

Prioritising European Security Flanks: Extrapolating the EU's Geopolitical Power to Ukraine

WRITTEN BY ANASTASIIA VOZOVYCH

<https://www.istockphoto.com/fr/vectoriel/banni%C3%A8re-de-lunion-europ%C3%A9enne-gm1291600080-386669292?phrase=european%20commission>



Prioritising European Security Flanks: Extrapolating the EU's Geopolitical Power to Ukraine

By Anastasiia Vozovych

The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), put into motion by the Maastricht Treaty, was supposed to underpin the EU's actorness and strengthen its defence capabilities. CSDP brings 'an operational capacity to deploy civilian and military missions abroad' (EEAS, 2022). Consequently, when it comes to interoperability per se, it should be considered from two perspectives: the technical and 'political' ones. The former envisages enhancing the cooperation among land forces on the ground while the latter grows in reaching coherence, efficiency and, even more critical – solidarity in pursuing the agreed strategy (Strategic Compass, 2022). This can be done only if all actors are on the same page. That is why the 'political background' becomes crucial for approaching the interoperability of land forces in the first place. Finding common ground concerning the insecurities in the specific region is a cornerstone of designating and implementing the policy. While the 'soft power' capacity of the EU (Czaputowicz, 2017) is beyond a doubt, its 'hard power' potential still requires worthy endeavours (Carp, 2020), especially for the time being, when the status-quo has been questioned by Russia's assertive posture and activities (ACLEDA, 2022). In light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the European security architecture has been attacked (EEAS, 2022). Thus, this Info Flash seeks to outline the EU's options to face up to challenges posed by the Kremlin in terms of its military capabilities. This IF outlines the EU's peace-building and peace-keeping efforts through an analysis of CSDP operations, particularly in Ukraine (EUAM, 2014). Subsequently, this IF will review the security dimension of the EU-Ukraine interactions to summarise this case and draw the metrics for its analysis. By comparing the security framework for the EU-Ukraine cooperation and the EU-the Western Balkans interactions, this IF aspires to address the central question: which flank the EU should prioritise in terms of strengthening its defence capabilities.

The EU's Security policy overview

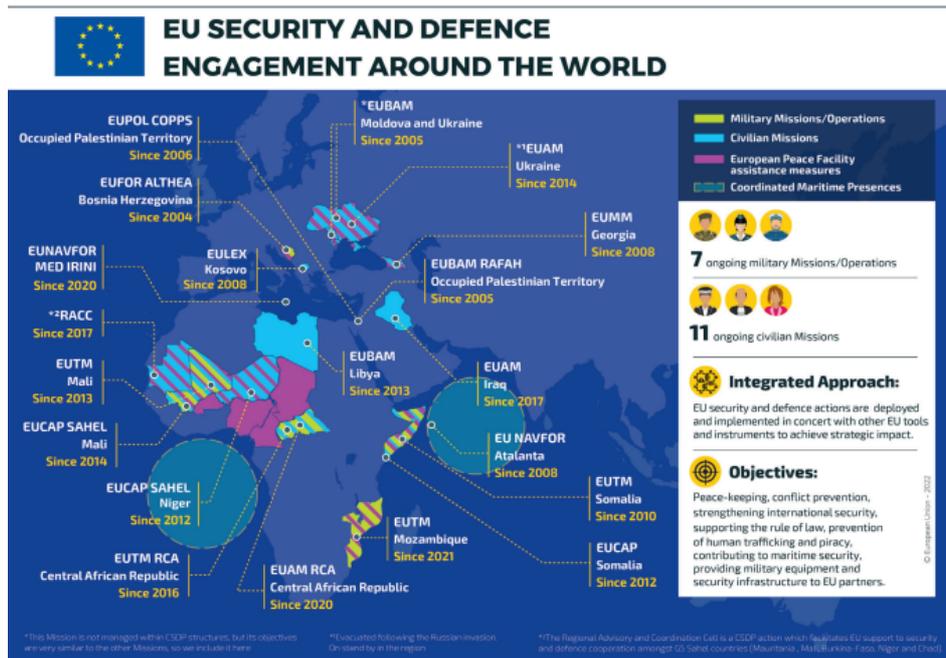
The question of agency regarding delivering security in Europe grew after putting an end to the historical confrontation embedded into the Cold War optics. The key actors – NATO, the US, and the EU – came across the security vacuum, which was supposed to be defined as soon as possible, given the international dynamics of the early 90s (Olsen, & McCormick, 2017). In general, the cooperation among the EU Member States in terms of military capacity was relatively slow. The temporal solution had been found in the Western European Union (WEU), established in 1954 following the crash of the European Defence Community, aimed at strengthening the defence commitments among the Member States (however, it never reached the same level of obligations as those within NATO). Having stretched its limited capabilities during the Gulf War 1990-1991, the WEU sessions led by the foreign and defence ministers at Petersberg initiated an instrument that assigned WEU to the so-called Petersberg assignments (Olsen, & McCormick, 2017). These assignments included but were not limited to humanitarian and rescue operations, peace-keeping and peace-building missions, and other crisis management activities. Simultaneously, the first attempt to tackle the absence of joint military capacity occurred in creating the Franco-German brigade in 1991, which was converted into Eurocorps later. The latter has been implemented since 1995, comprising up to 60k troops (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain). Eurocorps had been sent to carry out missions in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan (Olsen, & McCormick, 2017).

