



Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli

Department of Political Science
Degree Program in Politics: Philosophy and Economics

Chair of European Union Law

**The Evolution of the EU's External Powers:
A Comparative Analysis between the EU's approach in
the Balkan Wars and the Russian invasion of Ukraine**

Prof. Robert Schuetze

SUPERVISOR

Giulia Maria Vanotti
ID: 104622

CANDIDATE

Academic Year 2024/2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
Chapter 1 - Historical and Theoretical Framework of EU's external powers.....	7
1.1 The Evolution of the EU's External Powers.....	7
1.2 Key Legal Milestones in the Development of the EU's Foreign Competencies	8
1.2.1 The Treaty of Rome and Single European Act	8
1.2.3 The Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties	9
1.2.4 The Nice and Lisbon Treaties	10
1.3 Exploring External Powers through specific Articles and key ECJ Rulings	11
1.4 The External Powers in Action	13
1.4.1 The Sanctions as an External Action Tool.....	14
1.4.2 The European External Action Service (EEAS)	15
1.4.3 Crisis management and Peace Keeping	16
1.4.4 European Peace Facility	17
1.5 Conclusions.....	18
Chapter 2: The Balkan Wars and the EU's Role.....	20
2.1 Historical Background and Key Events.....	20
2.1.1 The Independence of Slovenia and Croatia	21
2.1.2 Bosnia's Tragedy: From Ethnic Strife to Shattered Unity	22
2.1.3 The Kosovo Conflict: A Case Study in International Peacebuilding and Post-War Reconstruction	23
2.2 The EU's Reaction: Peacebuilding Efforts and the Dayton Agreement	24
2.2.1 EU and NATO Approaches in Crisis Management	26
2.3 The Long-Term Consequences and EU Enlargement in the Balkans.....	27
2.4 Final Remarks	29
Chapter 3 - Russian invasion of Ukraine: a shift in the EU's response	31
3.1 Historical context of the conflict.....	31
3.1.1 From Ukraine's Independence until the Euromaidan Revolution.....	31
3.1.2 The Beginning of the Hybrid War	33
3.1.3 The Full-Scale Invasion	35
3.2 Evolving Dynamics: The Development of the EU Foreign Policy in Response to Russia.....	38
3.2.1 The EU approach prior to 2022.....	38

3.2.2 February 2022: Redefining EU Foreign Policy and Strategic Autonomy	40
3.3 The shift in the EU's external action	41
3.3.1 Economic Sanctions.....	41
3.3.2 Military Aid	42
3.3.3 Energy Independence	43
3.4 Differences in the EU Countries: Eastern EU countries	44
3.4.1 The integration of the Eastern European countries in the EU.....	44
3.4.2 Differences in the approach before and after 2022	44
3.4.3 The exception: the case of Hungary and South-eastern EU countries	46
3.5 Final remarks	47
Chapter 4: A Comparative Analysis and Potential Outcomes	49
4.1 Comparative Analysis Overview	49
4.2 From Post-Conflict Stabilisation to Immediate Strategic Response	49
4.3 Potential Scenarios in the Near Future.....	51
4.3.1 "Rearm Europe": a Possible Common European Response	53
4.4 Conclusions.....	55
Conclusion	58
Bibliography	62
Academic Resources:.....	62
Policy Resources:.....	64

Introduction

Since its creation, the European Union has embraced core values that reflected the need for peace and prosperity that arose in the aftermath of World War II. These founding principles contributed to shaping the European Union as both an economic and normative power, based on legal and democratic integration. As a result, its external powers have long been marginalised, due to political implications and divergent national positions among Member States. However, since the end of the Cold War, the European states have experienced armed conflicts and growing instability on the European continent, prompting them to expand the Union's external powers. The shifting geopolitical scenario, with an increasingly multipolar international system, requires the European Union to take concrete action and refocus on its priorities, otherwise its relevance as a strategic actor will eventually decline.

This dissertation aims to evaluate the extent to which the external powers of the European Union have evolved, considering future potential scenarios. Specifically, the thesis provides a comparative analysis of the EU's strategic approach in the Balkan Wars of the 1990s and in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, two pivotal moments for the evolution of a European foreign policy. Through this comparison, the thesis will underline both the key differences and shared elements, focusing on the continuity that will form the foundation for future progress.

