leading to a green light from President Clinton's administration to proceed with accession talks (Menon & Ruger, 2020, p. 376).

Following a five year process that was kicked off at the NATO 1994 Brussels summit where NATO country leaders reaffirmed their commitment to Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty (often referred to as the open door policy), they effectively invited democracies from the East to join the Alliance. Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic subsequently attained the status of NATO membership in 1999 (NATO, 1999). The second wave of NATO enlargement took place in 2004 sparking similar contempt from Russia when the Alliance was extended through the accession of the Baltic states alongside Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia (NATO, 2004). Despite growing dissatisfaction over the continuous convergence of NATO towards the borders of the Russian Federation, NATO and Russia created formal diplomatic channels for engagement through the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council (PJC). The PJC was established as a platform for consultation and cooperation through the NATO-Russia Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security signed in 1997 (NATO, 1997) and later replaced by the NATO-Russia Council established through the 2002 Rome Declaration on "NATO-Russia Relation: a new Quality" (NATO, 2002) as well as the Partnership for Peace Programme. Menon & Ruger however argue that Russia's involvement through these means of collaboration at best amounted to a "scant recompense for NATO's advance toward its borders" (Menon & Ruger, 2020, p. 381). The Russian leadership was also largely dissatisfied with the expanding dominance of the liberal international order as the "only surviving system" modeled after the normative preferences of the United States and its allies, encompassing the promotion of democracy and globalization which frequently led to developments perceived by Russia as

Western operations aimed at fomenting regime change abroad (Sawka, 2020, p. 340). While Russia was hoping for mutual transformation in the post-Cold War order, it became clear that the logic of US dominion in Europe would follow the expansion of its normative framework and power system embodied by the EU and NATO (Mearsheimer, 2022, p. 8).

# 3. Russia and the West in the 21st century

### 3.1 Putin's Russia emerges from convalescence

The relationship between Russia and the West started to significantly deteriorate from the year 2003 & 2004 onwards with the outset of so-called "color revolutions" sweeping through the streets of Tbilisi (Rose Revolution) and Kyiv (Orange Revolution) (Mankoff, 2022, p. 140). These civil society-led protest movements were both successful in removing Russian backed leaders from power, with Mikhail Saakashvilli replacing Eduard Shervardnadze as President of Georgia and Viktor Yushechenko defeating Viktor Yanukovych in the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections. When both the new government in Georgia and Ukraine then swiftly moved to promoting the possibility of NATO membership for their countries, the Russian leadership started to make out public European and US support over the developments as an indication of Western hybrid warfare against its interest in the near abroad (Muradov, 2022, p. 169). At the same time Russia underwent a significant internal transformation under the reign of Vladimir Putin who implemented a wide range of domestic political and economic as well as foreign policy reforms. Executive power was centralized in the hands of the presidency by hollowing out checks and balances and rewriting the fundamental pillars of the political system and the Russian economy. Externally Moscow forged stronger relations with the EU and China by means of energy diplomacy that would present Russia as a trustworthy partner capable of meeting the resource needs of its Western and Eastern periphery through the supply of comparatively cheap natural gas and crude oil (Fakiolas, 2012, p. 160). A strategy that proved to be outstandingly successful not only in economic terms but also when it comes to Putin's ability to yield tremendous power over Western nations which grew heavily dependent on Russian energy imports, with the EU in 2020 retreiving 41 % of its natural gas and 25.7 % of its crude oil supplies from the Russian Federation (Eurostat, 2020). The degree of dependence on Russian energy varies greatly within the European Union, with Lithuania (96.1%), Slovakia (57.3%) and

Hungary (54,2%) topping the charts in terms of natural gas imports, closely followed by the EU's largest economy Germany, that bought 38.4 % of its gas supplies vital for the German industry from Russia (Eurostat, 2020).

While Europe's dependence on cheap Russian gas and oil grew steadily in the first two decades of the 21st century, so did Vladmimir Putin's discontent over the geopolitical developments on the continent, especially the prospects of NATO moving even closer to its border. In his frequently cited speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, Putin referred to debates on further NATO enlargement as "a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust" (The Kremlin, 2007). He also used the opportunity to speak out strongly against the concept of a unipolar world in which there is "only one master", evidently referring to the global dominance of the United States and making clear in unmistakable terms his dissatisfaction with the geopolitical status quo. Andrew Doris and Thomas Graham alongside many other distinguished scholars of international relations argue that Putin's essential desire is to reconquer the USSR's former seat on the high table of great powers "as a co-equal great power in a multipolar world" which effectively translates into Western powers abstaining from interference in Russia's privileged sphere of interest - the historic Soviet Union countries and above all Ukraine (Doris & Graham, 2022, p. 76).

What often is referred to as the breaking point of NATO-Russia relations took place in the scope of the 2008 NATO Bucharest summit in Romania when allies agreed, referring to Georgia and Ukraine, that "these countries will become members of NATO" (NATO, 2008. Article 23). Despite strong efforts from George W. Bush's administration, supported by a coalition of Eastern European countries, Germany and France pushed back against the attempt to directly engage in the development of Membership Action Plans (MAP) for Georgia and Ukraine, fearing the negative impact on relations with Russia (Richter, 2022. p. 7). This however did not prevent Vladimir Putin's furious reaction upon receival of the news, allegedly expressing to a Russian journalist that "if Ukraine joins NATO, it will do so without Crimea and the Eastern regions, it will simply fall apart" (Mearsheimer, 2022). Shortly after the Bucharest summit the Russian Federation commenced its first military assault on another country in August 2008. Under the pretext of preventing an attack by the Georgian military on ethnic Russians in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, then president Dmitry Medvedev directed a quantitatively and technologically

superior combat force into the sovereign territory of its neighboring state, successfully taking control of the two provinces in a matter of seven days (Cohen & Hamilton, 2011, p. 8). The swift incursion and Russia's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia's independence less than two weeks after the hostilities were ceased had far-reaching implications for the geopolitical outlook of Georgia and the wider region. The Russian leadership elucidated conspicuously that Russia was capable and willing to defend its interests by military means. Correctly counting on Western hesitation to adopt a cohesive reaction. Moscow shattered Georgia's transatlantic ambitions while also securing control over strategically important pipeline infrastructure in the Caucasus (Pisciotta, 2019. p. 94).

