



UNIVERSIDADE
CATÓLICA
PORTUGUESA

INSTITUTO DE ESTUDOS POLÍTICOS

The European Union-Russia Relationship: Has the EU Moved Away from a Liberal Stance towards a Realist One after the War in Ukraine?

Degree: MA in Governance, Leadership and Democracy Studies

By Francisco Prisca

Masters thesis written under the supervision of

Professor Dr. Francisco Proença Garcia

Institute for Political Studies

September 2025

Lisbon, Portugal

Word Count: 27 000

Abstract

This dissertation investigates whether the European Union has shifted from a predominantly liberal approach to a more realist posture in its relations with Russia following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Drawing on the theoretical debates of liberalism, realism, and normative power, it traces the EU's policy evolution from the optimism of the 1990s to the geopolitical awakening of the 2020s.

The study first examines the foundations of EU–Russia relations through agreements such as the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1997) and the Common Strategy on Russia (1999), which reflected the EU's liberal values and belief that most states would enjoy becoming liberal democracies. It then considers the limits of this framework, exposed by the 2008 Georgia war and the 2014 annexation of Crimea, when sanctions and energy dependence revealed both EU divisions and Russian assertiveness.

Ukraine forms a central case study, showing the Union's gradual move from the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership towards deeper integration through the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, culminating in the decision to grant Ukraine candidate status in 2022.

The analysis demonstrates that the invasion prompted unprecedented measures: the adoption of the Strategic Compass, the European Peace Facility, and EUMAM Ukraine; record defence spending and common procurement initiatives; the most extensive sanctions regime in EU history; and new global strategies such as the Global Gateway and the European Economic Security Strategy.

The findings suggest not a complete abandonment of liberal ideals but a hybridization of liberal and realist logics. While the EU continues to emphasize international law, values, and enlargement conditionality, it increasingly relies on hard power and economic statecraft. February 2022 thus marked both the end of the EU's liberal partnership with Russia and the

beginning of its emergence as a geopolitical actor with Ukraine at the centre of its strategic vision.

Abstrato

Esta dissertação investiga se a União Europeia passou de uma abordagem predominantemente liberal para uma postura mais realista nas suas relações com a Rússia após a invasão à Ucrânia em fevereiro de 2022. Com base nas teorias da disciplina de relações internacionais, mencionamos o liberalismo, realismo e poder normativo, analisando-se a evolução da política da UE desde o otimismo dos anos 1990 até ao despertar geopolítico da década de 2020.

O estudo examina, em primeiro lugar, os fundamentos das relações UE–Rússia através de acordos como o Acordo de Parceria e Cooperação (1997) e a Estratégia Comum para a Rússia (1999), que refletiam a confiança liberal da União nos seus valores e ideais, tal como na eventual vontade de outros países praticarem esses mesmos valores. Em seguida, considera-se os limites desse quadro, expostos pela guerra da Geórgia em 2008 e pela anexação da Crimeia em 2014, quando as sanções e a dependência energética revelaram tanto as divisões internas da UE como a assertividade russa.

A Ucrânia constitui o estudo de caso central, demonstrando a evolução gradual da relação da União desde a Política Europeia de Vizinhança e a Parceria Oriental até uma integração mais profunda através do Acordo de Associação e da Área de Comércio Livre Abrangente e Aprofundado, culminando na concessão do estatuto de candidato em 2022.

A análise demonstra que a invasão desencadeou medidas sem precedentes: a adoção da Bússola Estratégica para a Segurança e Defesa, a criação do Mecanismo Europeu para a Paz e da Missão de Assistência Militar da UE (EUMAM Ukraine); níveis recorde de despesa em defesa e iniciativas de aquisição conjunta; o mais extenso regime de sanções da história da UE; e novas estratégias globais como a Global Gateway e a Estratégia Europeia de Segurança Económica.

Os resultados sugerem não um abandono completo dos ideais liberais, mas uma junção entre lógicas liberais e realistas. Embora a UE continue a dar importância máxima ao direito

internacional, os valores e a condicionalidade do alargamento, recorre cada vez mais ao poder militar e ao poder associado ao seu mercado interno. Fevereiro de 2022 marcou, assim, tanto o fim da parceria liberal com a Rússia como o início da sua afirmação como ator geopolítico, tendo a Ucrânia como combustível para esta alteração estratégica.

Index

1. Political Engagement and Diplomacy	8
1.1. The Georgian War in 2008.....	11
1.2. Annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Its Importance	13
1.3. Energy Related Sanctions	20
1.4. Economic Related Sanctions	21
2. State of The Art	26
3. Shaping of the EU and Public Opinion within EU's Member States towards Russia throughout the Years	35
4. European Union's Policy towards Ukraine	54
5. Geopolitical Shifts and EU's Global Strategy	60
5.1. EU's Policy Changes Post-2022	60
5.2. Sanctions and Law Enforcement	65
5.3. EU's Political Discourse and Strategy	69
5.4. EU's Geopolitical Stance in a New Paradigm	73
6. Conclusion and Future Research.....	77
Bibliography	81

1. Political Engagement and Diplomacy

The official start of the relationship between the European Union and the Russian Federation was set through the EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (CPA), on the 1st of December 1997. This bilateral agreement was signed between all the Member States and Russia, with the possibility of helping the country to “comeback” after the Cold War and the fall of the Soviet Union, meaning, to help democratize its society and its regime, so not only focusing on the economic realm, but also on the social side of the coin. To help Russia develop its economy and to change it onto a market economy, to enhance political dialogue between both parties, which would in turn, open the path for even more cooperation between both sides and a further democratization of Russia. In turn, this was expected to pave the way for deeper cooperation and a further democratization of Russian society.¹ It was here then, that the European Union first moved officially towards Russia, showcasing the desire it had to facilitate trade between its member states and the country, as well as to have a prosperous Russia that would in turn, work as an ally of the European Union, however, it also showed that we really we’re on the Third Wave of Democratization mentioned by Samuel Huntington, hence the belief and confidence of the Western world that everyone would in fact wish to pursue liberal ideals and values², such as the one’s that the EU defends publicly, and that is why I believe we’ve seen a true change of how the EU envisions Russia, in the totality of its relationship with the country.

Eight years after the CPA being put into motion, there was a Summit in St Petersburg that further showcased the desire, from both sides it seemed, to strengthen the dynamic of this partnership, which culminated in what was labelled as “The four “Common Spaces””, each having a different topic of interest. The Common Economic Space, where there was focus on trade, but

¹ European Council, *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, and the Russian Federation*, Official Journal L 327, 28 November 1997.

² Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

also on the energy dialogue as well as infrastructure projects that would benefit both parties. The Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice, where the focus was on joint action towards acts of terrorism, or whatever kind of organised crime developments that would occur in either territory. Another element of interest in this “space” was the visa facilitation, basically, to be as easy as it is to travel between member states, as a citizen of one.³

Followed by the Common Space of Co-operation in the Field of External Security, although it also is meshed with some of the topics mentioned above, it also focuses on the neighbouring countries of Russia, such as Georgia and Moldova, where there were huge conflicts, especially with the fall of the Soviet Union and all the clashes between ethnicities in such territories.

Finally, the Common Space on Research, Education and Culture, where the major focus was on the development of qualified individuals that would help develop the competitiveness of both economies, with the creation of partnerships between universities on both sides, to help promote this intellectual growth that benefits everyone.⁴

All in all, it is of vital importance to mention that after Vladimir Putin assumed the presidency in Russia in 2000, biannually summits we’re held between the European-Union and its member states and Russia, to maintain cooperation and dialogue that would further enhance the relationship, which at the time, we could portray it as a “strategic partnership”⁵, even though, from our point of view, the strategy outlined and taken by the European Union was one of that gave liberty for Putin to pursue his aspirations and views for what the future of Russia should look like, that is, to maintain its sphere of influence in Central and Eastern Europe, and to continue the fight against the West.

Throughout these summits we saw the European Union develop what is known as “effective multilateralism”. Effective multilateralism was referred to the willingness of EU Member States

³ European Council, “Joint Statement of the EU-Russia Summit”, St. Petersburg, 31 May 2003.

⁴ Hiski Haukkala, *The EU-Russia Strategic Partnership: The Limits of Post-Sovereignty* (London: Routledge, 2010), 78-82.

⁵ Richard Sakwa, *Russia and the EU: From Partnership to Antagonism* (London: Routledge, 2017), 24-28.

to delegate powers to EU institutions in order to establish a rules-based system capable of coordinating collective responses to international challenges.⁶ This institutional optimism, however, underestimated the degree to which Russia remained committed to a realist understanding of sovereignty and power.

When it comes to energy⁷, the EU also showed interest in the development of the infrastructure that would transport said energy, as it did with Ukraine, in the Paris summit of September 2008, where we saw a major development of the ties between the Union and the country, especially because most of the natural gas that the member states import from Russia go through Ukraine as a transit country, hence the urgency to develop the methods of said transportation, and to strengthen the relationship with a country that could be at Russia's mercy⁸, and where most of Russian energy flows through before entering the EU. The urgency of these initiatives was underscored by the fact that, by the late 2000s, approximately 40 percent of EU natural gas imports and 30 percent of its crude oil imports originated in Russia.⁹

In summary, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the European Union saw the opportunity to follow the trend of democratisation that was fuelled by the ideologic win of the United States and liberal democracies and focus on the political change that would occur throughout the Russia Federation following the Cold War. What I tried to point out in the previous page was the key moments that developed throughout the start of this partnership, one that at first was mainly of cooperation, which then led to a strategic partnership with the following summits and the direct dialogue and talks about extremely important topics, such as energy security, but also social related issues, for example, visas and the facilitation of travelling between member states and Russia. The goals of the European Union weren't only limited to cooperation with Russia,

⁶ European Council, *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*, Brussels, 12 December 2003.

⁷ Which is obviously a huge topic, particularly in the PCA with Russia, from the supply that could lead to dependency from the EU and, of course, create a major security issue.

⁸ European Commission, *EU Energy Security and Solidarity Action Plan*, COM (2008) 781 final, Brussels, 13 November 2008.

⁹ Agnia Grigas, *The Politics of Energy and Memory between the Baltic States and Russia* (London, Routledge, 2013), 111-15.

but also with the belief that Russia would change its way of acting in the international realm, this meaning, with the notion that Russia, if it was to become prosperous again, it would gladly accept and perpetrate the values shared by the EU.

1.1. The Georgian War in 2008

This was quite important at the time, for the bigger picture of what Russia intended to do in its foreign policy agenda, and how the perhaps lack of true consequences for the Russian Federation from the Western world paved way for a permissive environment where it was possible for the current war breakout that we're living in.

The outbreak of the short war was enough to show the world, how little Russia thought of what is deemed as the International Law, and any other agreements that the country had partaken in. To particularly point out those agreements, I can mention the previous cease fire agreement which entered action in 1992, South Ossetia¹⁰, through the usage of several military actions that we're taken in Georgian territory. But not only did Russia break agreements it had signed with its neighbouring country, it showed no regard to the International Law because the act of recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states is a violation of Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty, something that was overlooked by the European Union, and is in direct contravention of international law.¹¹

I don't wish to say that there wasn't any change in regards of how the European Union looked at its relationship with Russia, we certainly saw changes. The French president at the time, Nicolas Sarkozy, who was representing the EU, mediated a ceasefire agreement between Tbilisi and Moscow. However, many political analysts described the diplomatic intervention as

¹⁰ Agreement on Principles of Settlement of the Georgia-South Ossetia Conflict (Sochi Agreement), 24 June 1992.

¹¹ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 26 June 1945, 1 UNTS XVI; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), *Helsinki Final Act*, 1 August 1975.

a mere form of appeasement, reflecting the unwillingness of major European Union powers to confront Russia directly and upfront.¹² I think this was the first time that the member states understood that there was no way that we could liberalize Russia, politically nor socially speaking, there was no interest whatsoever to become what we deem as a liberal democracy, so this is, in my opinion, the start of the erosion of what was once a strategic partnership, that turned into a structural challenge to European security.¹³

This is possible to state because we saw the European Union take initiative with the creation of the Eastern Partnership¹⁴, involving five former soviet states¹⁵, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. This was the strategic response given by the European Union to the first major overstep by Russia regarding the relationship between both, understanding the major dependence on Russian energy, a supplier that clearly isn't trustworthy because it has followed the path of militarizing its energy, knowing that, at the time, roughly 40% of its oil and gas was being imported by the European Union.

It is also of interest to mention that the Baltic and Polish states had a very different reaction to the Georgian war, especially compared to other member states. The former publicly declared the need to support Georgia, pushing the agenda that the country should have a swift path towards membership into the EU and NATO, especially because all of these states have indirect conflicts with Russia, given that they believe that this particular war was an obvious showcase of Putin's imperialistic views, which nowadays, we can easily confirm such ideas.¹⁶ On the

¹² Roy Alisson, "Russia Resurgent? Moscow's Campaign to "Coerce Georgia to Peace"", *International Affairs* 84, no. 6 (2008): 1145-1171.

¹³ Haukkala, *EU-Russia Strategic Partnership*, 5-9.

¹⁴ European Commission, "Eastern Partnership", Brussels, 2021.

¹⁵ The Eastern Partnership was initially formed by another previous soviet state, Belarus, however, after the elections of 2020 that led to the deterioration of the rule of law and democracy itself in the country, the EU suspended its relationship with Belarus in 2021. I'd like to mention that this was the right choice, given that a couple of years later, we saw Belarus assist Russia with its invasion of Ukraine, giving way for Russia's military to enter its territory, in order to gain geopolitical advantage regarding the Ukraine soil. It needs to be mentioned that the EU didn't stop the support towards democratic forces that act in Belarus and try to push the country towards a different kind of political agenda.

¹⁶ Agnia Grigas, *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 55-59.

other side of the coin, key member states such as the United Kingdom, France and Italy, all decided to turn a blind eye to the occurrence, given the economic implications that their countries might've faced if they had decided to act against Russia in a convict manner. That is also true to the route taken by the European Union, because there we're no harsh sanctions towards Russia and merely the adoption of diplomatic talk, mainly led by France that mediated the ceasefire at the time, which, many specialists labelled said approach as a mere "appeasement", particularly in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea.¹⁷

1.2. Annexation of Crimea in 2014 and Its Importance

We cannot say that the Annexation of Crimea was a true turning point regarding the European Union's position towards Russia, because simply put, the reaction or lack of it created the pathway to the full-scale invasion in 2022. However, this was the first time where we we're to point out the slight shift of diplomatic tone between both parties, the palpable tension that was felt in the relationship¹⁸, regardless of whether the EU acted as it should, at the time, especially if we take into account that the Russian view towards how the EU was dealing with their country was always one, as Mr Dimitry Polyanskiy, from the Russian Foreign Ministry, described as "take it or leave it ; if you want it, you accept it; if you do not like it, well, that is your problem"¹⁹. Knowing that the political realm of Russia felt that the European Union was acting as if they we're doing them a favour, or stating that there isn't a better offer, and understanding how the Kremlin has, ever since 2007 demonstrated that their political history and imperialistic views have never left their political thought, it could be deemed probable that retaliation, even

¹⁷ Thomas de Waal, *The Caucasus: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 200-205.

¹⁸ Katya Kruk, "The Crimean Factor: How the European Union Reacted to Russia's Annexation of Crimea", *The Warsaw Institute Review*, May 7, 2019.

¹⁹ House of Lords. "The EU and Russia: before and beyond the crisis in Ukraine – European Union Committee", www.parliament.uk :56.

in a soft form, would occur. The disbelief that spread throughout the Member-States when Russia annexed Crimea showcased how far off the analytical work of the EU was, regarding what the objectives and beliefs of Russia really are and how “un-western like” Russia feels.

A quick dive onto why the Crimea peninsula was and still is important to Putin’s Russia will help us understand how the EU never really grasped what we’re Russia’s real ambitions in the international realm.

The peninsula of Crimea has a various amount of importance to Russia, particularly on a cultural and historical level when we go back to the Soviet Union, where Soviet leaders would go to Crimea to have their luxury escapes, but its real significance lies in its geopolitical and military value to Putin.

Geopolitically speaking, if we look at the map, it’s easy to understand that whoever gets to control it, can manage the pathway towards the Black Sea, which is home to an enormous amount of key energy supplies, such as of Oil and Natural Gas. Apart from the energy resources that are accessible in the Black Sea, the port of Sevastopol²⁰ is home to Russia’s black sea fleet, where its military can maintain significant presence in the maritime scheme of things, but it can also (and it did), create air defence systems that can intercept threats on the way to actual Russian soil, as well as the deployment of long range missiles that can easily reach any point of the European continent.²¹

So, not only is Crimea of extreme importance regarding Russia’s military capabilities, but it also allows it to control a heavier amount of the supply of energy that will flow onto the European market, it was also a political move due to Ukraine’s political trajectory, as most wars are, to annex Crimea. In fact, in 2013, the president of Ukraine, Víktor Yanukóvytch was on the verge of signing a document with the European Union, a move that would put Ukraine onto the

²⁰ As well as the port of Balaklava, however, the port of Sevastopol is the one where the Russian navy focused its strengths and developed the defence systems.

²¹ Dmitry Gorenburg, “The Military Significance of Sevastopol for Russia’s Black Sea Fleet”, *PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo*, no. 342 (2014).

“Western path”, something that Putin wasn’t keen on, and Moscow put enough pressure on the presidency of Ukraine for the deal to not be signed leading to The Maidan war in Ukraine.²²

What is important for us to take out from the official Annexation of Crimea²³ is the response that was felt throughout the European Union. As I’ve pointed out with the Georgian War, there’s always disparity between member states, particularly regarding what some believe to be the path to take on how to deal with Russia.

It’s clear that in both the circumstances when Russia breached International Law the countries that we’re either under previous Soviet control or had direct conflicts with Russia throughout History always tend to have a much stronger and harsh position when it comes to “punishing” the country for its actions, while countries that don’t share borders and are farther away from Russia, don’t feel the need to impose inflicting sanctions for said reasons, but also because they’re looking after their own interests, particularly economic one’s, which include the huge dependence that most member states of the European Union have in Russian energy²⁴, hence always finding it most important to maintain a somewhat good relationship with Putin to preserve the deals that are in place regarding energy.