In the 1990s, for the first time after World War II, armed conflicts among European states re-emerged, leaving the newly established EU unprepared in the face of the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia. Therefore, this exposed the EU's institutional and military fallacies in crisis management, revealing its reliance on the United Nations and NATO. Despite the EU's role being extremely marginal, the Balkan Wars raised awareness among the EU countries, increasing the need for a European external dimension. This urgency was further reinforced with the conflict in Ukraine, first in 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea, and later with the full-scale invasion in 2022. On this occasion, the EU was more prepared and could deploy more tailored policies, encompassing different dimensions, including humanitarian, economic, and military fields. Unlike in the Balkans, the EU seems to have greater strategic autonomy, although the conflict remains unresolved and new challenges are arising. In particular, Donald Trump's re-election has caused a strong reaction from most of the EU states, which could be the beginning of a change in the European approach seen until now.

This thesis seeks to address not only the major steps taken by the EU in foreign affairs, but also to assess how future scenarios may unfold, and whether the countermeasures adopted by the EU in response to the conflicts are genuinely effective, or merely symbolic. It will focus on legal, institutional, and political developments, analysing EU tools such as the European Peace Facility, and new proposals, such as *Rearm Europe*, which represent an ambitious effort towards a European strategic autonomy.

The selection of the thesis' topic relates to the increasing challenges of the current geopolitical landscape, characterized by a rapid rebalance of powers, where emerging actors are yet to be defined. This context, combined with personal curiosities and academic ambitions, has guided the choice of this subject, because the role of the European Union is critical to understand whether Europe will maintain its privileged positions or face the competition with other contesting countries. Indeed, if the EU fails to define itself strategically, its relevance on the international stage will inevitably decline. Therefore, analysing the evolution of its external powers is crucial to assess Europe's potential future and the well-being of its people.

The first chapter will delve into the legal and theoretical framework of the Union's external powers, by providing a historical overview and a particular focus on the Common Foreign and Security Policy and other competences that allow the EU to act externally. A special focus will be on the instruments employed by the Union in its foreign policy, underlining the key factors that prompted their evolution.

The second and third chapters will explore the EU's responses to the Balkan Wars and the Russian invasion of Ukraine respectively. They will present the historical backgrounds of the conflicts and the approaches adopted by the Union on both occasions, offering a balanced evaluation of their limitations and progressive elements. Specifically, the areas of intervention, the political cohesion among Member States, and the economic and military tools will be at the centre of the discussion.

Lastly, a fourth chapter will summarise the pivotal evolutions in terms of external powers, while drawing lessons from the Union's empirical experiences in crisis management. Additionally, it will offer an in-depth analysis on potential solutions and future challenges, critically assessing the current capabilities possessed by the EU.

In general, the research question guiding this dissertation can be formulated as: "To what extent did the European Union develop a coherent and effective external dimension?" More

specifically, it investigates whether the European Union was able to establish its own foreign competences, and whether there is potential for further development. According to the findings, significant progress has been made from the Coal and Steel Community until now, particularly in strategic and military matters. Nevertheless, the current international arena is surprisingly unstable and protecting its own relevance as a geopolitical actor should be a priority for the European Union, although this objective has not always been realised.

Chapter 1 - Historical and Theoretical Framework of EU's external powers

1.1 The Evolution of the EU's External Powers

This chapter provides a comprehensive analysis of the European Union's external powers. It focuses on the historical evolution and the normative approach adopted from the establishment of the European Community to the present day. It begins with an historical overview, with the post-World War period and the early attempts of integration, followed by a practical analysis of the mechanisms involved in the decision-making process for the defence and foreign policies. Understanding the advancement of these external powers is crucial to grasp how historical events shaped the EU's role as a unified actor on the global stage. Therefore, exploring the key developments that influenced the EU's international sphere will not only provide useful insights, but also lay the groundwork for future trends in European foreign policy.

In the aftermath of World War II, when the European Union started to take form as an economic alliance between six founding countries, a unified defence and military dimension was not taken into consideration, as the Member States (MS) envisaged only a purely economic aspect¹. The idea of a common foreign policy and defence was proposed in 1951, with the Paris Treaty, suggested by the French Premier, René Plevén, hence renowned as *Pleven Plan*². His proposal concerned the creation of a European Defence Community, with a common army under the command of a supranational European institution, to ensure the security of the Member States in case of external aggression³. Along with this initiative, the plan advocated also for a European Political Community (EPC), whose scope was the union between the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Defence Community⁴. This ambitious plan, however, was never implemented, as the French National Assembly rejected the ratification of the second Paris Treaty in 1954, signalling the failure of the European Defence Community, and

¹ "SHAPE History | That a 1952 Treaty Created a European Army Within NATO." n.d.

² Ibidem

³ European Union, "Treaty Establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, ECSC Treaty," Europa.eu, 2017.