Less than a year after the war in Georgia, the EU launched its Eastern Partnership Initiative through the adoption of the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit in May laying the foundation for enhanced economic cooperation and political association between the EU and its Eastern neighbors, setting out a framework to facilitate "approximation towards the European Union" (European Council, 2009, p. 6). Signatories included Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus (which later had its membership suspended) Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine; the full parade of European former USSR countries in Russia's "sphere of privileged interest". The political objectives of the initiative, including the opportunity for partner countries to acquire EU Association Agreements as well as Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA), contributed to further deterioration of the already quenched relationship between Russia and the West, with Russia criticizing the programme as an EU attempt to expand its sphere of influence (DeBardeleben, 2020, p. 573; Menon & Ruger, 2020, p. 383). In an bid to create alternative pathways for economic integration and specifically targeting post-Soviet states, Moscow pushed forward with the creation of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) enacting strong pressure onto its neighbors to become members (Mankoff, 2022, p. 140). While Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan signed the treaties, Russian attempts to coerce Ukraine into joining the EEU by leveraging President Viktor Yanukovych's allegiance to the Kremlin failed. Yanukovych's strive to neglect a standing decision taken by the Ukrainian parliament with overwhelming majority to sign the Association Agreement with the EU instead (Kyiv Post, 2013) led to the outbreak of the Euromaidan movement and the Revolution of Dignity in 2014 (Pshenychnykh, 2019, p. 347).

### 3.2 The illegal annexation of Crimea: Russia's 2014 attack on Ukraine

Widespread demonstrations erupted in Kyiv following President Yanukovych's bid to steer Ukraine away from its Western ambitions. Hundreds of thousands took to the streets in November 2013, facing brutal police repression and the inhospitable temperatures of Ukrainian winter while upholding their presence at the Maidan Nezalezhnosti protest camp till the 22nd of February 2014, when Viktor Yanukovych was removed from office through an anonymous vote by the Ukrainian Parliament (Reuters, 2013; BBC, 2014a). The Russian propaganda machine followed these events closely and started to intensify its efforts to discredit the protests and the new government in Ukraine, referring to them as a Western-backed "fascist junta" posing an urgent threat for ethnic Russians in Ukraine (Kofman et al. 2017, p. 13). A well known narrative from the Georgia incursion that was also utilized to defend the annexation of the Crimean peninsula and Russia's involvement in the Donbas war. Only days after the fall of the pro-Russian government in Ukraine, Moscow proved once again to the entire world its total neglect for international law, territorial integrity and the national sovereignty of its neighbor when ordering the invasion of Crimea. Supported by local separatist groups, Russian special forces of the Rapid Reaction Forces Command took control of strategic civil and military infrastructure throughout Crimea, acting under the guise of a massive disinformation campaign facilitated by Russian media outlets and coordinated operators targeting social media platforms (Bartles & McDermott, 2014, p. 56). A heavily disputed referendum was organized by the newly established separatist authorities under supervision of the Russian troops. The communicated outcome; 95% of voters in favor of joining the Russian Federation (BBC, 2014b). On the 21st of March 2014, Vladimir Putin formally signed the annexation of Crimea into law (BBC, 2014c) triggering widespread condemnation from the international community and leading to Russia's expulsion from the Group of 8 (G8) as well as the imposition of a strict sanctions regime by the EU, the US and other Western nations (He et al., 2021, p. 183). An UN Security Council resolution that would have reaffirmed the "sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity" of Ukraine received a Chinese abstention and a Russian veto (United Nations, 2014), once again showcasing the incapacity of the international system to take action against an aggressor holding permanent membership in the Security Council.

Taking Crimea had little military costs for Russia but enabled Moscow to gain control of highly valuable strategic infrastructure such as the naval-military base in Sevastopol, now harboring Russia's Black Sea Fleet. The invasion has also undoubtedly made Ukraine's NATO accession impossible for the foreseeable future, even though this was not a likely scenario regardless of the annexation taking into account multiple and severe reservations from individual member states. The EU's response commenced with the Foreign Affairs Council Meeting on the 3rd of March where member states decided to suspend their preparatory work for the Sochi G8 summit and called for an urgent extraordinary Council meeting of EU Heads of State or Government on Ukraine three days later. The EU Council welcomed the comprehensive assistance package proposed by the European Commission and put into motion a first set of sanctions consisting of individual restrictive measures against relevant Russian actors, imposing travel bans and asset freezes on 21 Russian officials (European Council, 2014a). The list of sanctioned individuals was extended by another 12 names shortly after and the Foreign Affairs Council proceeded with imposing an import ban on Crimean goods on the 23rd of June (European Council, 2014b). In May 2014 Petro Poroshenko was elected as Ukrainian President. His government swiftly proceeded with moving towards Euro-Atlantic integration, defining EU and NATO membership as policy priority and signing the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU in June 2014 alongside Georgia and Moldova (Klymenko, 2022, p. 1).