As usual, Poland was a big advocate of showcasing true strength, particularly through the possibility of deterrence that could be provided via NATO, given the geographic location of the country and the history of conflict it has with Russia. Apart from Poland, we also saw the Baltic states wishing for a firmer hand in the matter, as well as the Nordic Countries in Europe

²² Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis, What It Means for the West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 85-89.

²³ Which happened after a “Referendum” established a new Crimean pro-Russia administration in which it officially declared independence with Ukraine which was followed by Russia’s Annexation.

²⁴ More precisely, the EU imported around 38% of natural gas and 30% of crude oil from Russia. According to the European Commission roughly 60% of the EU’s energy was imported through Russia.

(Sweden and Finland)²⁵²⁶. The United Kingdom also showed some interest in pursuing a more vicious response given they're economic power, however, it received backlash throughout the continent because London was seen as a refugee for Russian Oligarchs and even more importantly, for their money.²⁷

On the other side of the coin, Italy never showed any interest in denting its relationship with Russia, given their struggling economy, accompanied by Greece and Cyprus. As expected, Hungary did not wish for the sanctions to go through, understanding how its Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, has always tried to somewhat follow the doctrine that Putin has been implementing over his long years in power.

The Annexation of Crimea was the most serious breach of European borders since the Second World War²⁸. To put it into perspective, Russia violated the following international treaties²⁹:

- ➔ Non-Intervention provisions in the United Nations Charter³⁰³¹.
- ➔ Helsinki Final Act of 1975.³²³³
- ➔ 1990 Paris Charter.³⁴³⁵

²⁵ Even though these countries weren't NATO members in 2014, they've always had a strategic vision whenever dealing with Russia. Finland has almost a 2000-kilometre border with Russia, and even though it doesn't have the conflictive history other neighbouring countries have with Putin's country, it always understood the geopolitical importance of its region, in this instance I'm referring to the access to the Baltic Sea and to the Barents Sea, both of huge importance to Russia.

²⁶ Katarzyna Wolczuk and Ben Judah, "Ukraine and the EU: Turning the Corner?" *Chatham House Briefing Paper*, August 2014.

²⁷ Richard Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 54-61.

²⁸ "EU non-recognition policy towards temporarily occupied Crimea", *Mission of Ukraine to the European Union*, April 15, 2021.

²⁹ Kruk, "The Crimean Factor: How the European Union Reacted to Russia's Annexation of Crimea".

³⁰ The UN Charter states the utmost need to not interfere with domestic matters of any of its members, which also underlines the importance of maintaining every single state's sovereignty.

³¹ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 1945.

³² Signed by the Soviet Union at the time, this agreement was made as an attempt to appease the tensions in the Cold War, which focused on state sovereignty and human rights.

³³ OSCE, *Helsinki Final Act*, 1975.

³⁴ The Paris Charter was created the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and it was an attempt to create new forms of cooperation and security in the European Continent. However, the members in the European Union and Russia took away quite different views on what was supposed to be the "outcome" of said Charter. Russia believed that given the cooperation route that was being brought to the table meant that there would be a plan between the EU and the country, which wasn't what happened, especially with the expansion of NATO onto previously Soviet territories, an expansion that was always seen with bad eyes from Putin.

³⁵ OSCE, *Charter of Paris for a New Europe*, 21 November 1990.

- ➔ 1997 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Russia and Ukraine.³⁶
- ➔ 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances.³⁷³⁸

At the start of the year of 2014 the European Union had already began to apply sanctions, mostly one's that would be aimed at individuals that we're tied to the Russian government or to any kind of militia movements, though a more mediatic one was the suspension of the preparations for the G8 Summit that was meant to happen in Sochi, Russia. Another moment that was somewhat shocking to the international realm happened in July 2014, when the MH17 flight was brought down in Donetsk, Ukraine, an action perpetrated by a Russian-tied militia, an even then, the measures/sanctions remained carefully calibrated to avoid excessive disruption of European economies³⁹, which also showcases how the EU's responses to the Crimea situation remains under the strings of its liberal strategy. These we're the actions taken by the European Union when it took notice of the influence Russia was having in the Crimean government, and how it was spreading disinformation regarding the conflict itself. However, even after the illegal annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol, the sanctions we're simply laughable because they never showed strength, nor we're they harsh enough to deter whatever Putin's aspirations we're Russia's foreign policy. To put it quite promptly, the economic sanctions imposed by the EU would only apply to certain individuals⁴⁰, with the freezing of assets in certain banks. However, the only sanction that we could deem to be mediatic and that could've been a step in the right direction was the removal of Russia of the Group of Eight (G8)⁴¹, and we say this because the

³⁶ Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, 31 May 1997, 2303 UNTS 131.

³⁷ This Memorandum followed the implementation of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), giving security assurances by the global powers to Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, given that these countries had inherited nuclear bombs from the Soviet Union. The Memorandum would provide security to them because they had agreed in the NPT that they wouldn't ever launch their weapons nor to get leverage in negotiations. It is clear then, how Russia broke the Memorandum when it Annexed Crimea.

³⁸ United Nations, *Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances*, 5 December 1994.

³⁹ European Commission, "EU Sanctions against Russia over Ukraine Crisis", Brussels, July 2013.

⁴⁰ Kristi Raik, "EU-Russia Sanctions: A Double-Edged Sword?" *FIIA Briefing Paper* no. 162, Finnish Institute of International Affairs, October 2014.

⁴¹ European Council, "EU Restrictive Measures in Response to the Crisis in Ukraine", Council of the EU, 2014-Present.

international realm would notice this change, a cut on the EU-Russia relationship (even if it was a small one, it felt like that should be the way forward, when it came to dealing with Russia).

Even though what is mentioned above regarding the removal of Russia from the G8 felt like a step on the right path, over the last decade, we've seen only an increase of individuals that are added to these "Sanctions list", but never did the European Union try and "dig deeper" when it comes to truly dent Putin's geopolitical ambitions, only condemning the actions of Putin in normative terms, while moving away from actually embracing realist deterrence, meaning that the Kremlin's actions and ambitions remained largely unchecked⁴², something that I'll come back to throughout the following chapters.

On the fatidic day of the 22nd of February 2022, Russian troops marched and began what was labelled by Putin as a "Special Military Operation"⁴³ towards Ukrainian territory, marking the start of the war between Ukraine and Russia.

On the day of the invasion, we saw the European Council meet in urgency, something unprecedented in the Union's history. In this "special meeting" the European Council condemned in the strongest possible terms Russia's military aggression towards Ukraine and expressed full unity with international partners and full solidarity with Ukraine and its people. In short, this meeting was the definition of the first package of sanctions towards Russia⁴⁴, and in it, it was clear that, for the first time, everyone in the European Union had united against one issue.

This unity was significant. We Europeans, haven't had war happen near our territory ever since the end of the Second World War, having been quite fortunate regarding our "bubble" because of the way Europe had been reconstructed after said war, having never been in need to act sharply and with true force towards an aggressor. However, Russia's full-scale invasion

⁴² Raik, "EU-Russia Sanctions: A Double-Edged Sword?".

⁴³ Vladimir Putin, "Address on Conducting a Special Military Operation", Kremlin.ru, 24 February 2022.

⁴⁴ European Council, "European Council Conclusions on Ukraine", Brussels, 24 February 2022.

represents an existential challenge to European security and way of life, compelling the EU to take unprecedented collective action.⁴⁵

If we analyse the sanctions which we're imposed by the EU after 2014, we notice and understand that those we're made according to possible "foreign policy achievements" rather than sanctions that would dent Russia's economy⁴⁶. This is an easy conclusion to achieve because throughout the years after 2014 the European Union continued to be the biggest trader with Russia, even supporting the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline⁴⁷ and none of these actions would cut short the continuous growth of Russia's economy which enables said nation to follow its geopolitical beliefs and objectives, in fact, it only helped grow Russia's leverage for its future actions, as we mention later on.

It might be important to say that at the time of the Annexation, the conflict didn't involve the United States directly nor indirectly, and even though Europe didn't try and move away from its dependence on Russian energy, one major development happened with the relationship with Ukraine, a socialization with Ukraine which grew the Union and its Member-States closer to the country. This deeper relationship with Ukraine, and the fact that Russia had already interfered with mass disinformation throughout Europe to lit up the far-right, and the possibility of clashing with NATO member's, are important reasons for the change of stance.

As mentioned previously, the sanctions that we're imposed at the time of the Annexation of Crimea we're mainly targeted at specific individuals that had ties to the mischiefs carried out by the Russian government, however, after 2022, we've seen a total change on the approach towards how to sanction the Kremlin, with the sanctions being systemic, comprehensive, and designed to weaken Russia's capacity to sustain its war. The difference lays not only in scale but also intent: for the first time, the European Union embraced sanctions as a tool of realistic

⁴⁵ Sven Biscop, *European Strategy in the 21st Century: New Future for Old Power*, (London: Routledge, 2019), 66-69.

⁴⁶ European External Action Service, "EU Sanctions against Russia", March 2016.

⁴⁷ Katja Yafimava, *Russian Gas Transit Across Ukraine After 2019: The Options*, (Oxford: Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, 2019), 14-18.

deterrence, moving beyond its traditional normative and liberal approach.⁴⁸ We'll go over the energy and economic related sanctions, where this sharp difference can easily be noted.

1.3. Energy Related Sanctions

If we dive into the Energy related solutions, firstly we understand that during the first year of the invasion, several measures we're taken to move away from Russian fossil fuels, to weather out the crisis that was developing throughout the continent with the inflation and rising of the cost of living. During 2022 ten meetings we're held by the Council, and most of the measures taken we're implemented by the Council alone which can happen during crisis situations as this one is. The pragmatism demonstrated by the Council and the Union itself can easily be showcased when we consider the fact that, the average time to adopt EU legislation is around 2 years, whereas the emergency measures only took an average of 4 months to be formulated and applied.⁴⁹

In May 2022 the European Commission implemented the REPowerEU Plan, which was launched in order to save energy, diversify energy supplies, and produce clean energy⁵⁰. The Commission also mobilised around 300 billion Euros to fund the Plan. The month prior to the creation of the REPowerEU Plan, both the European Council and Commission pushed for the foundation of the EU Energy Platform, which coordinates demand and supply within Member-States and possible suppliers that are non-EU members, to develop new trade partners that won't weaponize their energy as Russia did at the start of the conflict, and to further increase the

⁴⁸ Ian Bond, "The EU and Russia after the Georgian War: Time to Rethink?", *Centre for European Reform Policy Brief*, September 2008.

⁴⁹ Simone Tagliapietra, "The European Union's Energy Response to the Ukraine Crisis", *Bruegel Policy Contribution*, 2022.

⁵⁰ European Commission, *REPowerEU Plan*, Brussels, May 18, 2022.

Union's independence when it comes to energy. Both these plans work hand-in-hand and have already achieved outstanding numbers, especially in decreasing trade with Russia.

Some of the sanctions applied banned the import of Russian crude oil and refined petroleum products as well as Russian coal. In 2021 the European Union imported around 45% of its gas from Russia (whether through pipeline or LNG)⁵¹, and with the solutions mentioned above regarding energy, in 2023, the number dropped to only 15% of gas imported from Russia, and the biggest suppliers of gas, as of now, are the United States and Norway⁵², which are obviously partner's that are more than likely to not weaponize they're products because they are liberal democracies. Adding to the development of new trade partners, the Union also pushed to develop ways of creating its own energy, focusing heavily on green energy, especially renewable energy. Wind and solar capacity are growing faster than ever before, in 2022 it grew around 60% more than the previous year, and in 2023 it kept growing, not as sharply but steadily, having in only two years, grown the capacity around 67%.⁵³

By diversifying supplies and expanding renewable energy, the European Union not only weakened Russia's revenues but also redefined its own energy security model.⁵⁴

1.4. Economic Related Sanctions

One of Russia's strengths is its economy. It is an extremely wealthy country, and its vast territory also means that it is quite rich in natural resources, hence the dependence that the EU fell into prior to the invasion of Ukraine. As it had happened when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, in 2022 the European Union focused on sanctioning, at first, certain individuals, freezing

⁵¹ European Commission, *EU Energy Security Strategy*, Brussels, May 2014.

⁵² European Commission, "Quarterly Report on European Gas Markets", Brussels, 2023.

⁵³ International Energy Agency, *Renewables 2023: Analysis and Forecast to 2028* (Paris: IEA, 2023).

⁵⁴ Andreas Goldthau and Nick Sitter, "A Liberal Actor in a Realist World? The EU Regulatory State and the Global Political Economy of Energy", *Global Policy* 5, no. 3 (2014): 337-346.

assets of those that would've directly given a helping hand to the invasion, whether that would be through direct financing, presence in the industry of armament, basically anything that could help Russia fuel itself during the conflict.

Though this time the EU didn't only target oligarchs and decided to restrict Russia's access to EU's capital and financial market services through banning its access to SWIFT,

“In 2022 (March and June), pursuant to international and multilateral action to intensify financial sanctions against Russia, specialised financial messaging providers, such as Swift, were prohibited from providing services to designated entities under EU Council Regulation (EU) 833/2014. As Swift is incorporated under Belgian law and must comply with EU regulation, Swift disconnected all designated Russian entities (and their designated Russia-based subsidiaries) from the Swift network. Additionally, in compliance with EU Council Regulation (EU) 765/2006 containing similar prohibition, Swift also disconnected designated Belarusian entities (and their designated Belarus-based subsidiaries)”⁵⁵.

The ban on seven Russian banks which we're taken out of the SWIFT system is unprecedented territory, because it removes them from the international business sector, though it is important to point out that the two biggest Russian banks weren't banned (Gazprombank and Sberbank), mainly because the removal of such banks from the system could lead to a violent response from Russia and the energy market could quite easily enter in turmoil, which is something that the EU does not want to happen again. Another key factor in the sanctions imposed by the Union is the fact that they also incorporate those nations who might facilitate Russia's objectives, such as Belarus.

Belarus has been sanctioned because it has been allowing Russian forces to make their way through the country to gain strategic points towards Ukraine, to enable the launch of missiles on their soil, mainly providing any particular aid that they might be able to give to Russia. Having this in mind, the EU also imposed a SWIFT ban on four banks, restrictions on trade, travel, and the freezing of assets of entities and individuals⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ SWIFT, “EU Sanctions and SWIFT Compliance”, Brussels, March 2022.

⁵⁶ Council of the EU, “EU Sanctions against Belarus”, Brussels 2022.

With the same chain of thought, the EU focused on punishing Iran and North Korea, with regard to the deliveries of unmanned aerial vehicles and exchanges of military equipment, missile technology and ammunition, by both nations. The sanctions targeted individuals and industries that would permit the help of said nations to Russia⁵⁷, and it is a show of strength by the EU, to make sure that those who are willing to help tyrannical nations aren't going to do so without any consequences.

This initial package of sanctions already showcased the start of paradigm shift in EU policy, though, as Josep Borell described, the implementation of the Strategic Compass was a “turning point for the European Union as a security provider and an important step for the European security and defence policy”⁵⁸.

We shall lightly touch on the strategic compass and what it means for Europe. One of the key differences when we compare the Strategic Compass to any other agenda that has been created by the EU, is the public acceptance of Russia as a threat, as the enemy. The first time that the European Union directly addresses Russia as a country that needs to be dealt with and even compares it with China. China is viewed as a partner for cooperation, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival. With China we can address matters of global concern such as climate change. This doesn't happen with Russia since the invasion of Ukraine; now seen as an aggressor whose actions undermine European security.⁵⁹

In practical terms, there will be a creation of an EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (RDC), which has the objective to deliver up to five thousand troops that can be deployed whenever and wherever. This Rapid Deployment Capacity is an answer to the need of the EU being able to act in a quicker and swiftly manner, bypassing the bureaucracies that many times come in the way to assemble such an amount of personnel in short time. An example of this Deployment

⁵⁷ Council of the EU, “EU Sanctions against Iran and North Korea”, Brussels 2023.

⁵⁸ Alice Tidey, “What is the “strategic compass” and what does it mean for EU defence?”, *Euronews*, March 23, 2022.

⁵⁹ European Council, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – For a European Union that Protects its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security*, Brussels, March 21, 2022.

Capacity would be the possible support provided to EU partner's, such as Ukraine in times of crisis⁶⁰, especially if the crisis that is occurring is one that defies the sovereignty of a country and from a civilized nation such as is what is happening in the Ukraine-Russia conflict.

There is also a shift towards the focus of expanding the Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP) into areas of interest, that could impact the security of the EU and its strategic partners⁶¹. For this to work accordingly, there needs to be greater communication and cooperation between the Common Security and Defence Policy missions of the EU and agencies such as European Union Agency of Law Enforcement and Cooperation (EUROPOL) and the Coast Guard Agency.⁶²

All the stated above will of course not try to override any of the already established treaties, especially the article 51 of the United Nations Charter, regarding the inherent right of collective self-defence in the case of armed aggression against an UN member state.⁶³

This Strategic Compass also looks to establish continuous military related exercises, whether those be infantry related, or cyber related. There is a major emphasizes in cyber security, the importance of being prepared for such attacks, especially in this day of age where cyber-attacks are more common than ever and have a greater impact in societies as a whole and the security of such. It also looks to reform the commons costs throughout the Member States of the European Union, to enhance solidarity and stimulate participation in such missions and exercises as well to cover the costs of said activities⁶⁴, which are needed for everyone's security. When talking about cyber related threats, we need to talk about disinformation and propaganda, key instruments of Russia's hybrid warfare. Misinformation is one of the easiest ways to spread fear, or to shape the narrative that one's wants to spread. Looking at Putin's Russia, the control of the narrative is of the utmost importance to the Kremlin, hence the fact of seeing the way

⁶⁰ Daniel Fiott, "The EU's Strategic Compass and the Defence of Europe", *Survival* 64, no. 3 (2022): 7-30.

⁶¹ We'll be considering these strategic partner's to be NATO, United Nations, and G7.

⁶² European External Action Service (EEAS), "Coordinate Maritime Presences", Brussels, 2022.