⁴ "The European Political Community (EPC) - Historical Events in the European Integration Process (1945–2014) - CVCE Website," www.cvce.eu, n.d.

consequently the European Political Community as well⁵. The failure of the Pleven Plan underscored the difficulties in achieving a full political and military integration among Member States, especially post-World War II, a period in which the militarisation and rearmament was particularly delicate and deemed dangerous. Despite this non-success, the idea of a unified European defence did not vanish. Instead, it paved the way for a further economic and military cooperation, culminating with the consolidation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), with the 1952 Paris Treaty, initiating the long process of European integration⁶.

The evolution of EU's external power, particularly in its early stages, was significantly influenced by the necessity for increased cooperation and interconnection in an uncertain historical context, such as during the Cold War. Indeed, the aftermath of World War II was a delicate transitional moment for Europe, due to the decline of historical powers, such as Germany, France and Great Britain, which either lost the war or their colonial empires. This situation generated a power vacuum, prompting European countries to seek greater regional cooperation, while remaining aligned with the Atlantic block. This shift shaped the EU's external objectives and, as the Community started to expand, its defence and military strategies began to solidify, aiming at a counterbalance to the emerging international powers.

1.2 Key Legal Milestones in the Development of the EU's Foreign Competencies

1.2.1 The Treaty of Rome and Single European Act

The origins of the European Union rooted solely on economic integration among the founding states, initially defined by the ECSC, later reinforced through the 1957 Treaty of Rome, establishing the European Economic Community (EEC). The importance of this treaty lies in its objectives, as it envisioned a common market - based on the free movement of goods, people, services and capital – and a customs union⁷. Although the EEC Treaty did not mention political or external matters, it set the foundations for what would become the modern European Union.

⁵ Anne Deighton, "The European Security and Defence Policy," *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 4 (November 2002): 719–41.

⁶Ibidem

⁷ "The Treaty Establishing the European Economic Community (EEC Treaty)," EUR-Lex. N.d.

The Union's political and external cohesion gained more relevance thanks to the expansion of the EEC - starting in 1973 with the accession of Ireland, United Kingdom and Denmark⁸. In 1986, the Single European Act (SEA) completed the internal market, and granted, for the first time, a legal status to the concept of a European Political Cooperation (EPC). Although not directly implying any supranational aspect, the SEA posed the legal basis for the cooperation in the foreign area, based on intergovernmental procedures, led by the European Council and supported by the Council of the Foreign Ministers⁹. A permanent secretariat was also established to represent the Community in external relations¹⁰. The Single European Act marked the first significant provision expanding the Community's competences, particularly in foreign policy.

1.2.3 The Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties

The 1992 Maastricht Treaty marked a pivotal moment by establishing the foundations for the current European Union. Officially named *Treaty on the European Union* (TEU), it introduced the Union's three fundamental pillars: the European Communities; the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP); and the cooperation in the context of justice and home affairs¹¹. In particular, the CFSP became the core of the EU's external powers, outlining a distinct set of competences, primarily focused on political and security coordination, separate from those in legal and economic framework¹². Indeed, the CFSP allows Member States to define and implement policies in foreign and security affairs while respecting their own national sovereignty, with the European Council and the Council of Ministers being determinant in the decision-making process¹³. The CFSP operates through intergovernmental procedures, enabling Member States to collaborate in the Union's external actions, in line with the principles of loyalty and mutual solidarity¹⁴. Indeed, the competences under the CFSP are conferred by Member States, based on the fundamental

⁸ European Union, "EU Enlargement - European Union," european-union.europa.eu, 2025

⁹ Marit Sjøvaag, "The Single European Act," *Foreign and Security Policy in the European Union*, 1998, 22–42.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*

¹¹ Mariusz Maciejewski, "The Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament," www.europarl.europa.eu, July 2024.

¹² Emile Noël, "Reflections on the Maastricht Treaty," *Government and Opposition* 27, no. 2 (April 1, 1992): 148–57.

¹³ *Ibidem*

¹⁴ Mariusz Maciejewski, "The Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament," www.europarl.europa.eu, July 2024.

principle of conferral, as the EU does not possess *de facto* external sovereignty¹⁵. The general objectives and limits of the EU's external policies are laid out in Article 21 of the TEU, which emphasizes the safeguard of European common values, fundamental interests, independence and integrity of the Union, whilst acting in compliance with the principles of the United Nations¹⁶.