### 3.3 Failing diplomacy and the Donbas War

In addition to its successful efforts in Crimea, Russia started to increasingly support separatist movements in the Donbas, effectively fueling the outbreak of a civil war in the region (Mearsheimer, 2022, p. 10). While the skirmishes initially took place between the Ukrainian army and local separatists groups, more and more Russian military equipment ranging from light weapons to heavy artillery and tanks crossed the border in pursuit of keeping the conflict alive to destabilize Ukraine before the leadership in Moscow came to the conclusion that direct support by Russian forces was needed to avoid defeat of the separatists, ordering a regiment of multiple thousand Paratroopers and heavy equipment deep into Ukrainian territory (Matveeva, 2018, p. 163). With the quality of EU-Russia relations at a historic low point, alternative means of diplomatic engagement were put in place to keep multilateral communication alive. The so-called Normandie Format was established as a high table for exchange between the leaders of

Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany (CSIS, 2022). Proceedings within the Normandie Format and the subsequent creation of the Trilateral Contact Group consisting of Russia, Ukraine and the Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) led to the adoption of the Minsk I agreement in 2014 and Minsk II in 2015. Deborah Sanders & Christopher Tuck argue that Ukraine was in a strategically weak position when the settlement was signed, forcing Kyiv to give into some of Russia's key demands such as an effectively decentralized Donbas region with autonomous territory on Russia's border, its own "armed militia, administrative and justice system, guaranteed by permanent legislation and changes to Ukraine's constitution" (Sanders & Tuck, 2020, p. 25). Despite the adoption of the agreements, little progress has been made when it comes to the implementation of key points on the ground; a phenomenon that Duncan Allan, Associate Fellow at the Chatham House - Russia and Eurasia Programme refers to as the "Minsk Conundrum" which reflects a stark contrast in interpretation of the provisions set out by the framework on the Russian and Ukrainian side respectively (Allan, 2020, p. 15).

In the years to come the EU progressively and unanimously extended the scope and duration of its sanctions regime following the logic of "sustained crisis response" to Crimea's annexation and Russia's continued support for insurgents in the East of Ukraine (DeBardeleben, 2020, p. 572). A clear outline of the EU's posture at this point of the calamity was provided through the "Five Guiding Principles" concurred by the EU foreign ministers and High Representative Federica Mogherini. Key elements of this Russia policy constituted the demand for the full implementation of the Minsk agreements; a commitment to further strengthen relationships between the EU and post-Soviet countries in its Eastern neighborhood; increased developments of capabilities to achieve resilience against Russian threats manifested in European energy dependence, disinformation and propaganda as well as political interference through Russian funding of populist and far right movements within the EU; selective foreign policy engagement on issue with a strong EU interest; and lastly, targeted support for Russian civil society organizations as well as people to people contacts in the field of scientific research, higher education (Erasmus+) and cross border cooperation (European Parliament, 2018, pp. 2-7). These principles were reaffirmed in 2021 by the Joint Communication on EU-Russia relations developed by the European Commission under the responsibility of Mogherini's successor High Representative Joseph Borell. The policy reiterates the urgent need to counter Russian hybrid warfare against European states, placing emphasis on the threats emanating from cyber attacks

and disinformation while underlining the incompatibility between Russia's spheres of influence guided "zero-sum geopolitical vision of the world and the rules-based international order" (European Commission, 2021, p. 1 & 4).

### 3.4 Moscow's unsuccessful attempt to turn back time: Military buildup and full-scale invasion of Ukraine

Vladimir Putin's neglect for the rules based international system and the post-Cold War status quo of the European security order became once more evident in 2021 when Moscow started to amass significant amounts of combat forces alongside the Ukrainian border. The military buildup happened in concert with an attempt to pressure the US and NATO into making far-reaching, legally binding concessions that would have prevented Ukraine from joining NATO at any point in the future alongside commiting NATO allies to remove international troops from the territory of member states in Eastern Europe, effectively turning the geo-political clock back to 1997 before the first eastward expansion two years later (The Guardian, 2021). Moscow's ultimatum was not acceptable to the US and allies in Europe, specifically the Baltic states and other post-Soviet countries for which joining NATO at its core meant collective protection from Russian imperial ambition and the very threat that was now looming over Ukraine. With his impositions towards the West falling on deaf ears, Vladimir Putin proceeded to declare the start of a "special military operation" on the 24th of February 2022 (The Kremlin, 2022) setting into motion a brutal, unprovoked and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. As the main reason for the intervention Russia flagged the threat represented by NATO and the "genocidal intentions" of Ukraine's "neo-nazi government" against the Russian speaking population in the country (The Kremlin, 2022); a recurring theme in Moscow's playbook known from previous assaults on Georgia and Ukraine. While prominent realist scholars such as Mearsheimer argue that NATO's expansion and Ukraine's potential accession - symbolizing the Russian leaderships "brightest of all red lines" (Mearsheimer, 2022, p. 9) was indeed the main cause for the invasion, more idealistic arguments set forth that what Putin truly fears most is a prosperous, successful and democratic Ukrainian state (Person & McFaul, 2022, p. 19). As for the timing of the invasion it is a reasonable assumption that factors such as the the onset of Winter, comparatively high energy prices in Europe alongside the overall picture of a weakened EU in the process of

pandemic recovery and a deeply divided political system in the US, contributed to a positive strategic assessment resulting in the decision to seize the momentum.

No less than twenty days before the invasion, which was notably halted till after the closing of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, Vladimir Putin and Xi Jingping announced their so-called “Partnership without Limits' '(Reuters, 2022). Forgoing this public declaration of the alliance, it was clear to many observes that “Russia and China have undergone what appears to be a genuine normative rapprochement, having been brought together by shared skepticism of Western interventionism and democracy promotion” (Paikin, 2020, p. 407). This reconciliation between the two countries led to the establishment of strategic partnerships in both economic and military spheres, with joint missile defense system development programmes and billions of arms trade, making Russia one of the most important weapon suppliers for the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (Schwartz, 2015, p. 11). China’s energy supply issue and high demands for imported crude oil and natural gas in combination with the BRI rollout, that among massive infrastructure investments in transport lines, railways and fiber glass cable in Asia and Eurasia features the installation of a pipeline running from China via Kazakhstan into Russia, speaks to the immense potential for further economic integration and trade between the two countries (Leverett & Bingbing, 2016, p. 125; Khanna, 2019). Taking into account Russia’s unprecedented economic and political isolation from the rest of the World after the invasion alongside China’s contemporary industrial awakening from the coma of its Zero-COVID-19 policy reigniting excessive energy demands, this partnership is crucial for Moscow’s interests and economic stability. Whatever the basis of calculation, when following the rationale of cost-benefit analysis of war (Hausken, 2016, p. 455) it is difficult to believe that the Kremlin had a realistic operational assessment at hand when commencing the assault on its neighbor. Fierce Ukrainian resistance and the failure of Russia’s initial objective to take Kyiv in a matter of days paired with a united and sustained Western response has imposed mammoth costs on the Russian Federation. The next chapter will provide an in-depth analysis of the measures taken by the transatlantic community to counter the Russian aggression and support Ukraine in retaining the ability to mount its defense.