In the late 1990s, Petersberg assignments had been integrated into the EU institutional framework. In 1997, British PM Tony Blair gave a clear signal that the UK would be able to take the lead in building the EU security landscape. The French president Jacques Chirac delved into exploring the possibility of establishing the Anglo-French axis in defence matters, which resulted in the St. Malo declaration 1998 underpinning the EU's actorness in the international arena – “must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed up by credible military forces, the means to decide to use them, and the readiness to do so”. The parties also agreed on establishing a European Rapid Reaction Force (RRF), promulgated by the German chancellor Gerhard Schröder. Finally, the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) was launched in 1992. The first mission in Macedonia was launched shortly (Olsen, & McCormick, 2017).

Following a bunch of institutional modifications and aligning the regulation framework CSDP was considered to operate unanimously. The Lisbon Treaty granted the opportunity to establish the 'enhanced cooperation', opening the door for translating member states' defence ambitions into solid military capabilities. It allowed the EU to foster the collaborative framework for military operations such as peace-keeping, peace-making and disarmament. This course of action was supposed to underpin the EU's role as a 'global player' in sharing the responsibility for international security (Olsen, & McCormick, 2017). This ambition was immediately implemented by deploying the peace-keeping troops in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Macedonia, Bosnia and Kosovo.

In 2019 Ursula von der Leyen promised to make her new commission 'geopolitical' (EPRS, 2020). Simultaneously French President Emmanuel Macron called for the EU to become a 'geopolitical entity'. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Joseph Borrell called on the EU to 're-learn the language of power.'

It means that the EU seeks to translate its geopolitical ambitions into tangible actions. Given the recent developments, the question of Ukraine's accession to the EU precipitates overlooking one more dimension – the defence facet. The current debates brought this question to the table and explored the margins of 'justice' regarding the efforts made by the Western Balkans on their way to joining the EU. Should these two cases be considered together? Or do they tell two completely different stories? What does the EU have to do with the Western Balkans for the time being, and where is the place of Ukraine in this equation?