⁶³ United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations*, 26 June 1945, Article 51-

⁶⁴ European Commission, *Proposal for a Regulation on Horizontal Cybersecurity Requirements for Products with Digital Elements (Cyber Resilience Act)*, COM (2022), Brussels, September 15, 2022.

Putin addresses the Ukraine war in different ways throughout the development of such. Every time that he delivers a speech it will be one not to comfort nor abide by what the West want's, rather is a speech to focus on Russians, to make sure that they still believe that the war is needed, and that Russia was just preventing itself from being attacked by Ukraine and the West. This is the latest version and justification of Putin regarding why Russia invaded Ukraine, showing how tightly controlled media ensures that many citizens live under an "information bubble", isolated from different perspectives of the same scenario. The EU's strategy against disinformation therefore seeks to safeguard democratic discourse and reinforce societal resilience in the information domain.⁶⁵

Additionally, there will be a creation of a new Cyber Resilience Act, that focuses on cyber infrastructure and standards.

There is going to be an attempt to increase the control in the air domain, with the objective of maintaining safe international trade and for defence purposes in the military realm. There is an increase of the usage of drones, especially in modern warfare because of how much access and information that they can gather, without putting someone in danger when controlling such devices. So, the emphasis here is to integrate the EU's air and cyber strategies into a comprehensive defence posture capable of countering both state and non-state threats.⁶⁶

Taken together, the Strategic Compass represents not only an institutional milestone but also a profound paradigm shift in how the EU conceives its role in global security. For the first time, Brussels explicitly identifies Russia as a direct threat, commits to hard power instruments such as a Rapid Deployment Capacity, and prioritizes resilience against hybrid threats like cyberattacks and disinformation. This reflects a decisive move away from the Union's traditional liberal self-image as a hub of soft power and bureaucracy toward a more realist conception of itself as a security actor in an anarchic and contested international environment.

⁶⁵ Bethany Vailliant and Media Ajir, "Russian Information Warfare: Implications for Deterrence Theory", *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (FALL 2018): 70-89.

⁶⁶ Biscop, *European Strategy in the 21st Century: New Future for Old Power*.

2. State of The Art

Regarding the “State of the Art” there hasn’t been any specific essay, thesis nor scientific article that took this specific view regarding the relationship between the EU and Russia, most texts often focus either on Russia’s foreign policy and its realism, or the European Union’s power development/shift when it comes to the international realm/system.⁶⁷

When it comes to work that has been done regarding the EU-Russia relationship, we’ve already been able to glimpse some views regarding the energy security between the Member States and the Russian federation, where liberal interdependence and realist conflictual dynamics are obvious. Authors have debated if the energy relations between both parties are mutually beneficial, or whether they only fuel structural vulnerability, particularly because of how the Kremlin has always been keen to weaponize its energy monopoly over the EU’s Member States.⁶⁸ For example, Katja Yafimava highlighted the importance of gas transit routes across the Baltic states, as both economic and security vulnerabilities.⁶⁹

Throughout the decade of 2010 it was quite often assumed by most writers that the European Union’s geopolitical strategy is based on post-modern values per say, which means, it contrasts heavily with the geopolitical strategy assumed and perpetrated by Vladimir Putin’s Russia, which is based on national identity, hard power, basically, on “traditional” geopolitical values⁷⁰. This chain of thought aligns with what Ian Manners stated as “Normative Power Europe”, whereby the EU exports values, rules, morals, rather than relying on coercion. Other scholars such as Sandra Lavenex and Frank Schimmelfennig developed the concept of “External Governance”, arguing that the EU thought that its way of living and thinking would go beyond its borders, hence leading its leader to expect that third parties would gladly join in onto such

⁶⁷ Haukkala, *The EU-Russia Strategic Partnership*, 5-9.

⁶⁸ Katja Yafimava, *The Transit Dimension of EU Energy Security: Russian Gas Transit across Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova* (Oxford: Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, 2011).

⁶⁹ Ibidem

⁷⁰ Ian Manners, “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 235-258.

values⁷¹. This concept of beyond borders can be attached to Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane's theory of "Complex Interdependence", which stresses how with time, countries further their relationships through more interdependence between one another.⁷²

In contrast, as we've mentioned, Putin's Russia is so different by nature and history as is black and white. Simply put, it's quite easy to point out realist tendencies on how Russia's foreign policy is defined, for example, throughout Hans Morgenthau's work he has always stated that classical states are driven by their strength and power, always doing whatever they can to gain as much power as possible, and act upon their own survival.⁷³ Kenneth Waltz is a writer that also defined the international realm as a space of total anarchy, which then leans onto Morgenthau's theory, given that the internationally states live in anarchy, everyone acts towards its own needs, according to each state's "self-help", which we might dare say almost in a chameleonic way, not following any values or orders to achieve survival.⁷⁴

Apart from the authors that I've mentioned in the previous paragraph, I'd say that the following two are the ones that help strengthen the idea of my thesis. John Mearsheimer developed the theory of "Offensive Realism" which is a mesh of all of the characteristics that we're pointed out above, with the relations between states not being under any law that was discussed à priori, therefore, it says that the international scenario is one of constant stress, in the matter that no one can really gaze what each other's true intentions are, so deals aren't actually meaningful because one can't be certain that the second party will uphold its side, so a State can only be certain of its own capabilities, and that matter is military. What then happens is a snowball event, the fact that the pursuit of power is what makes a State to feel secure and stable in the international realm, every single one will try to do as much as possible to acquire it, making

⁷¹ Sandra Lavenex and Frank Schimmelfenning, "EU Rules Beyond EU Borders: Theorizing External Governance in European Politics", *Journal of European Public Policy* 16, no. 6 (2009): 791-812.

⁷² Robert O. Keohane and Joseph N. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little Brown, 1997).

⁷³ Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1948).

⁷⁴ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

conflict inevitable.⁷⁵ In 2003 Barry Buzan put forward the “Security Dilemma” where he states that security issues are more often than not interconnected between countries that are geographically closer to one another, for example, the democracies that arose from the Soviet collapse, are not only geographically close to Russia, but also historically linked to the country, hence every conflict that might occur between Russia and one of the countries that borders it, can easily become incredibly important to all the others. This theory is also of interest because it shows why throughout the European Union, we see a variety of stances regarding on how to deal with Russia, those who are closer to it tend to be more urgent in their appeals for proper retaliation, while those who aren’t as close, do not feel the need to do so.⁷⁶

However, it was only after the invasion in 2022 that there has been a turn on such views, particularly throughout the EU and its Member States, and the notion that the international realm has changed dramatically, and for the EU to not fall behind its competitors, it needs to reinvent itself, and it can do so.⁷⁷

Paul Post captured this sentiment and shift quite well in *The Disarmament Illusion*:

“Dissatisfied powers may not actually want war, may even dread it, and may be quite as unwilling to run the risk of an appeal to arms as the satisfied states; but in spite of this, they will not voluntarily shut off all possibility of obtaining a state of things which will be to them more acceptable than the present”⁷⁸.

This statement gives notion that dissatisfied old powers will always be open to conflict that might be costly, if that is a mean that will get them to the end they aspire to reach.

⁷⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, updated ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2014).

⁷⁶ Barry Buzan, *People, States, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991.)

⁷⁷ Nathalie Tocci, *Framing the EU’s Global Strategy: A Stronger Europe in a Fragile World* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁷⁸ Paul Post, “A World of Power and Fear: What Critics of Realism Get Wrong”, *Foreign Affairs*, June 15, 2022.

One article that particularly stands out in the matter of the way the European Union envisions its geopolitical relationship with Russia is written by Ian Klinke, in July 2012, “Postmodern Geopolitics? The European Union Eyes Russia”, where he states the following,

“The “Postmodern argument”, usually unfolds as follows: whereas Russia is seen as caught up in a modern spatial framework of fixed territory, national identity and traditional geopolitics, the European Union embodies a postmodern spatial mindset that simultaneously reflects and drives the dissolution of sovereign territory, the formation of multi-layered identities and the disappearance of geopolitics. Moreover, according to this line of reasoning, it is in the different types of actors that Russia and the EU represent and in the clash of value systems that they endorse that we can find the root causes of the conflicts that have emerged in Eu-Russia relations in the first decade of the twenty-first century.”

As the quote exposes, it is an important outlook on the major differences of how each side of the coin looks at the international grand scheme of things, and how the EU has fallen onto the tendency of ignoring realistic theories and a traditional geopolitical outlook, where states are the main actors, compared to Russia, which still holds onto those traditional views, hence the continuous situations where we see Russia breaking previously signed acts and laws between both parties.⁷⁹ This article is very much essential for my thesis, as it highlights the European Union’s initial tendencies of completely neglecting realist theories in detriment of assuming that cooperation and interdependence would be strong enough to deter any major power from acting as Russia does, one that continues to remind us that sovereignty, coercion and hard power are king’s in the international realm.

Another article that emphasis how Russia views this relationship in a much more realistic and strategic way was written by Reinhard Biedermann, “Putin’s War and Shifts in the European-Union-Russia-China Strategic Triangle: Quo Vadis Eurasian Connectivity?”, where he also focuses on how,

“Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, a response to its self-inflicted weakness, challenges the Eurasia dimension of the BRI (China’s Belt and Road Initiative). The Eu’s regulatory liberal capitalism, Russia’s territorial aspirations in the post-Soviet space, and China’s distributive state capitalism

⁷⁹ Ian Klinke, “Postmodern Geopolitics? The European Union Eyes Russia”, *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 7 (2012): 1215-1236.

are incompatible with the EU's connectivity approaches. The EU turned Eurasian connectivity sectors into sanction mechanisms in response to Russia's war."⁸⁰, this brief passage entails what is treated throughout the article, with a view that isn't solely focused on Russia's geopolitical situation in Europe, but also in Eurasia, given the weight that China has in the dynamic between both parties, especially throughout the start of the war in 2022.

Another particularly interesting article was written by Nicholas Ross Smith and Anastasiya Mahon, entitled "Realism and the Study of EU-Russia Relations" where they state that,

"Since EU-Russia relations have been plunged into uncertainty due to the ongoing Ukraine crisis – part of a longer trend of cooling in the relationship that started in the 2000s – realism, with its clear focus on power, has started to emerge as one of the most popular paradigms for examining the EU-Russia relations. While realism, as illustrated in this chapter, is a "broad church" encompassing many different approaches, the common theme emanating from recent (both Western and Russian) realist studies on the EU-Russia relationship is that, until a security architecture for Europe which pacifies the inherent power contestation is agreed, relations are "doomed to remain frosty"⁸¹. Thus, despite having numerous potential positive-sum areas in the EU-Russia relationship, such as trade and energy, the realist stance tends to be that the relationship will remain zero sum for the foreseeable future".

This part of the work suggests that realism is indeed the most truthful way to analyse the development and all the ups and downs that we've seen happen between the EU and Russia, ever since the official start of said relationship. This conclusion aligns with my thesis; realism is the most truthful way to interpret the path of the EU-Russia relationship.

The article written by Yu. V. Borovsky, "Russia and the West: Clash of energy interests through the lens of realist and liberal approaches", although clearly focused on the energy dynamic between the two sides, notes, once again, the importance of realism and how the liberal/idealistic approach taken by the European Union and other Western figures paved the way for the continuous pushing of the buttons by Russia in several situations that culminated

⁸⁰ Reinhard Bierdermann, "Putin's War and Shifts in the European-Union-Russia-China Strategic Triangle: Quo Vadis Eurasian Connectivity" *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 30, no. 3 (2022): 370-387.

⁸¹ Nicholas Ross Smith and Anastasiya Mahon, "Realism and the Study of EU-Russia Relations" *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22, no. 3 (2019): 611-634.

in the “military operation” carried out in Ukraine by Russia, as it can be seen in the following passage,

“Many steps taken by Russia, as well as the US and the EU can be well explained from the viewpoint of liberal approach. However, political realism provides a more compelling explanation of previous dynamics of international relations in this field, their current state and prospects. The policy of energy transition, implemented by Western countries to lower their carbon dependence, fits particularly well the logic of the realist approach, although potential tensions between Russia and the West in that regard have not yet fully materialized”⁸².

Other analysts that deems attention was written by Tania Marocchi, a Policy Analyst at the European Policy Centre, written in 2017, it is a quick glimpse over the main agreements that founded the relationship between Russia and the European Union, just like I tried to do on the previous chapter, though she doesn’t point out the differences that arise between such agreements in the same way I did, however, her conclusion is a good example of how little faith analysts had regarding the EU’s decision-making in the matter of taking a stance that would inflict true damage onto Russia’s assets that fuel it’s leverage in the international realm,

“The crisis in Ukraine brought a realisation about this differences and evidence in the EU response suggests a higher degree of awareness of Russia’s geopolitical attitude towards the neighbourhood along with the embracement of an increasingly geopolitical approach towards the region. (...) As for practical cooperation, in the short term, no fundamental change is to be expected. With Putin widely expected to be re-elected in March 2018 presidential elections for another six-year term and given Russia’s highly centralised foreign policy, a high degree of continuity in Russia’s EU policy is to be expected. Moscow will continue to try to have EU sanctions relaxed or lifted without having to fulfil the Minsk obligations. It will continue to do so by trying to weaken EU solidarity, wedging cleavages among member states, also through its propaganda machine⁸³. Nevertheless, with the EU’s sanctions clearly linked to the complete implementation of the Minsk agreements and the current lack of progress, the conflict in Ukraine is likely to remain stalled. Crimea has de facto joined the club of the frozen conflicts of the common neighbourhood, and

⁸² Yu. V. Borovsky, “Russia and the West: Clash of Energy Interests through the Lens of Realist and Liberal Approaches” *International Affairs (Moscow)* 66, no. 5 (2020): 15-19.

⁸³ After 2014, Russia has taken advantage of the reliance on cyber related automatizations and electoral campaigns throughout Europe to cripple them, this is, through the hacking and manipulation of media narratives that could directly impact the outcome of a countries election to favour Putin’s ambitions.

will most likely be increasingly compartmentalised, with the EU not recognising it as a part of Russia while cooperating with the Kremlin on other dossiers”⁸⁴.

If we take a look at articles that have been written in 2025 there is an obvious change of stance, a different approach on how to analyse Russia, to accept the country as a real enemy of the EU’s member states way of life, as a country that continue to try and push forward an agenda that doesn’t nor will ever align with the EU’s liberal values, a true shock of ideologies, as Alain Fabre, a writer for the Foundation of Robert Schuman states in the following article,

“While Putin is not Hitler, he shares with that dictator a revisionist project to abolish the international order in place when he came to power. In both cases, war is not the means of resolving a singular conflict, a territorial dispute having exhausted diplomatic channels. It does not end with its resolution: on the contrary, it systematically results in the acceptance of a reality, the conservation of conquered territories, in exchange for a promise to limit oneself to the gains obtained. But once satisfied, the previous claim gives rise to the next one, as General de Gaulle clearly demonstrated in 1961, after the erection of the Berlin Wall, rendering any form of appeasement futile from the outset: “[...] At a certain point of threat from ambitious imperialism, any retreat has the effect of overexciting the aggressor, pushing him to double his pressure, and, finally, facilitating and hastening his assault. All in all, [...], the Western powers have no better way to serve world peace than to stand tall and firm.” (...) Even deprived of American military support, the Europeans cannot give up on the ultimate goal of wresting Ukraine from conquering Putinism. Brzezinski said it: without Ukraine Russia ceases to be an empire. In this respect, morality goes hand in hand with strategy: Ukraine quite simply controls the future, security and freedom of Europe”⁸⁵.

This quote explicitly underlies the importance of Ukraine, particularly after the full-scale invasion that took place in 2022, and how all the previous “small gains” that Putin had been able to celebrate before (the one’s I pointed out on the 1st chapter, Georgia and the Annexation of Crimea) paved the way to the continuous growing ambition that the EU and it’s member states weren’t gutsy enough to face off against Russia, that they’d never feel the obligation nor the need to put their agreements at risk, particularly the energy related one’s, to help Ukraine, however, now we’re in a much different scenario than we we’re in 2014.

⁸⁴ Tania Marocchi, “EU-Russia Relations: Towards an Increasingly Geopolitical Paradigm” *Heinrich Boll Stiftung*, July 3, 2017.

⁸⁵ Alain Fabre, “Europe and Putin: Should realism prevail over reality?” *Fondation Robert Schuman: The Research and Studies Centre on Europe*, March 11, 2025.

Similarly in the Financial Times, Marc De Vos wrote an article on May 12th where he pointed out the urgency for the European Union to understand and act upon what is starting to be a New World Order, stating that the EU had three different approaches for this matter, which he believes that all three are being followed with slight nuances, though I'd like to point out the conclusion he proposed at the end of his thought,

“European nations have to become conscious that the “European project” is now a hard-power project that needs a geostrategic footprint beyond its current boundaries. We have been there before. In the early 1950's, postwar Europe tried and failed to institutionalise political and defence co-operation. Back then, it was America's protection and a European economic community that enable peace and prosperity. Today, we are fending for ourselves. With economic development subservient to geopolitics, failure is simply not an option”⁸⁶.

As we've exposed, the literature around the EU-Russia relationship has two big cleavages. The Liberal perspective is one based on interdependence, cooperation, free trade, and the power of democratic institutions, and the argument of scholars such as Joseph Nye and Ian Manners note the effects of interdependence and how the EU tries to export its lifestyle and norms through external governance, which end up being the reason of conflict, because if those institutions aren't based on strong foundations, they can easily be manipulated by their executive, turning them onto weapons of the State, instead of working for the people.

On the other hand, whenever looking at this relationship through the realist theories, the focus is on classical power, either that be military, monetary or political power. Morgenthau's theory and Waltz's that derives from the former, denote that states are in a state of anarchy between one another, which means that their sole reasoning to act is based on their survival, which means that there is no space for normative or liberal aspirations. One of the best analysts that transcripts Russia's behaviour in the international realm is Mearsheimer's, a dissatisfied superpower who's clinging onto its past and wants to showcase its strength through continuous disruption of the neighbouring countries, particularly whenever Moscow feels like one is aligning with the Western world, as it happened with Ukraine.