# 4. The transatlantic response to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine

## 4.1 NATO’s 2022 Strategic Concept

In the scope of the June 2022 NATO Summit hosted in Madrid, member states came together to adopt the Alliance's new Strategic Concept, superseding the longstanding 2010 Lisbon Summit Concept. The Strategic Concept represents the most important document for the NATO policy framework after the Washington Treaty itself and serves as a short to medium term strategy for the Alliance (NATO Official, 2023). On an average it is only renewed once per decade, with the 1991 & 1999 concepts preceding the adoption of 2010 and 2022. The drafting process commenced in 2021 when NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg was tasked by the leaders convened through the Brussels Summit to oversee the exercise of developing a new paper, with the undertaking clearly situated in the light of escalating tensions between Moscow and the West. A series of consultations took place involving member states, external experts from civil society, academia and the private sector as well as representatives from NATO partner countries to inform an initial draft that was then further negotiated by the allies before its endorsement in Spain (NATO, 2022a). While the 2010 Strategic Concept embodied a manifestation of “NATO's experience in the post–Cold War era, a unique period characterized by Western unipolarity and military-technological supremacy, as well as the seeming absence of peer competitors” (Morcos & Simón, 2022, p. 2) the new concept should be understood as a response to the heavily altered security environment dominated by the the return of strategic competition on a global scale and the resurgence of inter-state war in the Euro-Atlantic region. When analyzing the 2022 Strategic Concept as evidence of the Western response to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine and its impact on the transatlantic security order it is important to not lose sight of the fact that NATO Strategic Concepts are not indented as operational documents but rather serve as a communiqués of allied consensus for public audiences within and outside of the Alliance alike. This means that in order to create a more holistic basis for informed conclusions, other non classified expressions of operational and political indent, such as the Madrid Summit Declaration alongside relevant public statements by the NATO Secretary General and national leaders of the Alliance need to be taken into account. In addition, it is also necessary to examine relevant steps taken by the EU as NATO’s key strategic partner, specifically in relation to the sanctions regime and the EU’s efforts to cut down its dependency on Russian gas and oil.

### 4.2 Strategic environment and priority areas for action

The 2010 Strategic Concept assessment of the security environment states that the "Euro-Atlantic area is at peace and the threat of a conventional attack against NATO territory is low" (NATO, 2010. p. 10). This evaluation of the strategic environment stands in stark contrast to the 2022 text underlining that the "Euro-Atlantic region is not at peace" and that NATO, referring to Russia violating the norms and principles of the European security order, "cannot discount the possibility of an attack against Allies' sovereignty and territorial integrity" (NATO 2022a, p. 3). While the 2010 Strategic Concept does not once refer to Russia as a threat, but rather outlines NATO's aspiration for a "true strategic partnership" (NATO, 2010. p. 29) the chosen language in 2022 explicitly declares the Russian Federation as "the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area" underlining not only the war against Ukraine but various avenues of aggression, including conventional, cyber and hybrid means applied against NATO and its partners to coerce and subvert countries in pursuit of establishing a Russian sphere of influence (NATO, 2022a, p. 4). A necessary acknowledgement accepting the realities of the post 2014 landscape in which Moscow has frequently made use of what Frank Hoffman conceptually refers to as "unrestricted warfare" (Hoffman, 2007, p. 22) utilizing disinformation campaigns, cyberattacks, direct political interference as well as the application of economic pressure against Western nations (NATO, 2022a, p. 3; Palubniskas, 2022, p. 27; Sakwa, 2022, p. 348). Coming to terms with the increasing threat posed by cyber assaults and the vulnerability of critical infrastructure in space, allies furthermore committed to enhance their capabilities and resilience in this domain while at the same time extending the prerogative of Article 5 invokement to non-kinetic assaults on member states (NATO, 2022a, p.7). The need for increased capabilities commensurate with the deteriorated strategic environment also manifests itself in a renewed focus on NATO's deterrence and defense posture in the 2022 Strategic Concept bolstered by steadily increasing Eastern flank troop deployments as part of the forward presence model following the 2016 Warsaw Summit (NATO, 2016). Existing battle groups were significantly reinforced in parallel to the creation of four new multinational deployments stationed in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia as part of the NATO response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine (NATO, 2022b). In addition, the Madrid summit adopted the creation of a permanent Forward Command Post Headquarters for

the US V Army Corps in Poland alongside further deployments of F-35 aircraft in the UK and two additional US destroyers to be stationed in Spain (Government of Poland, 2022).

While retaining the overall primacy of NATO's three core functions, minor amendments have been made to the language with "Deterrence and Defense" replacing "collective defense" and "crisis prevention and management" taking the place of "crisis management", leaving only the heading of "cooperative security" without alteration from the 2010 document (NATO, 2022a, pp. 6 - 10). The section of core principles was furthermore extended through a notion affirming the need to increase collective resilience and the technological edge of the Alliance alongside new references to climate change, human security as well as the "Women, Peace & Security Agenda" to be promoted as a crosscutting priority (NATO, 2022a, p. 3). Despite repeatedly calling out the Russian threat in unambiguous clarity, the document abstains from declaring the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act as revoked and instead expresses the allies indent to preserve open channels of communication for the sake of risk mitigation, de-escalation and transparency (NATO, 2022, p. 4). At this point all practical cooperation between Russia and NATO as well as joint activities such as the "Science for Peace and Security" programme or multilateral engagements through third parties in central-Asia concerning Afghanistan were suspended (NATO Official, 2023). High level exchanges on the military level between the chairman of the NATO Military Committee and the Chief of General Staff of the Russian Federation continue on a case by case basis. The same applies to the political level, e.g. a dialogue that took place at the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly between NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov (NATO Official, 2023). In relation to Georgia and Ukraine, the Strategic Concept reiterates the commitment of allies to strengthen their partnership with the two countries, explicitly reaffirm NATO's open door policy, the Bucharest Summit decision and all subsequent actions taken in its spirit (NATO, 2022a. p. 9).