In 1997, the Maastricht Treaty was further expanded through the Amsterdam Treaty, which adopted key developments in the external powers as well. The main integrations of this treaty concern the envision of the figure of the *High Representative of the Union for Foreign and Security Affairs* (officially established by the European Council in 1999¹⁷), and the adoption of majority voting for the implementation of the CFSP. The High Representative (HR) is a figure whose role is to outline the EU's CFSP; to preside over the Foreign Affairs Council; to chair the European Defence Agency, and to act as the vice president of the European Commission¹⁸. While the HR's competences and powers were strengthened in 2009, with the Lisbon Treaty, the Amsterdam Treaty was instrumental in creating this representative figure for the EU's foreign policy.

1.2.4 The Nice and Lisbon Treaties

The Foreign dimension of the Union was further shaped by the Nice and Lisbon treaties. In particular, the 2003 Nice Treaty instituted formally the Political and Security Committee, an organ which exercises strategic direction and political control in crisis management operations¹⁹. However, regarding the CFSP, the 2007 Lisbon Treaty can be considered more significant. Indeed, through the amendment of the Community Treaties, the Lisbon Treaty granted a legal personality to the European Union, replacing once for all the Communities and making the Union able to act in international law. Moreover, the treaty

¹⁵ Robert Schutze, *European Union Law*, 3rd ed. (S.L.: Oxford Univ Press, 2021), 270-273.

¹⁶ "Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union," Legislation.gov.uk, 2020.

¹⁷ European Parliament, "Foreign Policy: Aims, Instruments and Achievements | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament," Europa.eu, April 2019.

¹⁸ "EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy," Consilium, 2024.

¹⁹ European Parliament, "Foreign Policy: Aims, Instruments and Achievements | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament," Europa.eu, April 2019.

merged the three pillars introduced in 1992 with the Maastricht Treaty, creating a new legal foundation for the Union: The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)²⁰.

Together, the TEU and TFEU outline the legal nature of the Union, giving it a dual structure. In the field of foreign affairs, the Lisbon Treaty strengthened the role of the High Representative, by identifying him also as Vice-President of the European Commission, as well as introducing the Permanent President for the European Council. Additionally, it integrated the Political and Security Committee into the CFSP framework and established the *European External Action Services (EEAS)*²¹. Specifically, the EEAS, operating since 2011, serves as the Diplomatic Service of the Union, tasked with implementing the Union's CFSP to "*promote peace, prosperity, security, and the interests of Europeans across the globe.*"²² It operates under the political guidance of the High Representative, and works closely with both the foreign and defence ministries of the Member States and the EU institutions. Furthermore, it keeps strong ties with the United Nations as well, enhancing the EU's international personality²³.

Overall, the Treaties had an enormous impact on the creation and definition of the External Powers of the Union, by providing legal structure and organs capable to address the foreign policies. However, the Treaties recognize the principle of conferral, hence leaving the foreign competences to the Member States and leaving the floor to National actors, rather than providing for a supranational institution. Nonetheless, they enabled the Union to define itself juridically, being capable to function as a legal actor by itself.

1.3 Exploring External Powers through specific Articles and key ECJ Rulings

To better understand the external competences of the Union, it is essential to examine specific Articles of the TEU and TFEU, along with key legal opinions given by the European Court of Justice (ECJ). In fact, the ECJ plays a crucial role in interpreting the legal structure of the Union, offering clarity on the scope and limitations of the Treaties. This section explores significant Articles from the TEU and TFEU, analysing the nature

²⁰ "The Treaty of Lisbon - Historical Events in the European Integration Process (1945–2014) - CVCE Website," www.cvce.eu, n.d.

²¹ European Parliament, "Foreign Policy: Aims, Instruments and Achievements | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament," Europa.eu, April 2019.

²² EEAS, "EEAS | EEAS Website," www.eeas.europa.eu, 2025.

²³ *Ibidem*

and mechanisms of the foreign competences, while also discussing key rulings and interpretations by the ECJ.

The legal basis of the Union's External powers is based on a dual constitutional regime. Title V of the TEU outlines the general provisions for the EU's External Action and the CFSP; whilst Part V of the TFEU establishes specific external powers. These two frameworks are connected through Article 40 of the TEU, which ensures that the same principles and objectives are aligned within a common legal context, referred to as "General Provisions on the EU's External Action."²⁴ In fact, the article protects both the intergovernmental mechanism of the CFSP and the supranational one of the Union's special competences, by creating a balance between the two systems.

In general, the CFSP operates as a *Sui Generis* competence, meaning that it is a unique or exceptional legal category, which differs from ordinary EU's competences, as specified by Article 2 TFEU²⁵. Initially considered as a classical international law framework, after the Lisbon Treaty, the interpretations integrated the CFSP into the EU legal order. Although the CFSP remains subject to specific rules and procedures, it is considered integral to the EU law, having both the TEU and TFEU sharing the same legal capacities in foreign affairs²⁶. For this reason, Declaration 14 to the European Treaties delineates the CFSP as a 'sui generis' competence within the EU legal order, meaning it does not alter the legal basis or powers of the Member States in concluding international agreements or pursuing their national foreign policies²⁷.