⁸⁶ Marc De Vos, “The EU needs a new geopolitical compass” *Financial Times*, May 12, 2025.

But not only are these differences in theoretical matter, but they can be seen being played out in the relationship. The fact that the EU relies on normative persuasion and regulatory influence through sanctions that don't bring any true prejudice to Russia's actions, while Russia weaponizes its energy, puts into question the sovereignty of different countries, illegally annexes territories easily maps out the differences in actual situations. These differences are what paved way for the scenario we're living in nowadays, the initial optimism in the early 1990's and 2000's from the EU that Russia would change and play by their rules, led to the lack of real consequences whenever the country stepped over the line, in Georgia, Crimea, and ultimately Ukraine.

In summary, throughout the last two decades, analysts and scholars have always looked at the evolution of the relationship between the European Union and Russia through liberal or postmodern frameworks, leaning onto the belief that with time, the country would fall onto the railroads of the values shared by the EU and the West. However, a sharp change is found after 2022, with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, leading analysts to bring back the realist lens to the discussion of the relationship. This lens is characterised by classical geopolitical conflict, military power, and coercion. We're seeing then, a fundamental paradigm shift, not only on the analysis side, but also on the European Union's own strategy towards Russia, even though it was clearly forced to do so, it is decisively working towards a realist outlook.

3. Shaping of the EU and Public Opinion within EU's Member States towards Russia throughout the Years

After the most atrocious and vicious war that ever happened on Europe's mainland, the most powerful nations of the Continent decided that measures should be taken, in order to avoid war in and between European nations, which led to, what today is the European Union. At first, it solely consisted in the creation of "Communities", where cooperation was the basis of the running of said communities, settling a common agreement between several countries on how to manage certain industries (at first the Coal and Steel industry, being extremely relevant regarding the connections both have to the development of arms and ammunition) in which the main focus would be to avoid conflicts between one another. The ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community) was, therefore, key to make sure there was no renewed conflict between European States.⁸⁷

Having had unprecedented success in the pact mentioned above, the same six founding nations⁸⁸ sign two new treaties, which create the European Economic Community (ECC), and the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). I'd say that the success of these three stepping stones at the birth of the European Union, we're a big reason for the continued enlargement of the body itself.⁸⁹

It is important to note that, this wasn't the first time that we've had in Europe an intergovernmental organization between the most powerful nations. Woodrow Wilson, President of the United States between 1913 and 1921, famously proposed the creation of the League of Nations in the "Fourteen Points Speech", where he attempted to demonstrate the causes that led to World War I, and how the League of Nations would be a step towards avoiding another great war. However, the League of Nations did not achieve its main purpose, having

⁸⁷ Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, Paris, 18 April 1951.

⁸⁸ These being, Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxemburg.

⁸⁹ Treaties of Rome, Rome, 25 March 1957.

been officially disbanded in 1946, where its agenda was transferred to the newly founded United Nations. The League of Nations was of tremendous importance because it was the first organization of its kind in the international realm, a body that tried to develop cooperative relationships between nations that would otherwise not pursue collective security.⁹⁰

Having had these previous experiences, the government officials in Europe had a rough idea of what they shouldn't do if they were to avoid the failure of the League of Nations. The biggest argument at the time for the collapse of the League of Nations, was the fact that the nation that proposed it (the United States) did not want to join in. We'd think it to be obvious to assume that when one does not join something he brought to the table, how little credibility it seems to have. How come the United States propose the organization and not wanting to be involved in it? This was key to the allied victors of the Second World War, where they felt obliged to have Germany involved in the Union.⁹¹ Having built on their previous mistakes, the creation of the European Union has proved to be clinical regarding Europe's position in the international realm, and has achieved its main goal, which was to avoid European countries to fight one another.⁹² The European Union is founded under the basis of the rule of law, having attached to it liberal values, such as, Human Dignity, Freedom, Democracy, Equality, Rule of law, and Human Rights. These are the rights we've seen being perpetrated and promoted by the Union; hence it being seen as a flagship for what is defined as Soft Power in international relations by Joseph Nye. It is, in fact, a bureaucratic force in the international realm, especially because it was

⁹⁰ F. P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 670- 75.

⁹¹ It is also obvious that if Europe was ever to rebuild itself, especially in the economic realm, it couldn't relegate Germany to the side nor humiliate the nation, as it happened with the Treaty of Versailles, which was what fuelled much of the Germany supporters of a Nazi Germany.

⁹² Alan S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000), 317-20.

fortunate enough to not have to actively nor directly deal with armed forces⁹³, so there has never an actual effort nor urgency to develop Hard Power in its truest sense.⁹⁴

We should not be mistaken in believing that a United Europe isn't a true power in the international realm, however, it is important to acknowledge the fortunate environment it was built around to have thrived over the last decades. The end of the Great War led to a bipolar world for the first time as well as not having a world power in the European Continent, the power's being the United States and the Soviet Union. During these years, the beginning of the Cold War led to an ideological battle between the two, one side pushing for the Liberal Democracy and the other towards Communism⁹⁵. This division was particularly fortunate for the European countries, because for the United States own benefit in the Cold War, being able to showcase to the world through Europe that Liberal Democracy and its values is the way forward, would be of major importance in the ideological battle against communism.

Having this in mind, the United States granted Europe protection, through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, founded in 1949, leaving the European democracies to the sole duty of rebuilding their own economies. The US would happily carry the burden regarding Europe's security because it would be seen with great eyes by the Third World, possibly inclining such countries towards embracing democracy in detriment of being on the "bad side" of the US. It was at this time that we saw the "Wave of Democratization" written by Samuel Huntington, and it reached its peak in the so called Third Wave of Democratization, with the win of the United States that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union, and consequently to the foundation of new Nations that tried to embrace Liberal Democracy.

⁹³ The EU never had to develop a proper defence strategy nor to invest heavily onto its defence because it had the backup of the United States via NATO. The US created a safety blanket for the EU, which meant that the Union could solely focus on the rebuilding of its economy, the continuous growth of its democracies and the development of trade throughout several markets.

⁹⁴ Lawrence S. Kaplan, *NATO and the United States: The Enduring Alliance* (New York: Twayne, 1994), 76-83

⁹⁵ The key differences between both ideologies would be the lack of liberalness that the communism way pushed by the Soviet Union had, not really looking to perpetrate liberal values, nor having any interest in liberal policies, as long as Communism was seen as the best solution between both choices.

We find it indispensable to understand these very specific nuances in which Europe and the creation of the EU was able to be built around, because it is also why there hasn't been a focus on defence nor to take a public position regarding possible geopolitical enemies or threats. The position that the EU has taken in the world has been one of a political institution that gathers its strength through its economic sector, whether that is through the power of the Euro⁹⁶ or its trading routes/industry. In my opinion, that is what the EU brings to the table when in talks with other countries, a bureaucratic force, using the leverage of its industries and economy to follow and apply certain agendas, but it never brings a "firm hand" to the table, it never in its nature has looked at Hard Power as a way forward or as a possible solution to achieve those agendas. This is a very Kantian way of thinking and looking at things, extremely morally correct, however, at times, it can undermine the EU's position in the world.⁹⁷

Having said that, the first few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, we saw throughout the European Continent, the belief that with said change in the Russian Federation it meant a new chapter, a new biggining in the country's aspirations, particularly in the realm of its foreign policy, disregarding the previous imperialistic views that we're always so characteristic of the country prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was also fuelled by a new executive in Russia, Boris Yeltsin who was the first Russian president right after the collapse of the USRR. Yeltsin was viewed, both by its peers and by European leaders, as a real Pro-Western leader in the Kremlin, something that was unheard of really.

It was during Yeltsin's first years in the presidency, that we saw the flourishing of the EU-Russia relationship, for example, with the PCA agreement between both parties as I mentioned previously, an agreement that touched several different areas of common interests, such as,

⁹⁶ Which has been losing value in the last decade, especially when compared to the power of the Dollar or the UK's Pound.

⁹⁷ Manners, "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?".

trade, finance, cooperation in different areas, from science to culture, and it was basically the first formal and official channel of communication between Russia and the European Union. However, the first misstep in the EU's strategy towards Russia, was the "Common Strategy of the European Union of 4 June 1999 on Russia"⁹⁸, where it portrayed its own vision of what it wanted Russia to look like, as showcased in the following quote,

"A stable, democratic, and prosperous Russia, firmly anchored in a united Europe free of new dividing lines, is essential to lasting peace on the continent. The issues which the whole continent faces can be resolved only through ever closer cooperation between Russia and the European Union. The European Union welcomes Russia's return to its rightful place in the European family in a spirit of friendship, cooperation, fair accommodation of interests and on the foundations of shared values enshrined in the common heritage of European civilisation. The European Union has clear strategic goals:

- A stable, open and pluralistic democracy in Russia, governed by the rule of law and underpinning a prosperous market economy benefiting alike all the people of Russia and of the European Union,
- Maintaining European stability, promoting global security and responding to the common challenges of the continent through intensified cooperation with Russia.

The Union remains firmly committed to working with Russia, at federal, regional and local levels, to support a successful political and economic transformation in Russia. The Union and its Member States offer to share with Russia their various experiences in building modern political, economic, social and administrative structures, fully recognising that the main responsibility for Russia's future lies with Russia itself.

The European Council therefore adopts this Common Strategy to strengthen the strategic partnership between the Union and Russia at the dawn of a new century. The European Council recognises that the future of Russia is an essential element in the future of the continent and constitutes a strategic interest for the European Union. The offer of a reinforced relationship, based on shared democratic values, will help Russia to assert its European identity and bring new opportunities to all the peoples of the continent. The enlargement of the Union will further increase these benefits and opportunities"⁹⁹.

It is said to be a misstep because the language used throughout this document implies that Russia will adopt and mould itself onto the European Union's liberal values and beliefs, and

⁹⁸ European Council, *Common Strategy of the European Union of 4 June 1999 on Russia*, Official Journal L 157, 24 June 1999.

⁹⁹ Ibidem

this is one of the reasons for the scenario that we live in the current days, with the invasion of Ukraine. The almost arrogant and naïve belief that Russia and its leaders would easily discard and disregard the country's History, is what led to the relationship between both parties to deteriorate with time, slowly changing from a cooperative partnership, to a strategic one, and lately to a real adversary to the way of living that we're used to having throughout the EU's Member States. As Richard Sakwa argued, the EU policy was premised on the belief that norms could overpower and substitute power politics – ignoring Putin's realist worldview¹⁰⁰, and we can also point out John Mearsheimer's critique of Western liberal "delusions" where the EU and NATO enlargement was seen from the western standpoint as a mere continuation and democratization of countries, particularly on the Eastern part of Europe, Russia saw it as an encroachment into its original sphere of influence.¹⁰¹

Another key moment for the relationship, was the European Union's "Big Bang". The Big Bang is referred to the fifth enlargement in the EU, where we saw ten new countries join in, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Apart from the sheer number of countries that joined it felt like a new chapter in the "right direction", eight of ten of those that joined were previously in the Eastern Bloc, feeling like a true end to what was the Cold War, particularly in ideology terms. Not only was the enlargement fruitful for the EU's economy and its range, as well as the inclusion of new ethnicities and cultures onto the spectrum of what was already a big range of such throughout the Union.

Why is the enlargement important to the relationship then? Just after the "Big Bang" we saw Russia benefit from lower tariffs, a market that expanded to over 450 million consumers¹⁰², leading to the huge rise of Russia exports to the European Union, from thirty five percent to over 50 percent. However, Putin consistently framed the EU not primarily as an economic

¹⁰⁰ Richard Sakwa, *Russia against the Rest: The Post-Cold War Crisis of the World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 102-6.

¹⁰¹ John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin", *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 77-89.

¹⁰² Heather Grabbe, *The EU's Transformative Power: Europeanization through Conditionality in Central and Eastern Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 98-104.

partner but as a political and geopolitical actor. That is said because, when it came to national politics, economic reform was something constant in Russia, but when it came to its foreign policy, it always seemed like the economic factor wasn't a top priority, but the geopolitical one was. In fact, throughout looking at this relationship, it can be seen that Russia has always had, in foreign policy, a geopolitical analysis of every situation, hence demonstrating a realist and classical approach to the international realm and international relations, where every development in RU-EU relations was assessed through the prism of power, sovereignty, and strategic interests.¹⁰³

At this time then, the liberalism portrayed by the European Union towards Russia is visible. It was through liberal institutionalism, where we saw the EU push Russia towards the World Trade Organization, and every discussion surrounding politics with the newly integrated member states or the energy discussion with Russia, the agendas and proposals to try and solve such matters where rule and market based, not coercive in any way.¹⁰⁴

Another key moment can be seen in 2008, when the "Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation" of 2008 is released, just months prior to the Georgian war. This document provides valuable insight into Moscow's worldview.

One of the main takeaways from it is the stance that the country has against the European Union when it portrays itself as an organization that can impose sanctions and coercive measures in a legitimate way. It states throughout the document how the United Nations is the only organization in the International Realm, particularly the Security Council, as the following quotes help understand, "The United Nations, an organization for which there is no real alternative and which has a unique legitimacy, should continue serving as a clearing-house for

¹⁰³Haukkala, *The EU-Russia Strategic Partnership*, 55-61.

¹⁰⁴ Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1997).

the coordination of international relations and world politics in the 21st century.”¹⁰⁵, later on mentioning that Russia intends to,

“Ensure compliance by the international stakeholders with their international obligations both to Russia and to the world community as a whole; combat violations of international law by States, international organizations, non-governmental organizations and individuals. The globalization of challenges and threats to security and sustainable development increases the importance of the UN Security Council as a universal instrument for safeguarding international rule of law; counter the attempts by individual countries or groups of countries to revise the universally accepted norms of international law enshrined in universal documents such as the UN Charter”¹⁰⁶,

these two quotes clearly double down and try to de-legitimize the European Union as a whole, a clear demonstration of how the country saw the EU, as a collective of States that aren’t properly allowed to sanction nor impose coercive measures to other States that aren’t in the Union itself.

As the document continues on, there’s continuous moments where its foreign policy seems to naturally clash with the EU, particularly on the topic of the EU’s enlargement, especially when its growing towards Eastern Europe and to what is defined by Russia as its “Sphere of Influence”, meaning that there will be a constant clash and contestation from the country regarding all the European attempts of gaining influence over those countries, which clearly has been a Russian strategy, one of destabilizing any path that might be built for those countries in order to either achieve Member State status, or where their political agendas might showcase leaning towards Western values rather than accepting the Kremlin’s way¹⁰⁷. This trend continues, with the inclusion of the topic of energy security, which is clearly a geostrategic nuance in Russian’s foreign policy, stating that the Russian Federation is going to,

“(…) create favourable political conditions for diversifying Russia’s presence in the world markets through expanding the export range and geography of foreign economic and investment links of Russia; takes trade policy measures to protect interests of the Russian Federation in accordance with the international rules and counteracts trade and political measures of foreign

¹⁰⁵ Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 12 July 2008.

¹⁰⁶ Ibidem

¹⁰⁷ Sakwa, *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*.

States encroaching upon the rights of the Russian Federation and Russian enterprises; strengthens strategic partnership with the leading producers of energy resources, develops active dialogue with consuming countries and transit countries on the basis of the principles of energy security enshrined in the final documents of the Saint Petersburg G8 Summit in 2006, assuming that measures being taken to guarantee reliability of energy supplies should be consistently supported by forthcoming activities aimed at ensuring stability of demand and secure transit”¹⁰⁸.

This passage clearly exposes the strategic priority given to energy, it being one of the biggest tools of geopolitical leverage, given the dependence at this time of the European Union to it.

Apart from all this, Russia also mentions on a subject regarding “global trends”, how the globalization has basically enforced the international realm to embrace a new World Order, an order that will most certainly be polycentric/multipolar as is stated in the following points,

“enhanced economic potential of the emerging global growth centers, inter alia, as a result of a more equal distribution of development resources due to liberalization of global markets. The economic growth in those countries and regions converts into their political influence, the trend to a polycentric world order growing further”¹⁰⁹,

rejecting the notion of a Western bloc dominance or upheaval throughout the international realm.¹¹⁰

Now moving away from frictions between these parties, we shall very subtly delve into the public opinion within the EU’s Member States. At the very start of the relationship there aren’t many questionnaires nor numbers that can truly demonstrate the characteristics of the opinion, however, we can say that there was optimism during the 1990’s, an optimism that spread from state leaders to their people, where Russia was seen as a partner in transition or a country that was starting to modernise itself, which aligns with the PCA guidelines and nuances. It is after 2007, even before the Georgian War, that the view began changing and turning towards the idea of Russia as a revisionist power, someone who the EU can’t possibly rely on its energy supply

¹⁰⁸ Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*, 12 July 2008.

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem

¹¹⁰ Andrei P. Tsygankov, *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 210-215.

and be at the hands of Putin. Research conducted by the Pew Research Centre and published on June 27th of 2007, delves onto “Views of Russia”. In this topic

“Russia is viewed in mostly negative terms in Western Europe. Great Britain is the only country from the region in which Russia receives more favourable than unfavourable ratings, although even here only 47% have a positive opinion. Meanwhile, majorities in France (65%), Germany (62%), and Sweden (59%) express a negative view”¹¹¹,

but what is quite important to denote in this research, is when people were asked regarding their concern of their own country being dependent on Russia energy, keeping in mind this was during a time where there had been altercations between the country and Ukraine, yet nothing of major significance, at least at the time. The answers showed that,

“many Europeans are concerned that their countries are becoming too dependent on Russia for their energy needs. Majorities in most Western and Eastern nations say they are very or fairly concerned that they rely too much on Russian energy resources, and worries are particularly strong in Poland (75% very or fairly concerned), Italy (71%), and Great Britain (66%). Anxieties also run high in Ukraine (63%), which had its natural gas supplies from Russia temporarily shut off during a price dispute with Russia state-owned gas giant Gazprom in January 2006”¹¹².