Another autocratic nation has made its first appearance in a NATO Strategic Concept being awarded a noteworthy degree of direct and indirect attention throughout the document. While allies stopped short of calling the People's Republic of China a direct threat, they minced no words in acknowledging the increasing and systematic challenges Xi Jinping's regime poses to the rules-based international order and NATO's "interest, security and values". Alluding to the Belt and Road initiative (BRI), without spelling it out for what it is, the language warns of

Chinese attempts to create strategic dependencies through economic leverage, control of vital infrastructure and supply chains alongside critical technological and industrial sectors (NATO, 2022a, p. 5). The 2022 Madrid Summit was attended by multiple delegations from outside the Euro-Atlantic area, bringing together the heads of state and government of Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand (NATO, 2022c). This should not be surprising considering the increasingly assertive language used by China in relation to its claims in the South-China Sea, its rapid expansion of military capabilities and recent actions in the wider Indo-Pacific region. In line with the US foreign policy objective to balance China for the sake of preserving a "free and open Indo-Pacific" (The White House, 2022, p.6), the importance of Indo-Pacific stability for NATO and Euro-Atlantic security has found its articulation in the 2022 Strategic Concept with allies committed to strengthening their "dialogue and cooperation with new and existing partners to tackle cross-regional challenges and shared security interests" (NATO, 2022a, p. 11).

### 4.3 The role of nuclear weapons

Since the outset of the Russian invasion in February 2022, audiences across the globe have been progressively subjected to escalatory language around the usage of nuclear weapons. "Responding to aggressive statements made against the Russian Federation" by Western officials, Vladimir Putin ordered Russia's nuclear deterrence forces "to a special regime of combat duty" effectively raising their readiness to a level of high alert only three days after the full-scale attack on Ukraine was set into motion (Politico, 2022a). This public relations advance, in concert with recurrent threats to make use of Russia's nuclear capabilities, exercises conducted with nuclear armed submarines and the launch of missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads against targets in Ukraine represent a serious challenge for the global nuclear order, endangering multilateral treaties and bearing the potential of far-reaching repercussions on the state of non-proliferation regimes (Bollfrass & Herzog, 2022, pp. 7-8). Among the various treaties and agreements under international law which Putin's regime has nullified by way of attacking Ukraine is cynically also the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances (signed by Sergey Lavrov in his capacity as Russia's permanent representative to the UN Security Council) through which Ukraine had returned its Soviet Union stockpile of nuclear weapons to the Russian Federation in exchange for security guarantees from Moscow, protecting the country

from military attacks and economic coercion (United Nations, 1994, p. 2). In light of Russia's nuclear saber-rattling, NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept anticipatedly reaffirmed the importance of nuclear weapons as part of the Alliance's "appropriate mix" for effective deterrence. A slight change of language in comparison to the 2010 concept is noticeable. While the outdated strategy stated that "the circumstances in which any use of nuclear weapons might have to be contemplated are extremely remote" (NATO, 2010, p. 14), the 2022 concept refers not to the contemplation of nuclear weapons use, but instead the actual use of nuclear weapons in similarly remote circumstances (NATO, 2022a, p. 7).

Russia and China are named as the most relevant nuclear actors with the potential to endanger allied security. The Strategic Concept criticizes both countries' modernization and expansion efforts in the domain of nuclear forces and delivery systems while also pointing out the unwillingness to "increase transparency or engage in good faith in arms control or risk reduction" (NATO, 2022a, p. 5). Another interesting amendment to the 2010 Strategic Concept wording relates to the role of allied nuclear-sharing nations. The importance of "separate centers of decision making", referring to the UK's and France's independent nuclear capabilities, is emphasized as a variable contributing to making the strategic calculus of adversaries more difficult and therefore enhancing the Alliance's deterrence (NATO, 2022, p. 5). As for the global nuclear arms reduction regime, the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START) between Russia and the US remains in place as the agreement was extended in 2021 for the duration of five years (BBC, 2021). New START represents the only bilateral instrument of international law binding the two nuclear superpowers to transparency and imposing boundaries on the quantity of operationally active nuclear warheads and delivery systems (New START Treaty, 2010, p. 3). In light of the antagonistic state of affairs and diplomatic relationships between Russia and the US at near standstill, it is difficult to imagine from a 2022 point of view, how and when negotiations for a successor treaty could meaningfully take place, leaving the long term future of nuclear arms control and inspection unclear and therefore risking the start of a renewed nuclear arms race once the agreement has expired.