Furthermore, Article 3(2) TFEU provides a special provision which allows the EU to conclude international agreements. Indeed, the Union acquires exclusive treaty-making powers when the conclusion of the agreement is "*provided for in a legislative act of the Union or it is necessary to enable the Union to exercise its internal competence, or in so*

²⁴ European Parliament, "Foreign Policy: Aims, Instruments and Achievements | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament," Europa.eu, April 2019.

²⁵ Robert Schutze, *European Union Law*, 3rd ed. (S.L.: Oxford Univ Press, 2021), 282-283.

²⁶ *Ibidem*

²⁷ Marise Cremona, "EUI WORKING PAPERS EU ROPEA N U NIV ERSIT Y INSTITU TE a Constitutional Basis for Effective External Action? An Assessment of the Provisions on EU External Action in the Constitutional Treaty MARISE CREMONA Depa R T Ment of Law," 2003.

*far as its conclusion may affect common rules or alter their scope.*²⁸” This article ensures the dynamic development of the CFSP, instituting three areas of exclusivity, defined by three key doctrines of the ECJ. Firstly, the WTO Doctrine, established by the ECJ in *Opinion 1/94*, states that the exclusive powers are acquired if the agreement concerns areas covered by the EU internal competences, such as trade policies. Secondly, *Opinion 1/1976* Doctrine further expands this by allowing the Union to make international agreements if necessary to achieve the Treaties’ objectives, which would not be otherwise met with only autonomous rules²⁹. Lastly, the third situation is defined by the so-called ‘ERTA-Doctrine,’ which prevents Member States to sign international treaties conflicting with EU internal law, ensuring that Member States’ actions do not risk undermining the coherence and cohesion of EU policies.

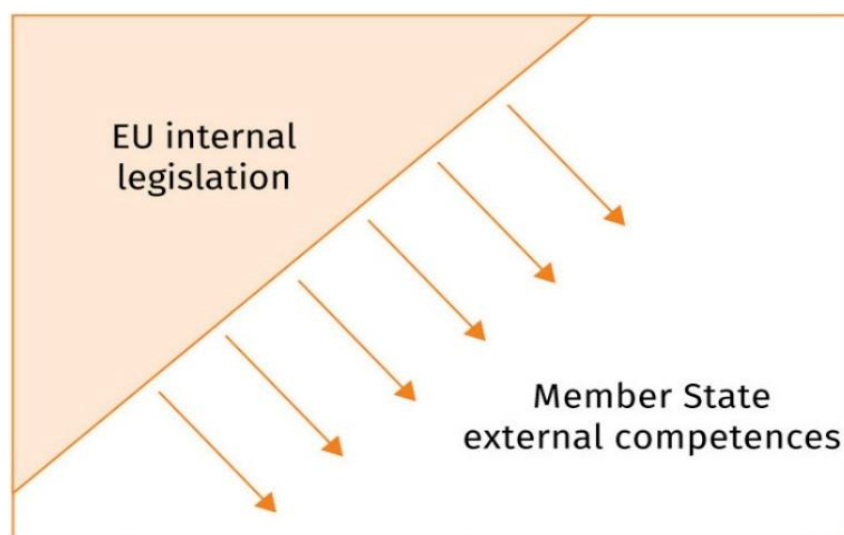


Figure 1. Relationship between EU internal legislation and Member State external competences. Source: European Union Law.

1.4 The External Powers in Action

The external decision-making procedures can be characterised as ‘Unilateral’ or ‘International’ agreements. While the meaning of the latter is straightforward, the unilateral agreements refer to acts single-handedly adopted by the EU, varying depending on the instrument deployed, which are directed to a third party, with no need for the consent of the latter³⁰. In this section, the focus will be mostly on unilateral acts, although international

²⁸ Art. 3(2) TFEU.

²⁹ Ibidem

³⁰ Robert Schutze, *European Union Law*, 3rd ed. (S.L.: Oxford Univ Press, 2021), 288-300.

agreements and other foreign policy instruments are relevant as well, but do not really relate to this dissertation's focal point.

