
EUROPE AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE

FROM RUSSIAN AGGRESSION TO A NEW
EASTERN POLICY



edited by
László Andor and Uwe Optenhögel

FEPS
FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES



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This book has been published in cooperation with:



Amicus Europae Foundation
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00-565 Warszawa, Poland
<https://fae.pl/>



Fondation Jean-Jaurès
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A-1100 Vienna, Austria
<https://renner-institut.at/>

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Book published in May 2023 by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies in association with London Publishing Partnership



FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN PROGRESSIVE STUDIES (FEPS)

Avenue des Arts 46 – 1000 Brussels, Belgium
www.feps-europe.eu
@FEPS_Europe

Supervision: Hedwig Giusto

Layout and editing: T&T Productions Ltd, London; Steve Anthony

Cover photographs: Adobe Stock



This book was published with the financial support of the European Parliament. It does not represent the view of the European Parliament.

ISBN: 978-1-913019-88-4 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-913019-89-1 (ePDF)

ISBN: 978-1-913019-90-7 (ePUB)

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Foreword

The Russian aggression against Ukraine defined politics and life in Europe in 2022 and will continue to do so in 2023. Although it is primarily the people of Ukraine who are suffering the impact of Vladimir Putin's war, the indirect effects have been felt worldwide. Putin's invasion and its inherent potential to provoke chaos in the international system show that wars involving great powers can no longer be contained regionally in a globalised world.

Whenever this war eventually ends, it has already unleashed dynamics with far-reaching global implications. It is reinforcing the deglobalisation tendencies observable since the financial crisis of 2008–2009 and accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. In geopolitical terms, new centres of power are emerging, while geo-economically, a reconfiguration of energy, production, distribution and financial systems is under way.

For Europeans the Russian invasion triggered a reassessment and reconsideration of Eastern policies, going back not only to the previous chapters of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict but to the postcommunist transition as a whole. In regard to the transformation in Russia, it should be remembered that until 1998 developments in Russia were already taking the wrong path economically, and since about 2008 they have also taken the wrong path politically.

Already prior to the Ukraine war, the European Union had been living in a security paradox. The demand for security provided by Europe increased due to a growing arc of instability in the European neighbourhood and an increasingly distracted United States. The corresponding supply, however, was hardly to be found. Whereas the Union was making some progress institutionally, capacities were not available and – even more crucially – there was no political will to act. The concept of "strategic autonomy" was far from matching the security and military demands generated by the war. Into this European gap between high security demand and low security supply burst the Russian attack on Ukraine.

While Washington and London reacted decisively and NATO was revitalised as the main defence for Europeans, the EU particularly struggled

with the military aspect of the conflict, which brought the reality of a major interstate war back to the European continent. The war put a definitive end to the post-Cold War European security architecture anchored in the Paris Charter (1990), following the global political earthquake of the fall of the Berlin Wall.

It is worth recalling the situation in Europe in 1989, just one year after the recognition of the existence of the European Community by the Soviet Union. In fact, throughout that year, a series of signs had suggested that the Soviet bloc was a pressure cooker about to blow. The borders of the Soviet Union had been defined by Joseph Stalin at Yalta and Potsdam, where he had imposed his map of Central and Eastern Europe with a traditional imperial political and military logic, according to which "whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system [...] as far as his army can reach. It cannot be otherwise." As soon as the Soviet Empire imploded, the European peoples under its rule strived for their own way. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria all in turn became member states of the newly created European Union – a simultaneous process of joining a united Europe while escaping from a classical empire. Ukraine remained in the grey zone: was it a frontier or a buffer state?

It is becoming increasingly clear that Europe is paying a high price for not having sufficiently striven towards a common and proactive Russia policy. Putin led Russia back into international politics based on the claim of being a military world power. And he underpinned his increasingly aggressive foreign policy by relying on conservative, anticommunist and nationalist thinkers combining pan-Slavic ideas with anti-Western, neoimperialist Russian nationalism. These thinkers call for a "Russian world" (*Russkiy mir*) that relativises existing state borders and explicitly includes the diaspora, a comprehensive concept that addresses ideological, political, cultural, geopolitical and identity issues. This approach is supported by the Russian Orthodox Church, which wants to make the "Russian world" an outpost of Christian civilisation once more. The concept of *Russkiy mir* has already been employed by Putin to legitimise Russia's annexation of Crimea. Could it be that the ultimate aim is to build a new Holy Russian Empire?

Unfortunately, it seems that the West failed to take either this doctrine or security concerns about Russia seriously up until the outbreak of the Ukraine war. Against this background, the question of whether security on the European continent can be organised only with Russia or only against Russia gains a wholly different meaning. Peaceful coexistence

with Putin's Russian world is currently hard to imagine. What is emerging is an existential confrontation between looking to the past and building the future.