*Mission in Mali has been suspended since June 2022 in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the Kremlin's heavy presence in the Sahel region (Wagner Group)

Source: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/EU-mission-and-operation_2022-new-layout-V2.pdf

Walking through European security flanks

After the collapse of Yugoslavia, the Balkan countries delved into a myriad of bloody confrontations (Dabrowski & Myachenkova, 2018). Genocide and ethnic cleansing were brutally back. This chain of outrageous conflicts became the 'satisfied justification' for the West to build upon the biased attitudes towards the Balkans as a region screaming for patronising from the West (Hope, 2017). In terms of accumulating its geopolitical capital, the EU decided to foster the European aspirations of the Western Balkans forward (European Commission, 2018). Simultaneously, it precipitated Europe's involvement not only in terms of political dimension but the military one. CSDP missions were deployed to foster the common grounds for tackling the simmering insecurities in the region. In doing so, the EU got the chance to strengthen its deployment 'skills', including interoperability of its peace-keeping capabilities.

Moreover, amid the numerous attempts from Russia and China (Krstinovska, 2021) to pave the way for imposing their will, the EU has become even more eager to engage with the region (Kaczmarek & Jakóbowski, 2015). Given the dynamics of the current international developments, Brussels is trying to react according to its goals and capabilities in delivering security. However, if the Western Balkans are currently the theatre for 'indirect' tackling Russia's invasiveness (Kelkitli, 2021), Ukraine has become the place where Russian aggression is more than natural.

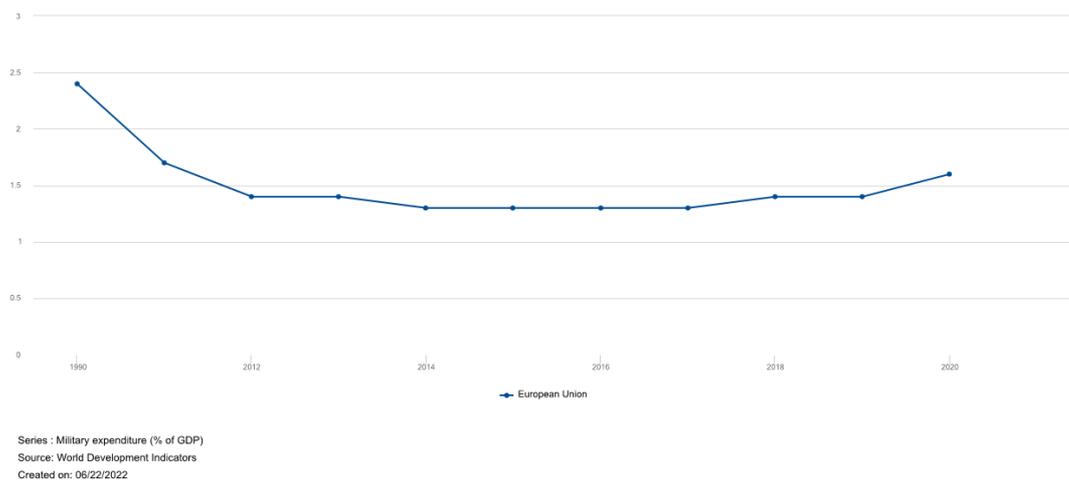
According to High Representative Josep Borrell's remarks, a secure, stable, democratic, and prosperous Ukraine should remain the backbone of peace in Europe. As long as Eastern Europe remains a 'grey security zone', Russia will not abandon its ambitions to restore the Soviet Union in a new capacity (Crombois, 2015). Strengthening the EU defence capacity and improving the European military's interoperability should become the Union's priority. This priority can be articulated more convincingly if the threats are outlined in a clear-cut way (Lehne, 2020).

Establishing the institutional framework (PESCO, CARD) tends to focus on improving the interoperability rather than developing the specific weapons systems. However, the latter cannot be lost entirely from the EU's radars amid the appalling catastrophe launched by Russia. Apart from the ideological basis for inciting wars with neighbours, Russia's security strategies also contained provisions on the methods of waging these wars. These clauses have been ignored for a long time, but they start adding up only amid the current developments. For example, Article 38 of current Russia's security strategy mentions that the Russian Federation aims to improve its methods of warfare, including introducing new weapons (Decree of the Russian Federation, 2015). In this context, the situation in July 2020 in the Donbas is worth noting. The Ukrainian side could not determine from which weapon the military medic was killed because representatives of the Russian occupation forces cut out the affected organs and bones in the Horlivka morgue located in the temporarily occupied Donetsk region (Censor.NET, 2020). This suggests that Russia deliberately took this step to make it impossible to identify the type of weapon which inflicted the fatal injuries. It can be inferred that this could be the latest weapon designated by Russia and had been tested at that time in Ukraine.