1.4.1 The Sanctions as an External Action Tool

One of the most concrete tools at the Union's disposal is undoubtedly the capability to impose sanctions to a third country. The range does not include only economic sanctions, but also trade and diplomatic restrictions, asset freezes, and travel bans. The main objective is to influence the behaviour of third countries, in response to violations of international law, human rights, or conflicts. Sanctions have recently played crucial roles in the EU foreign policies, especially due to the conflict in Ukraine, which will be discussed in the next chapters. The sanctions are the only tool that directly bridge the foreign policies to the substantive competences of the Union, as outlined in article 215 TFEU³¹. Indeed, the article provides a connection between the political and substantive dimensions of the Union, such as economy and trade, which, as explored in the first sections, were initially irreconcilable.

Article 215 TFEU offers the legal basis for restrictive measures, which fall under the CFSP framework. As *Lex Generalis*, the procedures follow an intergovernmental mechanism³². A proposal must be initiated by the High Representative, which must be examined by the relevant Council preparatory bodies, thus the working party specialised in the geographical area of the targeted country; the Working Party of Foreign Relations Counsellors; and the Committee of Permanent Representatives (Coreper II)³³. After the discussion, the decision can be adopted through unanimous voting by the Council of the EU. For economic or financial sanctions, a Council regulation is needed. Therefore, the HR jointly with the European commission present a proposal for a Council regulation, which will be discussed by the Working Party of Foreign Counsellors and the Coreper II. It is also necessary that the European Parliament is informed of the initiative discussed³⁴. The regulation, once published and ratified, will be binding on any entity within the EU³⁵.

For this reason, although being a strong political tool and a significant advancement in EU external powers, as part of the CFSP framework, sanctions still adhere intergovernmental

³¹ Maria Bartoloni, "Insight 'Restrictive Measures' under Art. 215 TFEU: Towards a Unitary Legal Regime? Brief Reflections on the Bank Refah Judgment" 5, no. 3 (2020): 1359–69.

³² *Ibidem*

³³ "How the EU Adopts and Reviews Sanctions," Consilium, 2019.

³⁴ Art. 215(1) TFEU

³⁵ "How the EU Adopts and Reviews Sanctions," Consilium, 2019.

procedures. Additionally, they are subject to the judicial review of the European Court of Justice, which assesses whether the sanctions do not violate the rights of individuals or entities, hence operating as a safeguard of their legality³⁶.

1.4.2 The European External Action Service (EEAS)

The European External Action Service (EEAS) operates as the diplomatic force of the Union, coordinating the CFSP alongside other EU institutions. Established by the Lisbon Treaty, the EEAS assists the High Representative and fosters diplomatic relations with non-EU countries and International Organizations³⁷. Its structure is divided into two main components: the Headquarters, situated in Brussels, and 145 EU delegations located worldwide. In Brussels, the EEAS Secretary-General, along with three Deputy Secretaries-General, supervises the coordination with European institutions and the EU delegations in the framework of foreign affairs³⁸. It also hosts departments for crisis management in the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the EU military staff (EUMS), which supports the CSDP in political and military terms, making the CSDP an integral part of the CFSP³⁹.

Currently, the EEAS encompass 145 EU delegations, including eight delegations designated to represent the EU at International Organizations (IOs)⁴⁰. These delegations, supervised by the Headquarters, serves to project the EU foreign policies in third countries or IOs. While initially focused on trade, enlargement, and development aid, the political and security features have acquired more relevance⁴¹.

In general, the EEAS supports the HR in granting coherence in international policies and coordinating the work of the Council and the Commission in the field of external action. In relation to the European Commission, the EEAS initiates dialogue with several Commission Directorates-General (DGs), ensuring that the work of the Commission aligns with the policies adopted in foreign affairs⁴². Regarding its role related to the European

³⁶ Maria Bartoloni, "Insight 'Restrictive Measures' under Art. 215 TFEU: Towards a Unitary Legal Regime? Brief Reflections on the Bank Refah Judgment" 5, no. 3 (2020): 1359–69.

³⁷ "Special Report 02/2024: The Coordination Role of the European External Action Service," European Court of Auditors, 2024.

³⁸ Ibidem

³⁹ "European Union Military Staff: 20 Years Contributing to European Defence and Security," EEAS, 2024.

⁴⁰ "Special Report 02/2024: The Coordination Role of the European External Action Service," European Court of Auditors, 2024.

⁴¹ Ibidem

⁴² Ibidem

Council, the EEAS and the HR are responsible of implementing the measures proposed and discussed by the Foreign Affairs Council, namely the section of the Council composed by the Member States foreign affairs ministers⁴³. Through its work, the EEAS helps the Union manage its external powers, guaranteeing consistency in its role in the international arena.