We can clearly see a trend that has been present throughout the years of the relationship between the country and EU and its members. The countries that share a complicated history with Russia¹¹³, whether because they were under Soviet control, or because of their geographical condition of sharing a border with the country, have always been sceptical about dealing with Russia, and expressed alarm at Europe’s energy dependence and disillusionment with Russia’s increasingly aggressive behaviour.¹¹⁴

It was in 2008 that we certainly saw a shift throughout the European media, where Russia began being seen as a country that has an assertive foreign policy based on the leverage gained by the dependence of European countries in its energy, which, at the time, Germany was one of the main reasons that dependence only grew. This can be said because after World War II, the

¹¹¹ Pew Research Center, “Views of Russia”, June 27, 2007.

¹¹² Ibidem

¹¹³ Those always having been Poland, the Baltic Countries and Nordics, particularly close to the Russian border.

¹¹⁴ Grigas, *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire*, 59-63.

defeated country went through a very difficult time, especially during the Cold War, with the division of it into West Germany and East Germany. What followed was the creation of “Ostpolitik” which means “new Eastern Policy”, aimed at trying to normalize diplomatic relations between Western and Eastern Germany/Soviet Union. What’s important from this foreign policy, is the pressure and the lobby that Germany pushed for the Nord Stream. Before the Nord Stream was built, Russian gas went through various “transit countries” before entering Western Europe, such as Poland and Ukraine, however, given the disputes that had already occurred between Russia and Ukraine regarding the halting of energy supplies to the latter, Germany was very concerned about not having a direct channel that would fuel Western Europe with Russian energy, given the possibility of Russia and the transit countries relationship deteriorate over time. Having that in mind, the discontented voices of the usual actors, the Baltic States, Poland and the Scandinavian States, Berlin pushed forward the creation of the Nord Stream pipeline, the first that bypasses Ukraine and Poland and delivers natural gas directly onto Western Europe through Germany, Italy and Austria. This is also why we’ve seen Italy been one of the countries that was always unsure of publicly back the sanctions imposed by the European Union after the Annexation of Crimea. The Nord Stream reflects a liberal belief in interdependence but completely ignores the geopolitical risks attached to such project.¹¹⁵

These two then, Germany and Italy, can be seen as the backbone that led to the interdependence of oil and gas that exists between European Countries and Russia. Matters only worsened after the annexation of Crimea of 2014 and consequently the downing of the Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, which has already been deemed an action of Russia as expressed by the European Council in the following statement,

“The European Union welcomes the judgement of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) of 9 July 2025, and the decision of the Council of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) of 12 May 2025, that the Russian Federation is responsible for the downing of Flight MH17 and for the deaths of 298 people on board. The ECtHR also held that the Russian

¹¹⁵ Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russia Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 168-171.

Federation is responsible for the additional suffering that these events have caused the next of kin”¹¹⁶.

Surveys held throughout Member States recorded a sustained deterioration of the public opinion on how they feel about Russia and its acts¹¹⁷, and the media held on to the view of Russia as a revisionist power, and framed the conflict with Ukraine/Crimea as a defining moment in the relationship with the country, one that needs to be looked at particularly in the matter of security¹¹⁸, hence the declining public opinion towards Putin and his acts, even though member states we’re continuously hesitant to abandon altogether their ties with the country, given the importance of Russian energy which has already been exposed earlier.

After the fatidic night of the 22nd of February in 2022, when Russia unleashed its troops onto Ukrainian soil, the Directorate-General for Communication of the European parliament began studying the public opinion on the topic of the war in Ukraine. The very first survey results came in, in March 2022, where the DG COMM’s Public Opinion Monitoring Unit gained insight of how citizens in member states viewed the invasion of Russia and felt about the unprecedented array of sanctions that swiftly followed. A general view of these first results shows a general drop in popularity towards Putin, an approval of the first package of sanctions imposed by the EU and a general feeling that the war might escalate in the future.¹¹⁹

What is important to take from this first wave of surveys is the position of certain countries, that we’ve mentioned before, particularly on how some have clashed when it comes to their ideas of solutions to deal with Putin’s Russia. The very first surprise comes from Bulgaria, a country that has historically been one of the most pro-Russian countries within Europe¹²⁰,

¹¹⁶ European Council, “Ukraine: Statement by the High Representative on Behalf of the EU on the 11th Anniversary of the Downing of the Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17”, Brussels, July 17, 2025.

¹¹⁷ Pew Research Center, “International Attitudes Toward Russia and Putin” (various reports, 2007-2024), <https://www.pewresearch.org/>; accessed September 16, 2025.

¹¹⁸ Zixuan Liu, “News Framing of the 2014-2015 Ukraine Conflict by the BBC”, *Sage Journals*, 23 February 2023.

¹¹⁹ European Parliament, Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM), *Public Opinion Monitoring in the EU: First Survey on the War in Ukraine*, March 2022.

¹²⁰ Where between 2020 and 2022 a range between 55% and 58% of Bulgarians we’re content or had a positive stance towards Putin.

drastically turned a page on that stance in just four days after the invasion began. Since then, those positive ratings towards Putin dropped to around 32% and the negative ratings towards the Stateman have more than doubled. The survey continues stating that,

“Over 75% of the Bulgarians surveyed see Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as unjustified. (...) This is despite pro-Russian propaganda on social networks. Despite propaganda and fake news, the EU’s unprecedented and unified move in imposing sanctions on Russia is seen as the right policy by 63% of Bulgarian citizens, with 32% opposed. The most surprising result of the survey is that most people in the poorest EU country are willing to pay the price of the sanctions. 47% of Bulgarians declare their readiness to share the cost of the imposed economic sanctions”¹²¹.

Apart from the swift change of opinion towards Russia and Putin, Bulgarians showed that they’d be ready to carry the financial burden that further economic sanctions on Russia will most certainly bring to their country and people, given that they’re the poorest EU member state.¹²²

However, on the far spectrum of those who’d be open to taking the economic toll of sharper sanctions, we find Italy and France. In all the aspects that mean the people having their lifestyle affected negatively in exchange for further sanctions, the French and Italians have promptly opposed to that possibility. When we say “Lifestyle”, we’re talking about an increase in the general cost of living, oil and gas shortages, a possible tax increase to cover defence costs and a significant increase in energy prices, a direct consequence of the EU’s dependence on Russia’s oil and gas. Continuing onto France, the sentiment of the French aligns with what is stated above, because they are worried about the war, but do not want a power struggle with Putin, hence a relative majority of 37% think their President Macron has done enough to avoid conflict, even though 80% of French have a negative opinion towards Putin. Italy has a similar position because from all the countries that participated in this survey¹²³ it has the highest

¹²¹ European Parliament, *Public Opinion Monitoring in the EU: First Survey on the War in Ukraine*.

¹²² European Parliament, DG COMM, *Public Opinion on the War in Ukraine: Bulgaria Country Report*, March 2022.

¹²³ Those being Bulgaria, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, and Spain.

percentage of those who believe that the EU should only intervene in the conflict through diplomatic actions (53%).¹²⁴

One of the most prominent states in Europe shows that its people are ready to retaliate in the manner of sanctions, where two thirds of the Germany population are on board in regard to upping economic sanctions towards Russia, as well as a massive 78% of Germans that think their country needs to build and send arms to Ukraine. Apart from the quite general feeling of reproof of Russia's actions and the need of Germany to push for further diplomatic sanctions and helping Ukraine with armament, the Germans are also the most concerned around the possibility of the conflict to escalate and even move onto possible NATO intervention.¹²⁵

On the other hand, in total contrast with Italy and France, Poland, given its geographical position and history with the Russian country, has a staggering majority of citizens who want to help. Over 90% of Poles support the possibility of accepting Ukrainian refugees and 64% state that they'd wish to help personally. In fact, as it has been mentioned throughout this dissertation, there has always been a sharp contrast between the stance of certain EU member states in regard on the best approach towards Russia in various situations, and some have always maintained the same stance, Poland being the utmost rigid when it comes to the best way to deal with the Kremlin. This shows particularly in this first survey, because in every answer given regarding the war, the Poles always state how NATO and the European Union should defend Ukraine's sovereignty, and they're also the first ones to be more than open to get into the conflict directly, saying that Poland should help Ukraine, regardless the economic risks, possible cyber-attacks, and higher energy prices¹²⁶. We've seen that Poland has always demonstrated full solidarity towards Ukraine and its people.

¹²⁴ European Parliament, DG COMM, *Public Opinion on the War in Ukraine: France and Italy Country Reports*, March 2022.

¹²⁵ European Parliament, DG COMM, *Public Opinion on the War in Ukraine: Germany Country Report*, March 2022.

¹²⁶ European Parliament, DG COMM, *Public Opinion on the War in Ukraine: Poland Country Report*, March 2022

Another country that took a big step forward regarding European security in the international realm was Finland. A poll made between the 23rd and 25th of February showed that 53% of Finnish people would support its country's application to join NATO, a remarkable growth of support compared to the last time the same question was asked, in 2017, where only 34% were inclined to support it. The same can be said with the other Scandinavian country Sweden, that also showcased that around 51% of Swedes would support its country's application to join NATO. This shouldn't be taken as granted because the possibility of these two countries joining NATO prior to the invasion was severely low, giving always priority to having a neutral stance, something that was always nerve-racking for some of EU's member states. Why is the importance of having Finland and Sweden as NATO members?

Modern warfare relies not only in hybrid warfare, but very much so on maritime war, and the Baltic Sea is of the utmost importance for Russia as is for the EU. The importance of the Baltic Sea doesn't suffice in economic trade, but in transit, the access that it gives to Russia, whether to move up to the Arctic Sea or to move along the north part of the European continent at ease. The biggest military leverage that Russia has in this part of the country is in Kaliningrad exclave, which the U.S. Naval Institute has written about its geopolitical importance given the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the following,

“Sometimes described as the Kremlin’s “unsinkable aircraft carrier” in the Baltic Sea, the Kaliningrad Oblast plays an important strategic and military role in Russia. The Russian Baltic Fleet’s main base is located at Baltiysk. In May 2022, Moscow carried out simulated nuclear missile strikes from Kaliningrad. A nuclear missile attack from Kaliningrad could quickly disintegrate the main European capitals. (...) The creation of rigid opposing sides in the Baltic now seems self-evident, with the Baltic States and Poland confronting Russia (Kaliningrad) and Belarus along a “new Iron Curtain”. From a military perspective, the geostrategic position of Kaliningrad presents opportunities and challenges for Russia. It provides an early-warning function and air-defence option in coordination with units from the mainland transition through Belarus. In addition, the Baltic Fleet is positioned to project control over or exercise sea denial in the Black Sea region and ensure access to the Gulf of Finland, with consequences not only for the

Baltic States, but also for the security and freedom of manoeuvre of NATO members Finland and Sweden”¹²⁷.

Keir Giles captures this duality amazingly in the following statement, “Kaliningrad is both Russia’s sword and shield: a forward-operating base that threatens NATO’s heartland, but one that is equally vulnerable to encirclement”¹²⁸.

The work written by Dr. Paolo Pizzolo alerts for the relevance of Kaliningrad in the matters of its geostrategic position, and the nuances of Sweden and Finland joining NATO.¹²⁹ Prior to them joining the alliance Russia had and felt more freedom whenever sailing through the Baltic Sea, in fact, this was arguably the only zone where NATO presence wasn’t felt as much as it is in any other location, hence having its major fleet in Kaliningrad¹³⁰, where it could move undetected throughout the northern waters of Europe for long miles. Apart from the maritime advantage the Kremlin also made Kaliningrad as an A2/D2 area¹³¹, which, in military terms means, Anti-Access/Area Denial, which is applied through long-range and/or precision-guided missiles that are engulfed in layered defence systems.

This then explains the strategic importance of Kaliningrad to Russia, the geographic location of it means that Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland could easily be a part of future Russian covert operations or actual military escalation, particularly after the Annexation of Crimea. In fact, after the Georgian War in 2008 which we’ve already discussed, Russia has showed tremendous openness to use hard coercion methods towards its “sphere of influence”/Non-

¹²⁷ U.S. Naval Institute, “Strategic Relevance of Kaliningrad”, *Proceedings*, October 2024.

¹²⁸ Keir Giles, *Moscow Rules: What Drives Russia to Confront the West* (London: Chatham House, 2019), 141.

¹²⁹ Paolo Pizzolo, “Kaliningrad and the Future of Baltic Security”, *European Security Review*, 2023.

¹³⁰ Not only because of the access it has onto the Baltic Sea, but also because this is the only Russian port that free from ice all year round.

¹³¹ The A2/D2 area can launch the Iskander-M which has a striking range of at least 400 kilometres, and it is able to either carry conventional or nuclear missiles. Given that the range of these missiles can be even greater than what is expected, it’s easy to understand the strategic importance of Kaliningrad. Not only does Russia have the ability to use them, the sheer knowledge of other States of this possibility is a strategy, hence the number of times that Russia has deployed these types of missiles, either in military trainings or parades, however, the objective is always the same, to demonstrate their capability of deployment. Apart from these attack missiles, the A2/D2 “bubble” also comprehends Anti-ship, aircraft and air defence systems which are key to prevent an enemy from entering the area. Lastly, Russia uses this location for the development of new techniques and technologies that can jam radio transmissions, particularly used in the war in Ukraine.

NATO/EU members, while doing its best to avoid direct conflict with any member of NATO. However, the decision of invading Ukraine has yet to be proved as a good decision by Putin, because it pushed Finland and Sweden to join NATO, something that wouldn't even be on Russia's playbook, given that their accession to the Northern Alliance means its own encirclement, over the northern access via sea and southern as well, becoming surrounded by NATO members. The importance for the West of having Sweden and Finland as member states of the Alliance is shown on the following quote,

“The Baltic States, as well as Bornholm and Gotland in the central Baltic Sea, are becoming increasingly important from a strategic perspective for Russian access to the exclave of Kaliningrad. Gotland will facilitate NATO's potential control of the Baltic Sea region, while Kaliningrad will become a burden for Russia. A country whose fleet does not have free access to its own bases and sea lines cannot be a sea power. Under the Law of the Sea Convention of the International Maritime Organization (IMO), a suborganization of the UN, Russia has legitimate rights to use vital sea lines of communication in the Baltic Sea to its territories. In the event of armed conflict, however, that could change dramatically. NATO would have great leverage to impede Russia's exclave of Kaliningrad and economically essential access to St. Petersburg through blockades and military operations, or even to close these sea lines for Russia use. Sweden's and Finland's accession to NATO would allow the alliance to expand its capabilities with better reconnaissance assets and defensive or even offensive weapons systems”¹³².

Having all this in mind, the Baltic Sea was for Russia a gateway in the global market to steer away from EU's influence, though nowadays its main importance is given to the A2/D2 situation in Kaliningrad, and a pressure point through the usage of hybrid warfare/leverage towards the surrounding countries of the exclave. For the European Union, the Baltic Sea moved from a corridor of interdependence between its Member States and Russia, to a theatre to be secured, showcasing, once again, how the EU is moving away from its liberal position towards a realist orientated strategy in its relationship with Russia.

Two years later, on the 23rd of February 2024 we have the last survey published by the European Union regarding insight into how citizens see Russia's war against Ukraine, and the

¹³² German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP), “Sweden and Finland in NATO: Implications for the Baltic Sea Region”, SWP Comment.

consequences of it. Throughout Europe a common feeling towards Ukraine remains, one of solidarity particularly in the realm of humanitarian aid, which is nowadays supported by 89% of EU citizens, the continuation of sanctioning Russia (72%) and the onflow of cash to Ukraine also maintains a high degree of approval, around 72%.¹³³

However, we still find division within EU Member States when it comes to their position regarding how the EU should deal with the conflict. Italy remains one of the major countries to remain on the fence when it comes to dealing with Russia, and the numbers reflect that stance, with 9% of Italians supporting Russia, 40% Ukraine, but 51% remain neutral. This trend of Italy not wanting to publicly take a step that might confront the Kremlin was exposed when Hungary blockaded the European Union's attempt to approve a new package of military aid to Ukraine, with 47% of Italians siding with Hungary's decision and only 33% having said to oppose it¹³⁴. On the contrary we find France, one of the countries that at first, also leaned towards a slight sense of neutrality in the conflict, thinking, at the time of the invasion that their President, Macron, had done what he could to help Ukraine, we can see a slight increase in the thought of helping Ukraine, with 20% of the French wanting an increase in military and strategic support, while 39% want it reduced/finished, and 26% believe that the present time support should be maintained.¹³⁵

As it had been displayed at the very start of the conflict, the Nordic Countries continue to showcase support, particularly on the financial and humanitarian aid, with Swedes showing a clear majority of around 65% supporting for NATO membership of their country.¹³⁶

The country that remains static in its stance is, without surprise, Poland. Poles have said that the conflict is the decade's most transformative event in their lifestyle, with a continuous sensation that Russia might escalate the war onto their own territory, leading to a firm believe

¹³³ European Parliament, DG COMM, *Public Opinion Monitoring in the EU: 2024 Survey Results*, February 2024.

¹³⁴ Keeping in mind that 60% of Italians already disagreed, at the very start of the conflict for any military assistance/strategic assistance to be given to the Ukrainians.

¹³⁵ Ibidem.

¹³⁶ Ibidem.

that there needs to be an increment of NATO led air-defence coordination within their borders with Russia.

All in all, the post-2022 vision of Russia and its leader Putin was new chapter in Europe's political culture. In 2025 Pew's global survey records very unfavourable views of Russia, especially in the West, hence seeing the approval of unprecedented sanctions applied to the country, and all the solidarity that has been seen through the EU's Member States. Humanitarian aid, sanctions and the acceptance of refugees are generally accepted within the EU, however support for military and strategic assistance remains a difficult topic to be pushed forward, as Kadri Liik observed, "Eastern member states perceive Russia as an existential threat, while in Southern Europe the war is filtered through the prism of economic consequences and migration"¹³⁷.

The analysis of the survey's showcase that Poland and the Scandinavian States continue to show a higher threat perception and readiness for defensive measures given their geographical position and history with Russia. There is a feeling that the war will only end through negotiated terms, even in countries that clearly show their position to be totally against Russia's invasion, where only 10% of Europeans believe in a total Ukrainian victory, that is, one where they do not lose any territory to Russia. We conclude then, that there is a sharp geographical contrast through the EU in this discussion, where the Eastern/Northern part of the continent showcase a preference to act harsher towards Russia, not only deter, but actually understand the threat that it poses and to act on it, with heavy preference towards military assistance in Ukraine and military action in their own countries in order to prevent any future possibilities, while the Centre/Western and sceptical South of Europe have a posture of humanitarian aid and shying away from direct conflict or even any particular action that might escalate the conflict.