### 4.4 NATO & the EU

The membership roster of NATO and the EU is marked by a striking degree of overlap. 21 of the 27 EU member states are full members of the Alliance. The Madrid Summit decision to welcome Finland and Sweden (NATO, 2022c) followed by the signing of Accession Protocols shortly after is bound to increase the number of EU countries even further. The accession is however pending the ratification of the protocols by all NATO states and specifically Türkiye which has been refusing to proceed with the ratification until Sweden extradites a total of 130 individuals of mostly Kurdish origin considered to be terrorists by the authorities in Ankara (Politico, 2023). The Russian invasion of Ukraine has disrupted the longstanding neutrality of the two remaining Nordic countries outside of the Alliance and resulted in a geo-political shift detrimental to Moscow's foreign policy objective; preventing the further expansion of NATO to the doorstep of its border. In a similar move towards stronger engagement with collective European security, Denmark has abandoned its opt-out decision from the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy after a referendum was held in June 2022 (EEAS, 2022). In the 2022 Strategic Concept, the EU is referred to as a value-aligned, "unique and essential partner" with both organizations playing "complementary, coherent and mutually reinforcing roles in supporting international peace and security" (NATO, 2022a, p. 10). The importance of this partnership for both organizations has also been reaffirmed in the 2023 Joint Declaration on NATO-EU Cooperation (NATO, 2023). The Strategic Concept furthermore welcomes the contribution that strengthened European defense capabilities can make to the overall transatlantic security landscape, without failing to point out that "unnecessary duplications" should be avoided and that developing initiatives should be "mutually reinforcing" (NATO, 2022a, p. 10). The underlying question at the heart of this issue revolves around geo-political US interests and whether or not a strategically autonomous European security and defense capacity is considered to threaten US primacy in the domain. Some experts argue that a coherent, muscular and centralized EU defense capability and command structure could be perceived as challenging NATO's distinct role (Davidson, 2022, p. 3). The events of 2022 have certainly re-ignited a debate around the EU's security independence and the need to contemplate further steps towards more strategic autonomy in line with president Emanuel Macron's 2018 speech in which he pleaded for a "Europe that can defend itself on its own without relying only on the United States" (BBC, 2018).

### 4.5 The burden of burden sharing: New impetus for European defense investments?

Corresponding to the commitments made by allies in the scope of the Wales Summit, when member states pledged to "halt any decline in defense expenditure" and "spend a minimum of 2% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defense" (NATO, 2014), the 2022 Strategic Concept reaffirms the need for NATO countries to live up to their expenditure promises "commensurate with the challenges of a more contested security order (NATO, 2022a, p. 11). Some progress has been made since the adoption of the 2014 commitment. While at the time of the Wales summit only three member states, namely Greece, the UK and the US dedicated more than 2 % of their GDP to defense expenditure, the club of countries meeting the pledge has been extended by Croatia, Estonia, France, Latvia Lithuania and Poland in 2021 (NATO, 2022d, p. 3) and Slovakia in 2022 (Balakrishan & Kirk-Wade, 2022). Latvia and Lithuania's defense budgets saw the sharpest increases with both countries having doubled their spending since the annexation of Crimea. In his hallmark "Zeitenwende" speech at the Bundestag a few days after the invasion of Ukraine, German chancellor Olav Scholz announced a 100 billion extrabudgetary defense spending package and re-committed his country to finally reach the 2 % benchmark. A promise that was however walked back on shortly after by his spokesperson who was underlining the enormous efforts made by the government to reach the target before the end of the ongoing legislative period in 2025, however admitting that this would not be a realistic objective for 2023 (Politico, 2022b). Another country set to radically ram up its military capabilities is Poland following the adoption of a law that raises defense spending to 3% of GDP in 2023 (US-ITA, 2022). In June 2022, a budget of one billion euros has been allocated to a new Innovation Fund launched by Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. The resources made available through the fund will aid NATO's Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic (DIANA), through which the Alliance aims to "support the development and adaptation of dual-use emerging technologies critical for security and defense challenges" (NATO, 2022e). Looking at the overall picture, it is clear that the level of dedication to increase defense budgets differs greatly from country to country within the Alliance. Nevertheless, if one has faith in the various public commitments made by Western leaders throughout the past year, the extent of available funds for security and defense will increase significantly in the near future as a direct response to the Russian aggression making NATO a better equipped and thus more capable military alliance. Taking into account the dire state of military capabilities in many individual

European countries, the 2022 invasion of Ukraine has certainly been a much needed wake up call for allies to increase investments in security and defense (NATO Official, 2023). A development in stark contradiction to what should be assumed as Moscow's grand strategic aspirations, but in turn very much in line with longstanding calls from the US, peeking under President Trump's administration, for European allies to seize the "easy riding" and contribute more substantially to the faculties of NATO.

### 4.6 The EU & US sanctions regime: Economic & finance

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has promoted the establishment of an unprecedented sanctions regime implemented by the EU, the US and their Western partners in an act of historically cohesive and united policy making within the Alliance (Dijkstra et al., 2022, p. 464). In addition to the biannual extension of sanctions in place since the annexation of Crimea, the EU by means of nine additional sanction packages adopted before the end of 2022, commenced its reaction by initially targeting hundreds of Russian politicians, bureaucrats and businessmen with close ties to the Kremlin through asset freezes and travel bans. Today more than 1380 individuals from Russia and Belarus alongside a total of 171 legal entities have made it onto the sanctions list of EU authorities. The pool of measures was progressively extended throughout the year, encompassing a broad range of diplomatic and economic steps aimed at "weakening Russia's economic base, depriving it of critical technologies and markets and significantly curtailing its ability to wage war" (European Council, 2022a). In the financial sector, Russian banks and businesses have been stripped of access to European capital markets while Western financial institutions were banned from making investments in or processing transactions to and from central banks in the Russian Federation and Belarus. A similar regulation applies to physical euro banknotes which can no longer be taken in or out of the two countries. In another act of decisive unity between the EU, UK, Canada and the US, seven Russian banks were removed from the SWIFT system vital for processing international transactions in March 2022. Russia's largest financial institution Sberbank was initially excluded from the ban and added to the list two months later (European Council, 2022a). The purchase of raw materials from Russia, ranging from iron and steel to gold as well as plastic, cement and wood was prohibited by the EU together with luxury goods imports such as jewelry, seafood, cosmetics, cigarettes and spirits (European Council, 2022a). Overall the Russian economy has been suffering from a significant

downturn in 2022. While GDP growth was at 4.7 % in 2021, International Monetary Fund (IMF) data for 2022 indicates a recession of 8.1 % in comparison to the previous year, leveling at -3.4 % for 2022 and predicting a minus of 2.3 % for 2023 (IMF, 2023). This certainly speaks to the effectiveness of the sanction regime, however Western economies were not spared from the negative impact either. Heavy inflation has swept through the EU, settling at an average of 9 % for 2022 with predictions indicating that the year 2023 will only bring slow-paced relief and a median inflation rate of 7 %. The outlook concerning GDP growth presents itself similarly gloomy, with the EU GDP dropping by 3 percentage points from 3.3 % in 2022 to 0.3 % in 2023 (European Commission, 2022a). On the other side of the Atlantic, the US economy is bound to shrink by 0.6 percentage points in comparison to 2022, with the IMF predicting a GDP growth rate of only 1 % for 2023 (IMF, 2022).