Such matters prove that the EU should avail of the opportunity to deepen cooperation with Ukraine in intelligence exchange, including assessing Russia's military capabilities. It also provides significant military assistance, perhaps even deploying the military mission along with an already existing civilian one (EUAM), as this practical experience may become outrageously crucial for building the capabilities of the united European army. The Foreign Affairs Council decides on deploying any new mission by the Member States (EEAS, 2022).

Using the eastern security flank can help tackle the main challenges for the EU's security delivery.

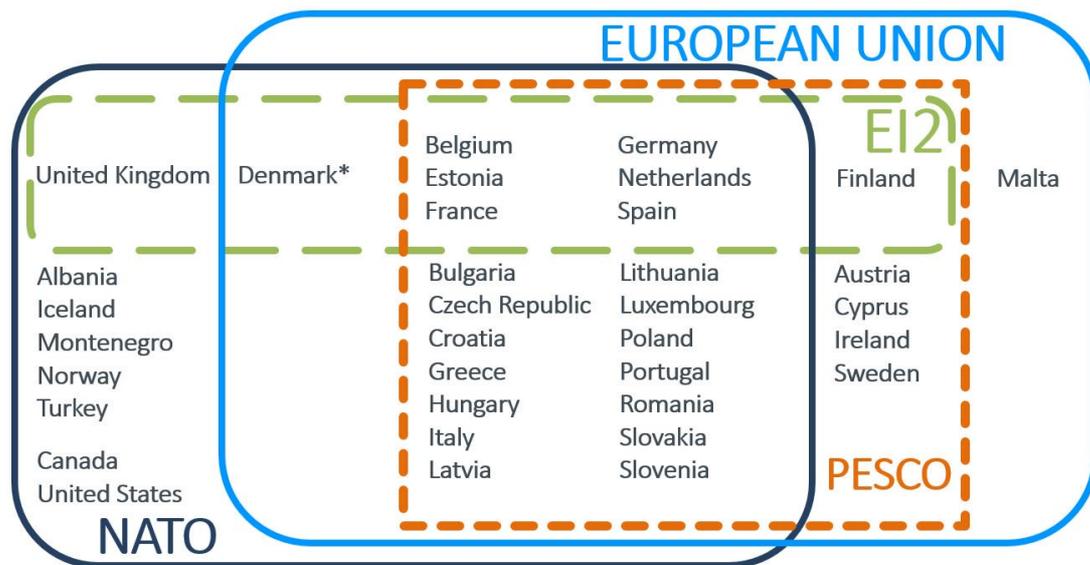
1) Mobilising the funding capacity (Dombrovskis, 2022)



The retrospective overview of the EU military expenditures indicates that over the recent decades, the military spending of the EU has decreased. The problem with funding has become one of the main issues for the successful implementation of the security policy for the EU Members (Novaky, 2016). It might be explained by the fact that most of the countries are also the members of NATO and prefer to spend less on their defence, having the US security umbrella. However, with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine coupled with numerous threats recently articulated by Russia towards Lithuania, Poland, and the Baltic States, this issue can be mitigated as there is solid evidence of Russia's assertiveness. According to the Strategic Compass, the EU should “**make a quantum leap forward**” and increase its capacity and willingness to act”. It includes but is not limited to strengthening the EU’s resilience and “investing in better defence capabilities” (Strategic Compass, 2022). In this regard, securing the eastern flank of the EU becomes the top priority and might be used to convince those members who have remained sceptical about strengthening defence capabilities.