¹³⁷ Kadri Liik, "The War and the Future of European Security", European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), April 2022.

4. European Union's Policy towards Ukraine

The EU's approach towards Ukraine at the very start of their official relationship was one based on how the Union dealt with Russia, through a bilateral agreement between the parties, PCA, which also had the same objectives as the one it signed with Russia, those being, an open channel for political dialogue, economic support given the need for Ukraine to develop and transition onto a market economy after the collapse of the Soviet Union with prospects for a Free Trade Agreement conditioned on reforms.¹³⁸

With EU's "Big Bang" followed the creation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)¹³⁹, which focused on "Economic development for stabilisation; The security dimension; and migration and mobility"¹⁴⁰. With access to the strategy paper of the ENP, the key objectives were based on support for human rights, civil society, and good governance; the encouragement to participate in European Union initiatives in the world of politics, economy, social and security realm; the cooperation against common threats, such as terrorism and illegal immigration; the creation of a common funding tool by the EU, the European Neighbourhood Instrument, while making sure everyone would share the same access to all these benefits, if the guidelines presupposed by the EU were met by the ENP members¹⁴¹.

A year later, in 2005, we saw a significant intensification of the EU-Ukraine relationship with the EU-Ukraine Action Plan, which underlined quite clearly that, if the country had the wish to move towards the path of membership of the European Union, the latter would be happy to oblige, if the necessary actions would be carried by Ukraine. The plan had been outlined to be completed in three years, and it had six main chapters: "Political dialogue and reform;

¹³⁸ European Council, *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, and the Russia Federation*, Official Journal L 327 (28 November 1997).

¹³⁹ ENP was signed by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

¹⁴⁰ European Commission, "European Neighbourhood Policy", accessed 20th September 2025, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/european-neighbourhood-policy_en.

¹⁴¹ European Commission, *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*, COM (2004) 373 final (Brussels, 12 May 2004).

Economic and social reform and development; Co-Operation in Justice and Home Affairs; Transport, energy information society and environment and People-to-people contacts”¹⁴². In the immediate time, the measures of the Action Plan granted Ukrainian access to 250 million euros in the European Investment Bank, a social development with the priority showed by the EU of a visa that would facilitate the free transit of Ukrainians throughout its Member States and the diplomatic pressure of the EU to try and accelerate the process of Ukraine being a member of the World Trade Organization, which would grant it Market Economy Status, a step that is key for the development of the countries market onto a free one.

What was important with this Action Plan was the clear understanding that this wasn’t meant to be a “one off”, because it could be amended/updated as needed, which happened only a year after, making this a living instrument that would be moulded throughout its numbers, instead of merely having a timetable that would put an end to it. This package of 2005 is a clear example of EU’s liberalism¹⁴³, the focus on the social life of citizens with plans for mobility, and the interdependence that is tried to be achieved through the market transformation and legal groundwork to push Ukraine onto the path of Westernization while deviating it from its history of Soviet control.

On the 7th of May 2009 the EU released the Prague Joint Declaration launching the Eastern Partnership (EaP), another forward step taken, not only with Ukraine, but nonetheless very important. The EaP focused on the acceleration of political association and economic integration with willing partners (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine). The document also stresses the need to act according to international law, and all the values shared by the EU, democracy, rule of law, sustainable development and good governance. Apart from all this, it also mentions the need to actively engage in cooperating

¹⁴² European Commission, “EU-Ukraine Action Plan”, Brussels, 2005.

¹⁴³ We also saw the European Union create the European Union Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM), in November of 2005, which provided technical assistance with the management of Ukrainian borders and with the usage of the same technicians to assist on the implementation of the visa-liberation that the EU was trying to foment for its Neighbourhood Policy.

dialogue to peacefully deal with conflicts within the Eastern European region, in order to promote stability and confidence between all the parties of the EaP.¹⁴⁴

In matters of legislative development, the EaP became the foundation for Association Agreements (AA), which are bilateral agreements between the European Union and states that are willing and able to meet the commitments, such as the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTA's), that are approximate to the regulatory processes of EU law.

It also established the organization of summits every two years and annual Foreign Minister's meetings to maintain initiative within all parties, and the creation of flagship initiatives, such as the facilitation of the creation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SME's) that are within the EU norms to gain access to funding and benefits that give the EaP momentum, substance and visibility throughout the Union and its partners.¹⁴⁵

There was a misstep in the development of the EU-Ukraine relationship in November 2013, when it was stipulated that the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA), which included the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, to be signed, wasn't because of Russia's pressure on Víktor Yanukóvytch, president of Ukraine at the time, and suspended the negotiations with the EU. This was the decision that led to the Maidan war in Ukraine.

After the Annexation of Crimea, the European Union restarted negotiations with the Ukraine executive, which began by the unilateral tariff cuts, where the EU removed or reduced certain import duties on Ukraine trade given the war in Crimea, and to facilitate the pending DCFTA's entry into force, which only happened, provisionally in 2016 and in full force in 2017.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ Council of the EU, "Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit", Prague, 7 May 2009.

¹⁴⁵ European Commission, "Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SME's): SME Definition", accessed 20th September 2025, https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition_en.

¹⁴⁶ European Commission, "EU-Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA)", accessed 20th September 2025, <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/eu-ukraine-deep-and-comprehensive-free-trade-area>.

Another decision to facilitate the social side of the AA, in 2017 we saw the EU create Visa-free short stays, meaning that Ukrainians could travel freely and safely throughout the EU if they had a passport, with periods of up to 180 days.

Apart from these, there wasn't any meaningful progress in the relationship between both parties, as it's been mentioned in earlier chapters, the sanctions imposed on Russia after the Annexation of Crimea, we're seen by many as insufficient, an attempt to apply deterrence methods that clearly didn't do anything to steer away the Kremlin for lately invading Ukraine in 2022. However, we can note a change in action after the full-scale invasion, with the EU taking a proactive instead of reactive approach to the conflict and the need to take decisions on how to deal with Ukraine, and what the war in Ukraine might mean to the rest of the European Continent.

Along the lines of the "deep integration" that might lead to possible accession to the EU states in the DCFTA, we saw on the 23rd and 24th of June 2022, just four months after Russia's invasion,

"EU leaders granted EU candidate status to Ukraine. In this context, they invited the European Commission to report to the Council on the fulfilment of the conditions specified in the Commission's opinion on Ukraine's membership application. EU leaders reiterated that they are strongly committed to providing continued EU support to Ukraine, including military, financial, humanitarian and political support"¹⁴⁷.

On the same month we also saw the adoption of the Autonomous Trade Measures (ATM's), giving Ukraine full access to the EU market, being of immense importance to maintain some kind of stabilisation in the trade market of the country, which led to "EU imports from Ukraine amounted to 22.8 billion euros in 2023 compared to pre-war levels of 24 billion euros in 2021"¹⁴⁸. The ATM's also meant that the EU was able to suspend all tariffs and remaining quotas

¹⁴⁷ European External Action Service, "European Council Grants EU Candidate Status to Ukraine", 23 June 2022.

¹⁴⁸ European Commission, "EU extends trade support for Ukraine for one more year*", Press Release, 13 May 2024.

that we're in place before the full-scale invasion of 2022, a measure that has been updated as the war develops, having been repeatedly extended, as recent as in May 2025.¹⁴⁹

However, the EU-Ukraine relationship didn't only evolve in the matter of punishing the latter's aggressor or providing Ukraine with the opportunity to join the EU, but it also led to a deepening of the Union's intervention on military, economic, and energy matters.

Daniel Fiott and Luis Simón in-depth analysis of the EU defence after the Versailles summit in 2022 portrays an amazing picture of that change, however we'll only bring into light small bits of it, given the focus on Ukraine-related policies and not general sharp changes in actual EU's agenda/policies.

The Versailles Summit led to three Ukraine-driven priorities, given the fact that Ukraine gained EU's strategic centrality,

“Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in late February 2022 has had a perverse impact on the EU's security and defence agenda. Suddenly, the question of how to support Ukraine to defend itself against Russia – and how to develop the capabilities and industry geared for deterrence and collective defence – became a strategic objective for the EU and its Member States”¹⁵⁰

to boost its military capabilities, try and cut its dependence on Russian energy, and to be strengthened by Europe's economic base.

The creation of the European Peace Facility (EPF), an instrument that aims for the ability of the EU to prevent conflict, build and preserve peace, as well as strengthen the international security and stability, through a fund that is worth, nowadays, over seventeen billion Euros¹⁵¹. From this fund, the EU has already channelled around 6.1 billion of Euros between 2022 and 2024 onto Ukraine, which help finance the provision of lethal and non-lethal military equipment and supplies, a figure that has been raised for the upcoming years to 11.1 billion Euros through the EPF, made possible due to the establishment of a dedicated Ukraine Assistance Fund.

¹⁴⁹ European Commission, “EU Solidarity with Ukraine: Timeline”, accessed 20th September 2025, https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-solidarity-ukraine/timeline_en.

¹⁵⁰ European Parliament, “EU Defence After Versailles: An agenda for the Future”, Brussels, October 2023.

¹⁵¹ A number that has increasingly been upped, having started with a ceiling of 5.66 billion Euros in March 2021.

Hand in hand with the EPF, the European Union also created the EU Military Assistance Mission in support for Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine), which is funded by the EPF, and it is through the EUMAM that the EU assists in the training of Ukrainian personnel, where all the training happens under EU soil and every military equipment used in those sessions are also provided by the Union, everything towards the development of the technical ability of the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF's). A true show of commitment from the Member States towards the assistance being laid out for Ukraine is the fact that up until 2025, we've seen 24 Member States offering either training modules to indulge on the UAF's or personnel to fulfil the training missions carried out by the EUMAM.

All of these nuances changed the EU's relationship with Ukraine, now taking a position of a security provider instead of a security consumer, given the investment in Defence, the assumption that Europe needs to develop its military industry, that is the only way that it can supply and restock Ukraine with whatever might be needed to defend or counterattack Russia. It is through this way that the actions taken by the European Union also align with NATO's commitment to maintain its Alliance and protect its members, proving to the world that the EU can add Hard Power to its locker and to its alliances when needed, as it has proven to be needed, when Putin launched the invasion onto Ukrainian soil.

5. Geopolitical Shifts and EU's Global Strategy

We've already grasped throughout this dissertation, the long development of the relationship between the European Union and Russia, one that has had ups and downs as every relationship has, but in 2022 the down hit a new low, and with that, we saw a new, renewed European Union, one that we've never seen before, and hopefully a reaction that won't, in the long term, come back to bite us for having happened quite late.¹⁵²

5.1. EU's Policy Changes Post-2022

The very first practical change that we saw happen in the EU's agenda was the creation and implementation of the Strategic Compass, which we've discussed previously. One of the key features of the Strategic Compass is the creation of the RDC, which is a troop of five thousand soldiers that are ready to be deployed at whatever time they might need to, which is a step towards a deterrence-capable posture instead of being one of sole crisis-management, explicitly a move towards a realist-based thought without losing the liberal aspect of crisis-management.¹⁵³

The implementation of the Strategic Compass was a first step swiftly followed by the creation of all the necessary methods for it to be applied, such as the EPF. To get a grasp of the investment already made up to 2025, solely towards the conflict in Ukraine, the EU Member States have already invested 57.1 billion euros in military support for the country, with an addition of 6.1 billion euros that came through the EPF, which makes it a total of 63.2 billion

¹⁵² Mark Leonard and Ivan Krastev, *The Crisis of European Security: What Europeans Think about the War in Ukraine* (London: ECFR, 2022)

¹⁵³ European Council, *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, March 2022.

euro investment¹⁵⁴ onto anything military related that might help Ukraine defend itself and even counterattack the uncalled for invasion of Russia.

The creation of the EUMAM was also a step towards a European Union that can defend its members autonomously, however, the EU does not relinquish nor neglect the value of alliances in the international realm, as we've seen Trump's administration do ever since he took office, and EUMAM Ukraine has been cooperating with NATO on the training of Ukraine Armed Forces, particularly with the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU)¹⁵⁵. Up until November 8th, 2024, these two Units had helped "training 63 000 UAF soldiers so far, which is an equivalent of ten brigades. The mission will train additional 15 000 troops in coming months, bringing the total number of soldiers trained to 75 000 by the end of winter 2024/2025", a statement made by the Council of the European Union regarding the extension of the mandate of the EUMAM for two more years.

Following the Versailles meeting the Heads of State of several EU Member States understood and underlined the need for the EU to re-invent itself in the matter of its own security and defence. That meant all the investment which we've already laid out throughout different chapters, though those investments need to be carefully made, ensuring money is well spent and it remains within the financial European circle. Having this in mind, the Commission proposed the establishment of The European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA), which is the engine of the defence industry/market, making sure that there is a continuous surge of demand for defence capabilities within the EU Member States and that investment is being made in order to fulfil those demands, but also to create, develop and boost the overall EU defence capabilities. The three main areas for investment we're, as follows: Ammunition (small arms, artillery ammunition, mortars, rockets); Air and Missile Defence; and Platforms and replacement of legacy systems. The EDIRPA programme is a short-

¹⁵⁴ Council of the EU, "EU Military Support to Ukraine", 2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/military-support-ukraine/> .

¹⁵⁵ Council of the EU, "Ukraine: Council Extends the Mandate of the EU Military Assistance Mission for Two Years", 8 November 2024.

term urgency instrument that is directly tied to the invasion of Russia and the need for rapid development of EU's defence capabilities.

Everything that we've mentioned above only happened after the invasion of 2022, but the European Union had already a Defence Procurement Directive, implemented in 2009, that had European rules towards services for defence purposes, however the budget and obligations weren't nowhere near to what they've turned into after the Russian invasion.

We shall not forget the EU's most powerful asset, its unique market. The European Union's market gives it the ability to turn inward for investment, without needing any outsource for money nor development of its industries, if the money is applied correctly. Having this in mind, we can go through a small timeline of the EU's continuous decision of incrementally up its Member States investment in defence. On the 14th of December of 2020 the Council reached an agreement for a provisional establishment of the European Defence Fund, with a plan outlined for 2021 up until 2027, giving emphasis to the need for augmenting in some way the investment that was being made in the defence industry within the EU. With the invasion in 2022 and the Versailles declaration in March of the same year, the EU and its executive have committed to "bolster European defence capabilities". It was here then, that we saw a change within EU's policy and political agenda regarding military spending. On the 23rd of June 2023 the Council established the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), which was solely aimed at the shortage of ammunition and missiles that was felt in the UAF and from the own Member States stocks given their donations to Ukraine. The very first big step towards the EU's ability to develop its industry defence, was taken on the 28th of June of the same year, with the implementation of EDIRPA, which we've mentioned previously. The Prime Minister of Sweden, Pal Jonson said the following at the press release,

"Today's agreement is indeed important. Through the joint procurement of defence materiel, the competitiveness and efficiency of the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base will

be boosted, and EU member states will be able to more effectively replenish their stocks depleted by donations to Ukraine”¹⁵⁶.

What is key in the EDIRPA is the conditions that are imposed, clearly putting the EU’s benefits up front, that is, making sure the supply, the manufacture of defence related goods are made by EU member states, that every bit of money that is channelled towards defence, remains in the European Union’s “bubble”, as it is demonstrated through the three conditions made for projects “in order to be eligible for funding:

- As a principle, contractors involved in the common procurement should be established in and have their executive management structures in the EU or an associated country (Iceland, Liechtenstein, or Norway). They should also not be controlled by a non-associated third country, or a derogation has been granted through guarantees from member states. Under no circumstances can EDIRPA funds can be used to source components from countries that do not respect good-neighbourly relations.
- By default, contractors must use facilities and resources that are located in the EU or in an associated third country. The use of non-EU facilities is only allowed where an EU producer has no relevant infrastructure on EU territory.
- Member states may only produce products that do not carry any restrictions by a non-associated third country limiting their ability to use them. This rule is not applicable in the case of urgent and critical defence products, provided that they were in use before 24 February 2022 in the majority of the consortium, and the members of the consortium commit to study the feasibility of replacing those restricted components with restriction-free components of EU origin”¹⁵⁷.

The analysis of these conditions truly showcases the new path taken by the EU, understanding the need to invest in defence, it created funds that would incentivise entrepreneurs and businesses throughout Europe to develop new machinery, new systems, new technologies that can be used for member states defence, without needing to rely on others. However, we shall underline the continuous liberal commitment that is shown on the third conditions, regarding the usage of products that might come from third countries, stating the need to not eradicate or stagnate said countries from their products unless they we’re already being used to fabricate components prior to the invasion of Russia.

¹⁵⁶ Council of the EU, “EU Defence Industry: Council and Parliament Agree on New Rules to Boost Common Procurement”, 27 June 2023.

¹⁵⁷ Ibidem.

To conclude the timeline, after the mentioned dates, we saw the Council meet several times, and on every occasion the stressing line was the need to continuously augment the investment, to speed the process that will eventually lead to the autonomy of the EU regarding its ability to defend itself.

The investment made for the member states is something we've never seen before in the EU. In 2021 the defence expenditure between all member states rested at 251 billion euros. That figure saw a slight rise in the following year, with 262 billion euros being spent, it is the first year of the war in Ukraine, but all of the measures we've mentioned the EU asserted, only entered into place in 2023, and those we're felt in the numbers. In 2023, that number rose to 288 billion euros and to 343 the year after, this was a rise of around 19% in defence expenditure, a figure that shows the commitment of the EU to upgrade its defensive measures, and it also shows that the procedures and acts perpetrated by the Union worked correctly, making sure the incentives we're good enough for investment and procurement by both sides of supply and demand. A figure that helps us understand this is the fact that 80% of the investment was made onto new defence products that we're developed in 2024, a clear sign that new armament and software is being developed by EU companies and people.