### 4.7 The EU & US sanctions regime: Energy, transport & defense

A key sector for the Russian economy and in turn for the economies of most European countries is the energy trade between Moscow and the EU. The 2022 sanction packages included a total ban on coal imports from Russia and a partial prohibition for EU countries to purchase Russian oil alongside an embargo for investments in and exports of relevant technologies and raw materials used in the Russian mining and oil refining industry (European Council, 2022a). Russia’s best selling commodity in the EU - natural gas was however not included in the measures, giving testimony to the desperate scale of EU dependence on this crucial resource. As a Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) report published in June 2022 shows, the EU and its member states have finally ramped up their efforts in relieving themselves from the Russian energy stranglehold. While import of Russian natural gas continues, many EU countries have announced plans to boost the share of renewable energy sources, aiming at attaining a degree of 63 % renewable sources for the generation of electricity by 2030 (Czyżak, Et. al., 2022, p. 2). The European Commission's flagship REPowerEU strategy aims to enhance this target to 69 % while setting out an ambitious framework to decarbonise the EU energy infrastructure, supporting efforts to double solar and photovoltaic capacities as well as the usage of geothermal energy through the deployment of heat pumps in modernized energy grids powering local infrastructure (European Commission, 2022b). According to the agreed benchmarks, Austria, Denmark, Portugal and the Netherlands will produce almost 100 % of

their electricity from renewable sources, closely followed by Germany setting the target to 80 % and Greece, Ireland as well as Italy at 70 % (Czyżak, Et. al., 2022, p. 6). A development that scholars however see not solely rooted in geo-political tension but also in the success of environmental movements in Europe growing stronger throughout the past decade with the need for emancipation from Russian fossil fuel dependence providing a window of opportunity for an accelerated green transition in the EU (Siddi, 2022, p. 896). Despite these efforts, the industries of many EU countries are still in need of natural gas to operate at full capacity, prompting a heightened global demand for liquified natural gas (LNG) and a push by the EU to build more storage facilities and regasification terminals. At the same time energy dialogues with partners in Northern Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean - a region harboring considerable natural gas resources have been taken up to further diversify supply chains in the future (European Commission, 2022c). The 2022 sanction regime also includes various prohibitions on the supply and purchase of dual-use items and technologies as well as arms, ammunition and other military equipment to and from Russia. In addition, the EU and the US both banned Russian aircraft from entering their airspace while also stripping Russian naval vessels from access to their ports and Russian road transport operators from entering EU territory (European Council, 2022a; Politico, 2022c).

### 4.8 Economic & military assistance to Ukraine

A budget of nearly twenty billion euros was dispersed by the EU and its member states over the course of 2022 to financially support Ukraine, funding 7.2 billion euro in marco-financial assistance for housing, education and the agricultural sector alongside 485 million euro in humanitarian assistance to ensure the availability of essential commodities and services such as food and healthcare but also allowing for the reconstruction of basic infrastructure. 620 million euro in direct budget support and another three billion in European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) investments as well as European Investment Bank (EIB) loans were additionally made available. Individual countries within the EU added another 7.3 billion in grants, loans and guarantees (European Commission, 2022d). However these numbers do not include the support given by individual countries to the approximately eight million refugees who fled from the war in Ukraine, with many seeking shelter in the neighboring states and other Eastern European nations. The largest number of registrations for temporary protection were

filed in Poland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Romania (UNHCR, 2023). Further measures to economically support Ukraine in the long-term perspective were discussed in the scope of the International Expert Conference on the Recovery, Reconstruction and Modernisation of Ukraine co-hosted between the European Commission and the government of Germany in their capacity as G7 presidency. According to World Bank estimates, the damage inflicted on Ukraine by September 2022 amounted to 350 billion US dollar (USD) and is set to increase further in line with the duration of the war and the additional destruction Russian forces can beget on Ukrainian infrastructure (World Bank, 2022).

The by far largest individual donor of Ukraine since the outbreak of the war has however been the United States, both in economic and military terms, having spent 9.9 billion USD on humanitarian aid and another 15.1 billion USD in financial assistance through support funds and loans (Council of Foreign Relations, 2022). According to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy which has been tracking the expenditure of countries in support of Ukraine through their in-house data tool, a total of 22.86 billion euro in military aid has found its way from the US to Ukraine from January till November 2022. In the same timeframe the UK donated 4.129 billion closely followed by Germany with 2.345 billion, Poland with 1.822 billion and Canada on rank five having spent 1.357 billion on propping up Ukraine's defense capabilities (Antezza et al., 2022). In the case of Germany, the delivery of lethal weapons into a conflict region equalled the abolishment of a long standing policy which chancellor Olav Scholz justified by presenting the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a historic "turning point" threatening the "entire "post-Cold War oder" (German Federal Government, 2022). In addition to the bilateral aid provided by European and North-American NATO allies, the EU itself has also contributed a total of 3.1 billion euro in military assistance (Kiel Institute, 2022). 2.5 billion were made available through the repurposing of the European Peace Facility (EPF) which was established in 2021 to "preserve peace, prevent conflicts and strengthen international security" (EUR-Lex, 2022) with EPF funds now being used to purchase both lethal arms and defensive military equipment for Ukraine (European Council, 2022b). Referring to the overall EU crisis response and the funds dispersed through the EPF specifically as "setting a legal precedent for the EU to arm third party states in conflict", Lena Chachko and Katerina Linos argue that the EU has successfully made use of a historic window of opportunity to centralize power and agency in the security and defense domain while putting into motion policy impulses that will outlive the crisis and contribute to

further European integration (Chachko & Linos, 2022, p. 786). Another decision that will probably outlive the war in Ukraine (considering how many years other candidate member states have been holding this status) was taken in June when the European Council awarded EU candidate membership to Ukraine (European Council, 2022c, p. 4). A step that many observers referred to as more of a symbolic gesture than serious intent to fast-track the proceedings for giving Ukraine full EU membership.