However, we need to admit that not only has study and strategy on Russia been lacking but so too has appreciation of the complexity of Ukraine as a country and a nation. The fragility of the Ukrainian state and the general weaknesses of the Ukrainian economy should have been assessed more seriously.

Nevertheless, since the initial shock one year ago, European leaders have acted with remarkable unity, determination and speed. Up to now the conflict has been highly dynamic, both militarily and politically. Ambitions, objectives and achievements have been as dynamic as the policies of the stakeholders involved. While not a military player at the beginning of the conflict, the EU has emerged as a significant actor by aiding the Ukrainian war effort, supporting refugees, sanctioning Russia and turning Ukraine into a candidate for EU membership. What continues to be a major challenge is to reconcile the open-ended war effort with the economic and social dynamics and interests of, and within, the EU itself.

The European strategy in response to the Russian invasion has been aimed at encouraging Ukraine and mobilising Western support, but it has not come without risks. Many EU leaders started to overstate the chances of Ukraine joining the Union, raising expectations that made Ukrainians believe their country could somehow naturally fit into EU structures as we know them today. When speaking publicly with Ukrainian politicians about the chances of EU accession, populist narratives frequently popped up suggesting that the speed of accession depends on the bureaucratic performance in Brussels, and not on the country in question matching EU standards and rules, without being rebutted by EU officials.

At the same time, when speaking to EU citizens, EU leaders constantly downplayed the expected costs of economic warfare. No wonder Europeans were disappointed when the sanctions imposed on Russia did not help force the aggressor to end its campaign and leave Ukraine alone, and even more so when the continent slid back into inflation and economic recession and started to face a long-term fall in growth potential and living standards.

Europe nevertheless ended the year 2022 remarkably united in its unwavering support for Ukraine. A new financial aid package was even adopted, together with another round of sanctions against Russian officials, as well as business and media figures. On the other hand, European views remained diverse regarding expectations about how the war

should end, what kind of postwar security architecture should be built, and how much room would remain for restarting economic cooperation with Russia once the war is over.

It is clear that, at least in the first year of the war, social democrats have not been rewarded for fighting at the vanguard of solidarity with Ukraine. However, progressive forces have distinguished themselves in this difficult year by going beyond the necessary international solidarity and reconciling it with two further objectives: fair distribution of the costs of war within our societies; and avoidance of unnecessary escalation, in tandem with simultaneous preparations for peace and reconstruction. No other political force seems concerned with this broader responsibility, which remains a distinctive characteristic of social democrats.

The eventual reconstruction of Ukraine will provide the opportunity for a second transition. In this process, it will be absolutely vital to learn from the grave errors of neoliberal transition in the post-Soviet societies. Social democrats can be self-confident in this regard and promote a way forward "for the many, not the few". This time reconstruction must go far beyond liberal market capitalism. It needs a proactive, enabling state pursuing social, industrial and technological policies, respecting decentralisation and regionalism, and showing a commitment to sustainability.

In this sense, FEPS's contribution to the debate, already important before, is particularly important now during the war in Ukraine. This book represents a continuation of this work. It offers an initial comprehensive picture of the war and its repercussions in Europe and may serve as a stimulus for informed debate about Ukraine's future in Europe.

Enrique Barón Crespo

Europe and the War in Ukraine

From Russian Aggression to a New Eastern Policy

"Russian aggression against Ukraine has dominated both politics and life in Europe since the invasion began in February 2022. And while it is primarily the population of Ukraine that suffers terribly from Vladimir Putin's war, the indirect effects have been felt worldwide. This book vividly illustrates that wars involving great powers can no longer be contained regionally in a globalised world."

– **Lubomir Zaorálek**, Minister of Foreign Affairs
of the Czech Republic (2014–2017)

"Putin's invasion of Ukraine brought with it the potential to create chaos in the international system. This book – a valuable contribution from FEPS – offers the first comprehensive account of the war and its repercussions in Europe and should serve as a key stimulus for informed debate about Ukraine's future in Europe."

– **Enrique Barón Crespo**, former president of the
European Parliament (1989–1992)

"For students, researchers and policymakers trying to get their heads round the Russian aggression against Ukraine and its tragic consequences both inside Europe and also beyond, this book will be an indispensable source of analysis and information, even while the conflict rages on and despite the fact that our world will never be the same again."

– **Nathalie Tocci**, director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (Rome)
and honorary professor at the University of Tübingen

László Andor is a Hungarian economist. He was the EU Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion between 2010 and 2014 and a member of the Board of Directors of the EBRD between 2005 and 2010. He has lectured at Corvinus University (Budapest), the Hertie School (Berlin), the ULB (Brussels), Sciences Po (Paris) and the European University Viadrina (Frankfurt, Oder).

Uwe Optenhögel is a vice president of FEPS and a political analyst and publisher. He was previously the network coordinator of the European Network of Political Foundations (ENoP) in Brussels and the international director of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Bonn/Berlin.