So, not only we're the decisions made by the EU important for the creation of competitiveness in the defence industry, as well as the incentive for member states to invest in their own defence particularly through mechanisms that safeguarded each member state investment in defence. On the 27th of May 2025, the EU created the Security Action for Europe (SAFE)¹⁵⁸ which is intended to support major investments that might be needed to do in order to close critical capability gaps. Through this instrument, the EU open's up a funding possibility through long-term loaning with a capacity of 150 billion euros, to be spread according to each country's needs and requests, noting that the projects that receive funding from SAFE, most often than not,

¹⁵⁸ Council of the EU, "Timeline European Defence Expenditure", accessed 20th September 2025.

should be projects that benefit more than one member state, though as it's mentioned, exceptions can be made.¹⁵⁹

We should mention that these initiatives are all under the umbrella of the Common Defence Procurement, which the EU believes to be key in order to

“tackle the fragmentation of European defence markets and the unnecessary duplication of capabilities, organisation and expenditure. Common procurement refers to the practice where two or more member states jointly purchase goods or services to achieve: More efficient public spending; Cost savings; Increased solidarity; and Improved interoperability”¹⁶⁰.

Everything that is done in the realm of defence in the European Union is done through common defence procurement, because this is the only way that the investment and money does not disrupt the EU's funding capabilities.

All in all,

“expenditure under the EU budget includes:

- 8.8 billion euros under the European Defence Fund to boost research and development.
- 1.7 billion euros to support military projects through the Connecting Europe Facility.
- 300 million euros to support joint defence procurement.
- 500 million euros to boost ammunition production”¹⁶¹.

5.2. Sanctions and Law Enforcement

We've already touched on the extensive list of sanctions that the EU imposed on Russia, in an unprecedented way, however, there are key aspects of those sanctions that truly demonstrate a turn towards realist instrumentalization and securitization of instruments to dent Russia's capabilities to continue financing their war on Ukraine.

¹⁵⁹ European Commission, “SAFE – Security Action for Europe”, 2025, https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/safe-security-action-europe_en

¹⁶⁰ Council of the EU, “Defence Procurement”, 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-procurement/>

¹⁶¹ Council of the EU, “European Defence in Numbers”, 2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-numbers/>

On the 6th of December 2023, the G7 leaders held a meeting to discuss the war in Ukraine, and in the official statement released by them, the following was said,

“It is not right for Russia to decide if or when it will pay for the damage it has caused in Ukraine. Russia’s obligations under international law are clear: Russia must both end its illegal war of aggression and pay for the damage it has caused, which according to the World Bank to date, already exceeds 400 billion US dollars. In light of the urgency of disrupting Russia’s attempts to destroy the Ukrainian economy and failure to abide by its international law obligations, we will explore all possible avenues to aid Ukraine in obtaining compensation from Russia, consistent with our respective legal systems and international law”¹⁶².

The actions that the prior statement led to where the adoption of new regulatory terms in the Central Securities Depositories (CSD) which hold assets and reserves of the Central Bank of Russia (CBR), assets that are already frozen due to the sanctions applied by the EU. The conclusion was that the EU would, legally, retain any extraordinary revenues that might be held in any CSD with more than one million euros in CBR’s assets. The usage of these revenues would be used to directly support Ukraine, which “will be channelled through the EU budget to the Ukraine Facility on which the Council and the European Parliament reached a provisional agreement on 6th February 2024”¹⁶³.

These realist measures of freezing assets and using them to help rebuild Ukraine and invest in defence we’re backed up by another realist measure, through the criminalisation of the violation of the EU sanctions. A major problem which we’ve already debated here was the lack of impunity that the sanctions imposed after the Annexation of Crimea had, one of the big reasons for the Kremlin’s foreign policy continuously being one that eventually led to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. With this in mind, the Vice-President for Values and Transparency, Vêra Jourová said,

“With Putin continuing his illegal aggression against Ukraine, it is paramount that the EU sanctions are fully implemented, and the violation of those measures is punished. In addition, the new rules will also make it easier for Member States to confiscate some of the frozen assets of

¹⁶² G7 Leader’s Statement on Ukraine, 6 December 2023

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/68615/g7-leaders-statement-2023-12-6.pdf>

¹⁶³ Council of the EU, “Immobilised Russian Assets: Council Decides to Set Aside Extraordinary Revenues”, 12 February 2024.

people and companies that support the war. Member States should now swiftly transpose the new rules and make them work in practice”¹⁶⁴.

There wouldn't be a better way to enforce sanctions and facilitate Member States regulatory work in freezing Russian assets that might be used to continuously fund Russia's war in Ukraine, and the fact that it is now considered a crime within the EU, obligates every Member State to prosecute whoever might breach the sanction through minimum EU standards.

Finally, on the 18th of July 2025 we saw the council of the EU adopt an unprecedented 18th package of sanctions towards Russia, with the statement from Kaja Kallas, which is the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and chair of Foreign Affairs Council,

“The EU just approved one of its strongest sanctions packages against Russia to date. Each sanction weakens Russia's ability to wage war. The message is clear: Europe will not back down in its support for Ukraine. The EU will keep raising the pressure until Russia ends its war”¹⁶⁵.

The tone in this statement is mesmerising given EU's history of avoiding real conflict with anyone, particularly because, apart from Russia, there isn't a threat to the European way of living. We shall outline the major nuances of this last package imposed by the EU:

- Energy wise, the EU is lowering the price cap for crude oil, given that oil exports still represent one third of Russian government revenues. There are also full-fledged sanctions applied to Russian and international companies that are managing shadow fleet vessels, one of those being a refinery in India.¹⁶⁶ The shadow fleet is the logistical backbone of Russia's sanctions-circumventing oil trade. By enabling 70-86% of crude exports to move outside the price-cap service net, it preserves core revenue streams that fund the war and cushions macro-fiscal pressure. EU responses – progressively listing

¹⁶⁴ European Commission, “New EU Rules Criminalising Violation of EU Sanctions Enter into Force”, 17 May 224.

¹⁶⁵ Council of the EU, “Russia's War of Aggression against Ukraine: EU Adopts 18th Package of Sanctions”, 18 July 2025.

¹⁶⁶ The Russian shadow fleet was created in 2022, being a loosely connected network of oil tankers that operate with opaque ownership, flags of convenience, which enables Russia to move seaborne crude and oil products outside the G7/EU price-cap and service ban regime, towards intermediaries or non-sanctioning jurisdictions (India, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Seychelles, etc). This is important to sustain Russia's export volumes and remove the dent of the price cap, keeping federal revenues flowing.

vessels, restricting port access and services, and tightening circumvention rules – reflect this realist, security-drive change in economic statecraft.

- Banking wise, the EU is doubling down its prohibition on certain Russian banks to a full transition ban. These sanctions are also being widened towards third countries financial and crypto-assisted service providers that might be helping Russia in any way, whether through the maintenance of Russian assets in banks, or through the buying of Russian oil through the shadow fleet.
- In the military industry the EU is applying harsher sanctions on suppliers for Russian military equipment, which include entities that are based in China, as well as Belarus, which we've already exposed its role in helping Russia ever since the invasion occurred in previous chapters.

“26 new entities will be subject to tighter export restrictions concerning dual-use goods and technologies, including those that could contribute to technological enhancement of Russia’s defence and security sector. Eleven of those entities are located in third countries other than Russia (seven in China, and Hong Kong, and four in Turkey), and have been involved in circumventing export restrictions, including for unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV’s)”¹⁶⁷.

- Apart from these, the package also focuses on the active involvement of Russia’s “military education” in Ukrainian children, which the EU deems of manipulation of cultural heritage and Russian propaganda.

This latest package is another demonstration of EU’s U-turn towards a realist approach regarding its relationship with Russia and its position in the international realm. Another case of the securitisation of EU’s energy can be seen in the EU-NATO task force post-Nord Stream. On the 29th of June 2023, the European Commission released an assessment made by both parties with the objective of strengthening the resilience and protection of critical infrastructure

¹⁶⁷ Ibidem.

for the EU Member States (which most of them are also part of the Northern Alliance). The report stated recommendations to enhance that critical infrastructure, by doing the following:

“

- Increased engagement, while making full use of synergies, for instance in the case of a major hazard or a significant change in the security context; Promoting engagement among Allies, Member States, and the private sector, including on security by design for critical infrastructure; Holding dedicated scenario-based discussions, including through the EU-NATO Foresight Seminar and with the support of the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats.
- Strengthening the Structured Dialogue on Resilience and the Structured Dialogue on Military Mobility, and expanding existing staff talks on cyber, space, maritime, and energy, as well as between NATO's International Military Staff and the EU Military Staff.
- Promoting best practices, assessments, and enhancing monitoring for security implications and cooperation, including between civilian and military actors; carrying out regular Parallel and Coordinated Assessments of the threats to critical infrastructure, building on the one conducted in spring 2023”¹⁶⁸.

This statement and showing of active cooperation between the EU and NATO is quite fruitful in the matter of showing the international actors that the EU is trying to adapt itself to the new security paradigm it is living in, without forgetting the importance of maintaining Allies, which is one of the biggest trait of the EU, as is of the United States, even though we've seen the American administration showcase an impressive ability of denigrating its Allies.

5.3. EU's Political Discourse and Strategy

We've already mentioned the technical characteristics that the Strategic Compass brought into the EU, however, in this chapter, it is relevant to analyse the narrative and tone that the SC brings, given the war in Ukraine, but also having in mind the wider geopolitical environment,

¹⁶⁸ European Commission, “EU-NATO Task Force on the Resilience of Critical Infrastructure”, 29 June 2023.

showing, once again, the more realist posture of the EU towards not only Russia, but also the global panorama as a whole.

The SC paints Russia as the reason for this “tectonic shift” in a world of contested domains and coercive interdependence, placing EU’s security as the core and principal point of focus of the Union, as it is portrayed through the following,

“We live in an era of strategy competition and complex security threats. (...) Interdependence is increasingly conflictual and soft power weaponised. (...) After three decades of strong economic interdependence, which was supposed to decrease tensions, the return of power politics and even armed aggression, is the most significant change in international relations”¹⁶⁹.

This narrative clearly demonstrates the EU’s vision towards Russia and the world, the continuous sensation of how international actors feel like they can and should pursue whatever means necessary to achieve their own objectives, as Russia is doing so in Ukraine, a showing of a foreign policy agenda marked by its History, with an existential belief that the West actions are always done in order to undermine the country’s capabilities or influence.

It is through the SC that we see the EU establish the readiness to act upon its own defence, even if that reaction means doing so without help from its Allies (such as NATO, United Kingdom or other countries), particularly in the following quote, “We need to be able to act rapidly and robustly whenever a crisis erupts, with partners if possible and alone when necessary”¹⁷⁰, it openly accepts the potential need for robust action, something unprecedented given the pure “civilian power” which the EU has always leaned on, mainly because, it didn’t had a direct threat as it has now. In line with this deviation from being a pure civilian power, it developed the “EU Rapid Deployment Capacity (...) up to five thousand troops into non-permissive environments (...) fully operational by 2025”¹⁷¹, which exposes concretely a troop target for numbers and a timeline for it to be done, once again, something completely alien for EU standards and agendas.

¹⁶⁹ European Council, *Strategic Compass*, March 2022.

¹⁷⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁷¹ Ibidem.

It was for the first time where we saw a long-term plan for defence in the EU, which is also a jump from ad-hoc fixes to what the SC describes as a “quantum leap” in defence,

“The more hostile security environment requires us to make a quantum leap forward and increase our capacity and willingness to act, strengthen our resilience and ensure solidarity and mutual assistance. (...) We need to invest more and better in capabilities and innovative technologies, fill strategic gaps and reduce technological and industrial dependencies”¹⁷².

The SC also acknowledges the new hybrid warfare, which not only includes the usage of unmanned aerial vehicles, but also the interference in the news, the spreading of misinformation, or propaganda, a tool often used by Russia ever since its full-scale invasion in 2022. With this in mind, securitising the information space is of the utmost importance for the EU and its Member States, and the EU promised that they’d

“create an EU Hybrid Toolbox that brings together different instruments to detect and respond to cyberattacks, and further develop the EU Cyber Defence Policy to be better prepared for and respond to cyberattacks; strengthen our actions in maritime, air and space domains, notably by expanding the Coordinated Maritime Presences to other areas, starting with the Indo-Pacific, and by developing an EU Space Strategy for security and defence”¹⁷³.

The last line already pointed out the attention the EU will be having in its geopolitical reach, with the mention of Indo-Pacific naval presence and exercises, a stance of power-projection onto territories that aren’t the EU’s direct neighbours nor borders, “through our Indo-Pacific Strategy, we will seek to promote an open and rules-based regional security architecture, including secure sea lines of communication, capacity-building and enhanced naval presence in the Indo-Pacific”¹⁷⁴. We’ve previously talked about the EU-NATO task force discussion after the exposure of the infrastructure problems that the Nord Stream proved to have, and how the EU doesn’t neglect the need of assistance, hence clearly demonstrating the view that NATO is the security backbone of collective security. Solidarity between EU Member States is stated in the Treaty of the European Union on the 7th article, and the capacity of EU’s decision-making is also key for the Alliance’s strength at the eyes of the world, “a stronger and more capable EU

¹⁷² Ibidem.

¹⁷³ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁴ Ibidem.

in the field of security and defence will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains the foundation of collective defence for its members”¹⁷⁵.

This document really is a statement; the threat framing moves from optimism about liberal interdependence to an admission that interdependence can be weaponised and that the EU is dealing with power politics in the international realm. The language that is used legitimises the need and urgency for deterrence and resilience measures that should be applied intransigently. The adoption and public demonstration that the EU will implement the RDC is a classic realism notion, one that focuses on the “means for action”, the means here being the capacity to deploy troops in rapid manner regardless of the territory it might need to be triggered. The notion that nowadays most states will try and exploit every dependence of another to gain an advantage, this being true in the information area, where we’ve seen continuous exploitation of the media. A good quote that ends the analysis of the SC and how the language used throughout the document shows the EU taking a stance towards Russia and the international realm is the following,

“We must act as a strong and coherent political actor to uphold the values and principles underpinning our democracies, take more responsibility for the security of Europe and its citizens and support international peace and security, as well as human security, together with partners, while acknowledging the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States”¹⁷⁶.

If we take into account everything that’s been mentioned about the EU’s reaction to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, we can say that there’s a change from market interdependence to market power. The powerful single market that makes the EU stand out in the international realm is now, a coercive tool/platform, because it is through the monetary capabilities and its market that the EU can impose sweeping sanctions, criminalise evasion from said sanctions, and it even use the windfall profits from already frozen Russian assets for the arms industry and

¹⁷⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁶ Ibidem.

the reconstruction of Ukrainian territory. This made the change on the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) from what was a policy based on light agreements, light investment and overall seriousness given the fact that security and defence was, in a way, a given for the EU, through its Allies. It is post-2022 that we saw the creation of lethal aid (provided by the European Peace Facility), EUMAM training in big numbers, and a complete revolution in the defence industry in Europe, particularly through EDIRPA, marking a shift from advisory missions and actions to power-relevant outputs. The actual action that is making the European Union Member States move away from dependence on energy from suppliers that aren't to be trusted, as it happens with Russia, through cooperation with NATO to ensure the infrastructures aren't to be tampered with again, and to find new ways of either creating energy or to be supplied by different actors.

5.4. EU's Geopolitical Stance in a New Paradigm

On the 20th of June 2023, the European Commission published the Joint Communication to the European Parliament, The European Council and the Council, on "European Economic Security Strategy", where, we see the EU portraying what a beneficial web of interdependencies was once, as a possible threat, the need to manage the risk of falling onto interdependencies that aren't stable nor fruitful, stating that without ever talking down on the need for an open globe, that,

"With geopolitical tensions rising and global economic integration deeper than ever before, certain economic flows and activities can present a risk to our security. More than ever, our security is deeply intertwined with our ability to make ourselves more resilient and reduce the risks arising from economic linkages that in past decades we viewed as benign. Profound

technological shifts are adding to the intensity of this competition and making the economic and security challenges more complex”¹⁷⁷.

It is in this document that the EU clearly states that is going to elevate and systematise instruments which we’ve once seen as technical trade tools, by

“Protecting ourselves from commonly identified economic security risks, by better deploying the tools we already have in place, such as trade defence, foreign subsidies, 5G/6G security, Foreign Direct Investment screening and export controls, as well as the new instrument to counter economic coercion. (...) To tackle some of the new risks we face, for instance linked to exports or outward investments in a narrow set of key enabling technologies with military applications (e.g. in the areas of Quantum, Advanced Semiconductors, Artificial Intelligence)”¹⁷⁸.

Showing, once again, the commitment to change and address the new challenges that have risen from the war in Ukraine, but not only.

Further along the text we see the terms of Bilateral and Plurilateral cooperation, particularly leaning on the G7’s capabilities of institutionalised organisation, but also understanding the need to amplify the leader’s geo-economic toolbox and supply-chain diplomacy, to counter the possibility of future attacks from different actors. An amazing quote that clearly exposes the EU’s belief that it needs to reinvent and strengthen its geo-economic instruments, is the following,

“The EU is vastly expanding its bilateral and plurilateral cooperation instruments to be a nimbler actor where it is necessary for greater economic security. This is a core element of the Union’s policy response, implementing the notion of security through diversification of partners. Intensive cooperation on economic security is already taking place with various partners including the US and India as part of the respective Trade and Technology Councils (TTC). The EU-Japan High Level Economic Dialogue will incorporate a dedicated workstream on economic security issues”¹⁷⁹.

The “geo-economic toolbox” is the reference to every trade deal, any partnership or alliance that enriches the EU’s market and economy, this being the most effective way for the Union to remain a powerful and significant actor in the international realm.

¹⁷⁷ European Commission, *European Economic Security Strategy*, Joint Communication, 20 June 2023, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX%3A52023JC0020>

¹⁷⁸ Ibidem.

¹⁷⁹ Ibidem.