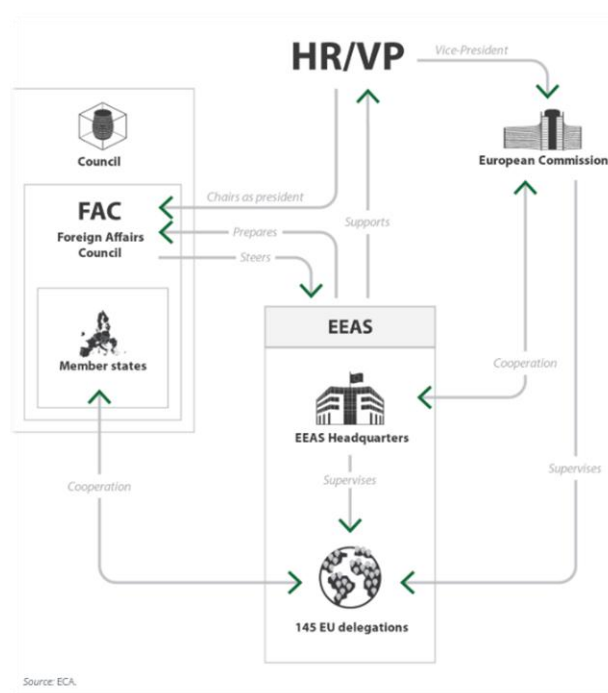


Figure 2. The EEAS Coordinating Role. Source European Court of Auditors.

1.4.3 Crisis management and Peace Keeping

Another area where the Union can assert its influence is in crisis management and peacebuilding, specifically under the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP). Conflicts such as the Balkan Wars of the 1990s encouraged the Member States to adopt strategic approaches to address complex challenges. Consequently, the Lisbon Treaty established a specific policy within the framework of the CFSP: The Common Security and Defence Policy⁴⁴. The CSDP enables the EU to engage in both civilian and military operations, with the aim of preventing conflicts, fostering peacebuilding and supporting post-war reconstruction⁴⁵. A pivotal moment is March 21, 2022, as the Member States

⁴³ "Foreign Affairs Council Configuration (FAC)," www.consilium.europa.eu, n.d.

⁴⁴ Zartsdahl, Peter Horne. 2018. "Civil-Military Synergies in EU Crisis Response and Peacebuilding: A Framework for Analysis." *Global Affairs* 4 (2-3): 197-213.

⁴⁵ Ibidem

adopted the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence⁴⁶. In response to the return of war in Europe, the Strategic Compass sets out a plan to strengthen the security and defence capabilities by 2030. The Crisis response capability includes civilian and military missions, including the formation of a rapid deployment capacity of 5,000 troops in crisis zones⁴⁷. Additionally, an EU Hybrid Toolbox is designed to address a broad variety of hybrid threats, for instance cyberattacks or information manipulation, with specialised teams of experts analysing these threats on a case-by-case basis⁴⁸. Overall, the Strategic Compass aims improve the EU's autonomy, while reinforcing the partnerships and synergies with international organizations like NATO and the UN, and regional partners, such as ASEAN and the African Union⁴⁹.

1.4.4 European Peace Facility

In 2021, an off-budget funding mechanism was established: the European Peace Facility (EPF). The EPF aims to finance the EU security and defence actions, under the scope of the CFSP, supporting military missions, providing for equipment, capacities-building and assistance to third countries and international organisations⁵⁰. With over 17 billion euros of budget for the period 2021-2027, approved by the European Council, the European Peace Facility represents one of the most powerful and effective tools for EU foreign affairs⁵¹. Indeed, it relates to military aspects, granting the European Union a strategic framework where it can deploy concrete military measures as well.

The EPF is governed by a Facility Committee, which is composed by a representative for each EU Member State, whose aim is to oversee the respect and compliance with human rights, and international humanitarian law⁵². Moreover, the European Commission's Service for Foreign Policy Instruments safeguards the financial implementation and internal audit of the EPF, by administering its assistance pillar⁵³. The purpose is to strengthen the EU's ability in crisis prevention and management, while maintaining global stability. Through this mechanism, indeed, the EU has provided military aid to several global partners, starting with a general

⁴⁶ "The Strategic Compass of the European Union," www.strategic-compass-european-union.com, n.d.

⁴⁷ Ibidem

⁴⁸ European External Action Service (EEAS), EU Hybrid Toolbox: Countering Hybrid Threats, Policy Brief, (Brussels: European External Action Service, 2021).

⁴⁹ "The Strategic Compass of the European Union," www.strategic-compass-european-union.com, n.d.

⁵⁰ European Commission, "European Peace Facility," fpi.ec.europa.eu, 2025.