2) Establishing coherence in terms of divergent political approaches

De France and Witney (2013) called the European approach to building its security capabilities 'Europe's Strategic Cacophony'. It might be explained by the fact that there are different camps in the EU in terms of security orientation, affiliation, and attitudes.



Infographic: Valentin Kreilinger, Jacques Delors Institute Berlin
 *) Denmark has an opt-out from the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy.
 E12 is the European Intervention Initiative launched by French President Emmanuel Macron.

*After a 30-year-opt-out policy on security & defence, Denmark decided to join the EU CSDP in June 2022 (66,9% votes in favour)

According to the Strategic Compass, the strength of the EU lies in "unity, solidarity and determination". It precipitates that for making the EU a more robust security provider, the political component is becoming crucial. The unity against the common enemy should bridge the gaps among divergent political orientations.

3) Translating ambitions into the irrevocable agency

Over the last decades, the EU put much effort into outlining its actorness and proving that the EU is a full-fledged actor in international relations with the natural, not delusional agency. The EU's responsibility is evidenced by establishing the security frameworks, including CSDP missions, and developing the Strategic Compass. Ursula von der Leyen stated at the GLOBSEC Security Forum 2022 held in Bratislava, "Ukraine is not a burden for us; it is our responsibility". Securing the Eastern flank of the EU is the only way to guarantee a robust and peaceful Europe (von der Leyen, 2022). The European values keep catching on. They became the main reason the Ukrainians keep paying the steepest cost - with their lives. This can and must be used as bargaining power to strengthen and deepen European capabilities.

Lastly, CSDP has developed a sense of annoyance over the past decades, the so-called fatigue. The proper reaction to the ongoing developments in Eastern Europe may help bring the standard security policy back to the EU's agenda and eliminate this fatigue. It allows the EU to become wholly united and devoted to the common cause (Witney, 2022).

Conclusion

To sum up, the current developments in Ukraine give the satisfactory justification to put into motion the EU's deployment capabilities, including but not limited to strengthening technological capacity, planning, establishing common standards, and aligning the legislation. It weaves a fabric for collaboration and cooperation within the European context and can help make Europe more united and homogeneous in terms of delivering security. It does not mean that the Western Balkans, for instance, should take a back seat. These cases should be analysed separately and considered as each is moving at its own pace. Ukraine is primed to strengthen the EU by enhancing its European defence capabilities. The EU should avail of the opportunity to act as a stabilising force. The European reaction toward the developments in Ukraine is primed to become decisive in the coming decades. The Russian invasion of Ukraine is supposed to test Europe and its capabilities to face the current challenges. In terms of political justification for deploying the EU's capabilities, Ukraine is the best case for doing so. It is high time the EU mobilised its interoperation capacity and translated it into a decisive action aimed at addressing the core dichotomy assigned to the EU's defence potential – capabilities vs ambitions.

Bibliography

Carp, R. (2020). Combining soft power with the geopolitical approach – how difficult is for the EU to change its attitude? *The Romanian Journal for Baltic and Nordic Studies*, 12(2), 107–115. https://doi.org/10.53604/rjbns.v12i2_6

Censor. NET (2020) 'Invaders Cut out Bones from the Body of Medic Ilin, Who Died near Zaitsevo.' Retrieved from: https://censor.net/en/news/3209796/invaders_cut_out_bones_from_the_body_of_medec_ilin_who_died_near_zaitsevo

Council of the European Union (2022) Strategic Compass. Retrieved from: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7371-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

Crombois, J. F. (2015). Which geopolitics for the European Union? The EU's Eastern Partnership. *International Relations and Diplomacy*, 3(7), 480–486. <https://doi.org/10.17265/2328-2134/2015.07.005>

Czaputowicz, J. (2017). Global strategy for the EU – the end of the EU as a normative power? *Przegląd Europejski*, (4-2016), 24–36. <https://doi.org/10.31338/1641-2478pe.4.16.2>