All in all, the document is a demonstration of a new page when it comes to EU's foreign policy, an EU that remains open but most definitely won't be naïve, avoiding it through the implementation of precise risk controls. Security through diversification seems to be the motto moving forward, with the EU trying to reduce single-country reliance (which obviously is a direct consequence of the escalation of the relationship with Russia, that culminated on the full-scale invasion in Ukraine), through finding new suppliers, markets and critical manufacturers (Chips, clean-tech, and critical raw materials). Following the need for diversification of suppliers, the EU shows again the importance of its Allies, through the power of coalitions and the EU's own objective to become an enforcer, hence the call for a "bolder and faster use of existing instruments" and the need to develop new one's where the existential gap is critical. Lastly, the European Parliament set out the "Global Gateway 2030: Future of Europe's Global Infrastructure Bid" in 2021, though the document is an analysis made in 2024, by Kjeld van Wiering which developed four scenarios based on the responses of 30 surveyed policy experts. The Global Gateway is the EU's 300 billion euros strategy to build digital, energy and transport infrastructure that boosts competitiveness within the EU and a supply-chain security worldwide. The EU takes a stance towards China's ambitions through infrastructure investment in the global south, mentioning that the Global Gateway is also geopolitically motivated, as we can see in the following quote,

"The Global Gateway, while largely presented as a development initiative, is partly geopolitically motivated. European Commission President Ursula von der Layen confirmed in a 2022 interview that the Global Gateway serves to counter China's growing influence and provide better alternatives to Chinese infrastructure finance"¹⁸⁰.

This plan is guided by a Global Gateway Board, made up of Member States, Commissioners, while the EU Parliament does not have the final say in any decision. In terms of numbers, we've covered EU's investments already, but in terms of projects, in 2023 around 90 projects we're

¹⁸⁰ European Parliament, "Global Gateway 2030: Future of Europe's Global Infrastructure Bid", Study by Kjeld van Wiering, 2024.

launched in Africa, and the strategic package of projects in Africa is aiming to raise around 150 billion euros by 2027.¹⁸¹

The four possible scenarios proposed by the author are simply put the following:

- Optimal Gateway: Gets partner buy-in and private money, with a diversity of supply chains, therefore yielding geopolitical gains and better external relations, with States that weren't previous Allies of the EU, which means that the EU "manage power" would succeed.
- Failed Gateway: Low partner or market interest, given the preference towards China investment, making the EU project look quite neo-colonial, given its Member State's History, and it leads to an even wider credibility gap between the EU and China.
- Corporate Gateway: The EU business wins, but with limited partner benefits, leading to criticism.
- Public Gateway: There is small private investment, but public funds align with partner priorities, improving the EU's standing and perception from its partners.¹⁸²

It is a very ambitious plan but one that the EU did well to implement. It is the true understanding that not only it found the need to reinvent itself in the matter of defence, given the war in Ukraine and the continuous showing of the United States of not showing true commitment to the alliances in place, but also looking at the bigger picture, defining China as the adversary which geopolitically has immense leverage when compared to the EU, hence the projects being aimed at the African continent, where China already tried and succeeded in gaining support through its Belt and Road Initiative. Even though it is a realist approach towards how the EU looks at the international realm, the Global Gateway is based on liberal principles and values: Equal partnerships, green and clean alignment, Security-Focused, Private investment, and good governance & transparency.

¹⁸¹ Ibidem.

¹⁸² Ibidem.

6. Conclusion and Future Research

This dissertation set out to examine whether the European Union has altered its approach toward Russia since the launch of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, shifting from a predominantly liberal framework to one increasingly defined by realist principles. The preceding chapters traced the historical development of EU–Russia relations, the Union’s normative self-conception, the dynamics of public opinion within member states, the evolving EU–Ukraine partnership, and the geopolitical transformations triggered by the war.

The analysis has shown that the EU’s initial relationship with Russia was rooted in liberal optimism. Through instruments such as the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1997), the Common Strategy on Russia (1999), and the Four Common Spaces (2003), Brussels attempted to socialize Russia into its liberal order. These initiatives reflected the EU’s identity as a normative power, relying on interdependence, rule export, and the transformative logic of enlargement. The Union assumed that Russia’s trajectory would converge with European liberal-democratic values, a belief reinforced by the post-Cold War environment and the “Third Wave of Democratization”.

Yet as the literature review demonstrated, the foundations of realism — from Morgenthau’s power politics to Mearsheimer’s offensive realism — were never absent from Russia’s worldview. Moscow consistently resisted Europeanization, wielded energy as a tool of coercion, and interpreted EU and NATO enlargement not as benign liberal expansion but as encroachment upon its sphere of influence. The 2014 annexation of Crimea exposed the limits of the EU’s liberal approach. Although sanctions were imposed, they were limited in scope and weakly enforced, revealing both the Union’s internal divisions and its reluctance to embrace hard power.

The events of 2022 constituted a turning point. Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine destroyed the foundations of partnership and compelled the EU to reinvent its geopolitical role. The Union

adopted measures that were unprecedented in their scope and nature: granting Ukraine candidate status, deploying the European Peace Facility to deliver lethal military aid, creating the EU Military Assistance Mission to train tens of thousands of Ukrainian troops, and accelerating defence industrial initiatives such as EDIRPA, ASAP, and SAFE. In parallel, the EU's sanctions regime expanded to cover Russia's financial sector, oil and gas exports, technology transfers, and even extraordinary revenues from immobilized assets.

The Strategic Compass (2022) encapsulated this geopolitical shift. Its language was strikingly realist, describing a "tectonic shift" in international relations and explicitly recognizing the return of power politics. The commitment to establish a Rapid Deployment Capacity of 5,000 troops by 2025, to invest massively in joint procurement, and to enhance hybrid resilience underscored a transformation in the EU's strategic culture. The Compass also extended the Union's vision globally, to the Indo-Pacific, while simultaneously reaffirming NATO as the foundation of European collective defence.

Public opinion reinforced this transformation. Surveys across the Union in 2022 and beyond revealed a dramatic collapse in support for Russia and widespread backing for sanctions, humanitarian aid, and refugee assistance. Although divisions persist between Eastern and Southern member states, the broad consensus has been that Russian aggression constitutes an existential threat. This convergence between institutional strategy and public sentiment further illustrates the extent to which realism has supplanted liberal assumptions in the EU's approach to Russia.

At the same time, the EU has not wholly abandoned its liberal identity. Initiatives such as the Global Gateway, the emphasis on reconstruction assistance through the Ukraine Facility, and the continued framing of policy in terms of values and international law highlight that liberal elements endure. Rather than a complete rupture, the EU's evolution may best be understood as a hybridization of liberal and realist logics: a Union that retains its normative aspirations but increasingly deploys the tools of hard power and economic statecraft to defend them.

In conclusion, this dissertation finds that the EU has indeed undergone a profound strategic shift since 2022, moving decisively toward realism while still anchored in liberal ideals. The Union has begun to act less as a civilian power reliant on interdependence and more as a geopolitical actor conscious of power asymmetries and survival in an anarchic international order. Whether this transformation will be sustained in the long term remains an open question. In fact, there are several areas that we can point out for further and future studying.

First, while this dissertation has argued that the EU has shifted toward a realist paradigm, the durability of this transformation remains uncertain. Will the Union's increased defence spending and military initiatives persist if the war ends or if the United States renews its security guarantees? Further research could examine the long-term institutionalization of the EU's defence policy, especially once the immediate crisis subsides.

Second, this study has focused primarily on the EU–Russia dyad. Yet the Union's strategy does not unfold in isolation: it is shaped by its relations with the United States and China. The U.S. remains the cornerstone of European security through NATO, while China's global rise and its ambiguous stance on the war pose new challenges for European autonomy. Future research could investigate how the EU balances its deepening security dependence on Washington with its growing economic interdependence with Beijing.

Third, while this dissertation considered public opinion within the EU, more detailed comparative work is needed to assess how different member states frame Russia and security threats in their domestic discourses. This would help explain the persistence of divisions within the Union and their impact on the coherence of EU foreign policy.

Finally, the question of enlargement deserves sustained attention. The granting of candidate status to Ukraine in 2022 was unprecedented, raising questions about conditionality, institutional absorption, and the balance between geopolitical imperatives and normative commitments. Further study could explore whether Ukraine's accession will mark a “geopolitical enlargement” that reshapes the very foundations of the Union.

In short, the EU's post-2022 evolution has opened a new chapter not only in its relations with Russia but in its broader global role. Understanding whether this moment represents a permanent geopolitical turn or merely a temporary adjustment will require ongoing research in the years ahead.

Bibliography

Allison, Roy. "Russia Resurgent? Moscow's Campaign to 'Coerce Georgia to Peace'." *International Affairs* 84, no. 6 (2008): 1145–1171.

Biedermann, Reinhard. "Putin's War and Shifts in the European-Union-Russia-China Strategic Triangle: Quo Vadis Eurasian Connectivity?" *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 30, no. 3 (2022): 370–387.

Biscop, Sven. *European Strategy in the 21st Century: New Future for Old Power*. London: Routledge, 2019.

Borovsky, Yu. V. "Russia and the West: Clash of Energy Interests through the Lens of Realist and Liberal Approaches." *International Affairs (Moscow)* 66, no. 5 (2020): 15–29.

Buzan, Barry. *People, States, and Fear: An Agenda for International Security Studies in the Post-Cold War Era*. 2nd ed. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1991.

Council of the EU. *A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – For a European Union that Protects its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security*. Brussels, March 21, 2022.

Council of the EU. "Defence Procurement." Brussels, 2024. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-procurement/>.

Council of the EU. "EU Defence Industry: Council and Parliament Agree on New Rules to Boost Common Procurement." Brussels, June 27, 2023.

Council of the EU. "EU Military Support to Ukraine." Brussels, 2025. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/military-support-ukraine/>.

Council of the EU. "EU Sanctions against Belarus." Brussels, 2022.

Council of the EU. "EU Sanctions against Iran and North Korea." Brussels, 2023.

Council of the EU. "European Defence in Numbers." Brussels, 2025. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/defence-numbers/>.

Council of the EU. “Immobilised Russian Assets: Council Decides to Set Aside Extraordinary Revenues.” Brussels, February 12, 2024.

Council of the EU. “Russia’s War of Aggression against Ukraine: EU Adopts 18th Package of Sanctions.” Brussels, July 18, 2025.

Council of the EU. “Timeline of European Defence Expenditure.” Brussels, 2025.

Council of the EU. “Ukraine: Council Extends the Mandate of the EU Military Assistance Mission for Two Years.” November 8, 2024.

De Vos, Marc. “The EU Needs a New Geopolitical Compass.” *Financial Times*, May 12, 2025.

Duchêne, François. “Europe’s Role in World Peace.” In *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead*, edited by Richard Mayne, 32–47. London: Fontana, 1972.

European Commission. *EU Energy Security and Solidarity Action Plan*. COM(2008) 781 final. Brussels, November 13, 2008.

European Commission. *European Economic Security Strategy*. Joint Communication. Brussels, June 20, 2023.

European Commission. *European Neighbourhood Policy Strategy Paper*. COM(2004) 373 final. Brussels, May 12, 2004.

European Commission. “EU–Ukraine Action Plan.” Brussels, 2005.

European Commission. “EU–Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA).”

Accessed September 20, 2025. <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/content/eu-ukraine-deep-and-comprehensive-free-trade-area>.

European Commission. *REPowerEU Plan*. Brussels, May 18, 2022.

European Commission. “SAFE – Security Action for Europe (SAFE).” Brussels, 2025.

https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/safe-security-action-europe_en.

European Commission. “Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs): SME Definition.” Accessed September 20, 2025. https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition_en.

European Commission. “Timeline: EU Solidarity with Ukraine.” Accessed September 20, 2025. https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-solidarity-ukraine/timeline_en.

European Commission. “New EU Rules Criminalising Violation of EU Sanctions Enter into Force.” May 17, 2024.

European Commission. “Quarterly Report on European Gas Markets.” Brussels, 2023.

European Council. *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*. Brussels, December 12, 2003.

European Council. “Common Strategy of the European Union of 4 June 1999 on Russia.” *Official Journal* L 157 (June 24, 1999).

European Council. *Joint Statement of the EU–Russia Summit*. St. Petersburg, May 31, 2003.

European Council. *Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and Their Member States, and the Russian Federation*. *Official Journal* L 327 (November 28, 1997).

European Council. “European Council Conclusions on Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.” Brussels, June 23–24, 2022.

European Council. “European Council Conclusions on Ukraine.” Brussels, February 24, 2022.

European Council. “Ukraine: Statement by the High Representative on Behalf of the EU on the 11th Anniversary of the Downing of the Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17.” Brussels, July 17, 2025.

European External Action Service (EEAS). “About the EU Military Assistance Mission in Support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine).” Brussels, 2025.

European External Action Service (EEAS). “European Council Grants EU Candidate Status to Ukraine.” Brussels, June 23, 2022.

European External Action Service (EEAS). “EU Sanctions against Russia.” Brussels, March 2016.

European Parliament. Directorate-General for Communication. *Public Opinion Monitoring in the EU: First Survey on the War in Ukraine*. Brussels, March 2022.

European Parliament. Directorate-General for Communication. *Public Opinion Monitoring in the EU: 2024 Survey Results*. Brussels, February 2024.

European Parliament. Directorate-General for Communication. *Country Reports: Bulgaria, France, Italy, Germany, Poland*. Brussels, March 2022.

European Parliament. Directorate-General for External Policies. *EU Defence After Versailles: An Agenda for the Future*. Brussels, October 2023.

European Parliament. “Global Gateway 2030: Future of Europe’s Global Infrastructure Bid.” Study by Kjeld van Wiering. Brussels, 2024.

Fabre, Alain. “Europe and Putin: Should Realism Prevail over Reality?” Fondation Robert Schuman, March 11, 2025.

Fiott, Daniel. “The EU’s Strategic Compass and the Defence of Europe.” *Survival* 64, no. 3 (2022): 7–30.

G7 Leaders. “Statement on Ukraine.” December 6, 2023.

Giles, Keir. *Moscow Rules: What Drives Russia to Confront the West*. London: Chatham House, 2019.

Goldthau, Andreas, and Nick Sitter. “A Liberal Actor in a Realist World? The EU Regulatory State and the Global Political Economy of Energy.” *Global Policy* 5, no. 3 (2014): 337–346.

Grigas, Agnia. *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016.

Haukkala, Hiski. *The EU–Russia Strategic Partnership: The Limits of Post-Sovereignty*. London: Routledge, 2010.

- Huntington, Samuel P. *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991.
- International Energy Agency. *Renewables 2023: Analysis and Forecast to 2028*. Paris: IEA, 2023.
- Kaplan, Lawrence S. *NATO and the United States: The Enduring Alliance*. New York: Twayne, 1994.
- Keohane, Robert O., and Joseph S. Nye. *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1997.
- Klinke, Ian. "Postmodern Geopolitics? The European Union Eyes Russia." *Europe-Asia Studies* 64, no. 7 (2012): 1215–1236.
- Lavenex, Sandra, and Frank Schimmelfennig. "EU Rules Beyond EU Borders: Theorizing External Governance in European Politics." *Journal of European Public Policy* 16, no. 6 (2009): 791–812.
- Leonard, Mark, and Ivan Krastev. *The Crisis of European Security: What Europeans Think about the War in Ukraine*. London: ECFR, 2022.
- Liik, Kadri. "The War and the Future of European Security." *European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR)*, April 2022.
- Liu, Zixuan. "News Framing of the 2014–2015 Ukraine Conflict by the BBC." *Journalism*, February 23, 2023.
- Manners, Ian. "Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?" *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 235–258.
- Mankoff, Jeffrey. *Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics*. 2nd ed. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011.
- Marocchi, Tania. "EU–Russia Relations: Towards an Increasingly Geopolitical Paradigm." Heinrich Böll Stiftung, July 3, 2017.

Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Updated ed. New York: W.W. Norton, 2014.

Mearsheimer, John J. “Why the Ukraine Crisis Is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin.” *Foreign Affairs* 93, no. 5 (2014): 77–89.

Milward, Alan S. *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2000.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. *Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*. Moscow, July 12, 2008.

Morgenthau, Hans J. *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. New York: Knopf, 1948.

NATO. “Madrid Summit Declaration.” June 29, 2022.

NATO–EU Task Force. “Strengthening Resilience of Critical Infrastructure.” June 29, 2023.

Pew Research Center. *International Attitudes Toward Russia and Putin*. Washington, DC, 2007–2024.

Pew Research Center. *Views of Russia*. Washington, DC, June 27, 2007.

Pizzolo, Paolo. “Kaliningrad and the Future of Baltic Security.” *European Security Review*, 2023.

Post, Paul. “A World of Power and Fear: What Critics of Realism Get Wrong.” *Foreign Affairs*, June 15, 2022.

Putin, Vladimir. “Address on Conducting a Special Military Operation.” *Kremlin.ru*, February 24, 2022.

Raik, Kristi. “EU–Russia Sanctions: A Double-Edged Sword?” *FIIA Briefing Paper* no. 162. Finnish Institute of International Affairs, October 2014.

Ross Smith, Nicholas, and Anastassiya Mahon. “Realism and the Study of EU–Russia Relations.” *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22, no. 3 (2019): 611–634.

Sakwa, Richard. *Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015.

Sakwa, Richard. *Russia against the Rest: The Post-Cold War Crisis of World Order*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

SWIFT. “EU Sanctions and SWIFT Compliance.” Brussels, March 2022.

Tagliapietra, Simone. “The European Union’s Energy Response to the Ukraine Crisis.” *Bruegel Policy Contribution*, 2022.

Tocci, Nathalie. *Framing the EU’s Global Strategy: A Stronger Europe in a Fragile World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Treaties of Rome. Rome, March 25, 1957.

Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community. Paris, April 18, 1951.

Tsygankov, Andrei P. *Russia and the West from Alexander to Putin: Honor in International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

United Nations. *Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances*. December 5, 1994.

United Nations. *Charter of the United Nations*. San Francisco, June 26, 1945.

United States Naval Institute. “Strategic Relevance of Kaliningrad.” *Proceedings*, October 2024.

Walters, F. P. *A History of the League of Nations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Waltz, Kenneth N. *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979.

Wilson, Andrew. *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

Yafimava, Katja. *Russian Gas Transit Across Ukraine after 2019: The Options*. Oxford: Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, 2019.

Yafimava, Katja. *The Transit Dimension of EU Energy Security: Russian Gas Transit across Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova*. Oxford: Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, 2011.