## 5. Quo vadis Europa?

On the basis of the examined primary and secondary sources discussed in this thesis, it is possible to present a variety of observations in line with the core assumption of the hypothesis. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has certainly uprooted the status quo of the transatlantic security order and in doing so pushed NATO and the EU into collective action, resulting in an at least momentarily cohesive and united response by Western nations. How this togetherness of member states will develop with the war potentially dragging on for many more years precipitating ever more costly and politically difficult questions remains to be seen. NATO allies have refrained from engaging their own forces in the conflict out of fear from a spillover reaction that could risk a direct confrontation with Russia. They however implemented an extraordinary set of measures to impose tremendous costs on the Russian Federation by assisting Ukraine in military and economic terms while coordinating an unprecedented economic and diplomatic sanction regime pernicious to the Russian war effort and Moscow's position within the international community where it today stands more isolated than ever before. Vladimir Putin's brutal and illegal war of aggression, in which civilian infrastructure often serves as a prime target for airstrikes and artillery attacks, has led to a fundamental reassessment of security in many European countries. This assumption is not only supported by Germany's "Zeitenwende" policy or Finland and Sweden's decision to abolish their neutrality in seeking NATO accession, but also through various commitments made by European allies to significantly step up their defense expenditure in the years ahead. If these pledges are followed through on, Russia's renewed aggression against Ukraine will lead to an expensive modernization of military equipment and overall rearmament on the continent which could pose the danger of potentially triggering financial cuts in other already underfunded sectors of public expenditure such as social services, health and education.

Instead of pushing back against further NATO expansion, Russia's assault on Ukraine has emboldened the Alliance, increased the number of international troop deployments at the Eastern flank and reinvigorated its core purpose, the protection of European democracies from an imperialist, expansionist and authoritarian Russian Federation keen on dominating the former Soviet empire and what it believes to be therefore its rightful sphere of privileged interest. The 2022 attack on Ukraine has also isolated Russia on the international stage, leading to an increased strategic dependence on the few allies Moscow has left. With the EU prioritizing its energy resilience in addition to the Western sanction regime targeting almost every aspect of the Russian economy, the Sino-Russian relationship appears to be even more prudent specifically for the energy trade, providing China with cheap ressources and Moscow's war chest with liquidity. At the same time, the invasion has forced individual European countries to take long overdue steps in the direction of lastingly freeing themselves from their dependence on Russian oil and gas. This opened a window of opportunity for the implementation of an accelerated transition to renewable energy sources but also left some countries little choice but to at least temporarily tap back into non-renewable and unsustainable means of energy production through coal and nuclear power plants.

With the UN Security Council debilitated by Russian vetoes, NATO is the only international organization that has proven to be an effective deterrent against Moscow's aggression in all relevant domains, including the realm of nuclear warfare; to a large extent thanks to the nuclear capabilities of the US. The escalatory and irresponsible language used by the Russian leadership in relation to the potential use of nuclear weapons has also reaffirmed the importance of NATO's nuclear capabilities in the public debate. Moscow's success in keeping Western allies from taking firmer action in Ukraine specifically in relation to President Zelensky's long standing calls on NATO to establish a No-Fly Zone over the country sadly bears testimony of the continued strategic effectiveness inherent to weapons of mass destruction. This could embolden other countries in possession of nuclear weapons and those actively working on the development of such capabilities to join the quire of reckless rhetoric whenever they see their interests at stake. As for the EU, a renewed discourse is developing around the need to enhance the Union's strategic autonomy and capabilities in the field of security and defense. It is clear that the politics of appeasing Putin's Russia or attempting to change its political system through trade relations, external governance and value diffusion have not been successful. The EU actively financing

lethal weapons for Ukraine through multilateral funds from the EPF can be interpreted as testimony of a new approach that speaks less to the actions of a normative power than to the posture of a realist actor.

Vladimir Putin's initial war objective to press through to Kyiv in a matter of days to install a pro-Russian government that could be controlled by the Kremlin has tragically failed. Instead, Russia's attack has awakened an Ukrainian nation fiercely committed to fighting for its freedom and the right to determine its future as a pro-European democracy. Instead of being held back by hesitation and ambiguity, NATO and EU allies reacted decisively in providing the Ukrainian armed forces with sophisticated weaponry and training, allowing the defenders to push Russian forces back into the Oblasts of Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhya where heavy fighting continues to the day. Ukraine's war objective in January 2023 is the complete liberation of all its occupied territory, including Crimea. In turn Russia's war objective must be assumed to be gaining full control of the four provinces annexed in September 2022 and keeping authority over the Crimean peninsula. A solution on the negotiation table seems to be out of reach considering the mutually exclusive aspirations for satisfactory grounds to terminate this war. While Putin can not afford to lose the Donbas from a domestic Russian politics perspective, Zelensky would have a similarly difficult time making any territorial concessions to Moscow. With Western allies so deeply entrenched in support for the Ukrainian defense and other autocratic nations plagued by their own appetite for taking over territory in the near abroad carefully watching, Russian victory or defeat in the Donbas could have far-reaching implications for the future of the rules-based international order and the prestige of the US and European democracies within it. Ukraine's success and chances for a prosperous future will heavily depend on continued Western support and willingness to finance the massive reconstruction and recovery effort that lies ahead.

As of today it seems that Ukraine has already won the war against the Kremlin's total subjugation; in part thanks to the firm support of the transatlantic community. What is left to be defined is where the exact borders will be drawn that separate the Russian Federation from the free world. A free and rules based world that will probably remain closed to Russia and its people for many years to come even after the eventual end of Vladimir Putin's terror regime.

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