Dabrowski, M., & Myachenkova, Y. (2018). The Western Balkans on the road to the European Union. Bruegel. Retrieved April 25, 2022, from <https://www.bruegel.org/2018/02/the-western-balkans-on-the-road-to-the-european-union/>

De France, O., Witney, N. (2013) 'Europe's Strategic Cacophony', https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/173488/ECFR77_SECURITY_BRIEF_AW.pdf

Decree of the Russian Federation President of December 31, 2015 No. 683 "On the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation". *Collected Legislation of the Russian Federation*, 2016 Retrieved from: <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/files/ru/l8iXkR8XLAtxeilX7JK3XXy6Y0AsHD5v.pdf>

Dombrovskis, V. EU's Foreign, Security and Defence Policy after the Russian invasion of Ukraine: Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at the EP plenary, EUEA. Retrieved from: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu%E2%80%99s-foreign-security-and-defence-policy-after-russian-invasion-ukraine-speech-high_en

EU Missions and Operations (2022) EU COMMON SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY (CSDP) Retrieved from: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/EU-mission-and-operation_2022-new-layout-V2.pdf

European Commission (2022) Speech by President von der Leyen at the GLOBSEC 2022 Bratislava Forum. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_22_3411

European Commission. (2018). Engaging with the Western Balkans. European Political Strategy Centre. Retrieved April 25, 2022, from https://www.rcc.int/swp/download/docs/epsc_-_brief_-_engaging_with_western_balkans.pdf/a9aabf45ea01dbdd09385eef13f26e0e.pdf

Bibliography

European Parliamentary Research Service (2020). The von der Leyen Commission's priorities for 2019-2024. Retrieved from [:https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/646148/EPRS_BRI\(2020\)646148_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/646148/EPRS_BRI(2020)646148_EN.pdf)

European Union Advisory Mission to Ukraine (2014) Retrieved from: <https://www.euam-ukraine.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Factsheet-EUAM-ENG.pdf>

Foreign Affairs Council (2022) Foreign Affairs Council: Remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell at the press conference. Retrieved from: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/foreign-affairs-council-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-press-conference_en

Hope, I. (2017). The Western Balkans and the Revenge of History. Research Division – NATO Defense College, Rome. Retrieved April 24, 2022, from <https://ebooklibrary.biz/pdf/the-western-balkans-and-the-revenge-of-history>

Kaczmarek, M., & Jakóbczyk, J. (2015). China on Central-Eastern Europe: '16+1' as seen from Beijing. OSW commentary number 166/15.04.2015. AEI Banner. Retrieved April 28, 2022, from <http://aei.pitt.edu/63761/>

Kelkitli, F. A. (2021). Russia in the Western Balkans: A receding power. *Balkan Araştırma Enstitüsü Dergisi*, 145–178. <https://doi.org/10.30903/balkan.954314>

Krstinowska, A. (2021). Between values and interests. Western Balkans' cooperation with China and its potential implications for the EU. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Retrieved April 30, 2022, from <https://www.kas.de/documents/252038/11055681/Western+Balkans%E2%80%99+cooperation+with+China+-+Between+values+and+interests.pdf/3e7725a0-eed2-a556-a558-987d2221e132?version=1.0&t=1633357470391>

Lehne, S. (2020). How the EU can survive in a geopolitical age. *How the EU Can Survive in a Geopolitical Age*. Retrieved April 23, 2022, from https://carnegieendowment.org/files/2-24_Lehne-EU_Geopolitics.pdf

Novak, N. I. (2016). Who wants to pay more? The European Union's military operations and the dispute over financial burden sharing. *European Security*, 25(2), 216-236.

Bibliography

Olsen, J., McCormick, J. (2017). The European Union: Politics and policies.

Witney, N. (2022) Five reasons driving European defence integration after the Ukraine invasion. Retrieved from: <https://ecfr.eu/article/five-reasons-driving-european-defence-integration-after-the-ukraine-invasion/>