⁵¹ Ibidem

⁵² Ibidem

⁵³ Ibidem

support programme for the African Union in July 2021 until an economic contribution to the Army of North Macedonia in April 2025⁵⁴.

In particular, it allows the EU to provide both lethal and non-lethal military support, such as in the case of Ukraine, as the 6.1 allocated through the EPF funded both artillery and missiles supplies, but also training for the armed forces⁵⁵. Therefore, the European Peace Facility constitutes a major achievement in the evolution of the EU's external powers, by enabling the Union to act not only in humanitarian, financial, or merely economic terms, but also in strictly military and strategic ones.

1.5 Conclusions

In conclusion, the external powers of the Union have experienced a dynamic and ongoing evolution, from the initial failure of the Pleven Plan to the current ambitious goals of the Strategic Compass, it is evident that this continuous change has been driven by the Union's response to external challenges. These threats vary from the aftermath of World War II to the Balkan Wars of the '90s, and even to the recent return of the war in Europe, including emerging risks such as cyberattacks and hybrid warfare.

The current political scenario is influenced by the change of the global balance, due to the shifting governance of the United States, which has created an unstable political environment, where the European Union seeks to define its role and strengthen its autonomy. The main challenge is to maintain its allies, while developing its own security capacities and internal balance. As discussed in this chapter, the EU's journey towards stronger external power has been slow and often as a reactive process, rather than a proactive one, with major steps taken incrementally, and not as a rapid crisis response.

For this reason, looking ahead, the Union will likely continue to pursue greater autonomy, despite the internal divergencies among its Member States, which may decelerate any progress. However, these suppositions are open to revisions, as the current political scenario remains fluid and unpredictable, and rapid shifts could lead to new opportunities or challenges to the Union. Therefore, although the future is uncertain, a possibility to enhance

⁵⁴ Ibidem

⁵⁵ Ibidem

and broader expand the external power is valid, and it will be interesting to explore how the Union will respond to this crisis.

Chapter 2: The Balkan Wars and the EU's Role

2.1 Historical Background and Key Events

Historically, the Balkans have served as a crossroads between different cultures and empires, being part of Europe, but deeply influenced by the Ottoman Empire⁵⁶. Therefore, it has been a culturally and ethnically diverse region, with strategic relevance for different imperialist powers, such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Ottomans, and Russia. This geopolitical landscape allowed the area to be the stage for various conflicts throughout the European history. In particular, the First Balkan war (1912) and the Second Balkan War (1913) were crucial to shape the political scenario of the region. In particular, the Balkan League, composed by Serbia, Bulgaria, Greece, and Montenegro, fought against the Ottoman empire, which was already a declining power⁵⁷. The competition over territorial control between these two factions, and among the Balkan League itself, contributed to the tensions which led to World War I.

After the Great War and the collapse of the Ottoman and Austrian Empires, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was formed, which became officially in 1918 Yugoslavia, a non-aligned federation of Balkan states, including the current Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Macedonia, Serbia, and the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina⁵⁸. After World War II, Yugoslavia became officially the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito. General Tito was the leader of the Partisans fighting in the resistance against the Nazi-fascist occupation in the Balkans, and thanks to his charisma he was able to establish a socialist regime in the region⁵⁹. The authoritarian regime imposed by Tito was very repressive, maintaining a balance between communist influences and Yugoslavia's independence from the USSR, despite having similar ideologies⁶⁰.

Whilst Serbia was the most influential country among the Balkans, the federal system was intended to balance the ambitions and powers of the various republics. Nevertheless,

⁵⁶ R. Craig, Nation. "THE BALKAN REGION IN WORLD POLITICS." *WAR IN THE BALKANS, 1991-2002*. Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2003.

⁵⁷ "Balkan Wars Summary | Britannica," www.britannica.com, n.d.

⁵⁸ Ibidem

⁵⁹ BBC, "Balkans War: A Brief Guide," *BBC News*, March 18, 2016.

⁶⁰ History.com Editors, "Tito Is Made President of Yugoslavia for Life | April 7, 1963 | HISTORY," HISTORY, March 4, 2010.

the Serbian dominance created tensions and rivalry among the states, with the rise of several ethnic and nationalist movements. Tito's death in 1980 increased the geopolitical instability in the republics, as no leader was able to reconcile the federal states under a unitary government⁶¹. The collapse of the USSR in 1991 further destabilized the area, allowing the increasing rise of national movements advocating for state sovereignty, eventually leading to the collapse of Yugoslavia itself through a series of conflicts, known as Balkan Wars⁶².



Figure 3. The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as of January 1991. Source University of Central Arkansas.

2.1.1 The Independence of Slovenia and Croatia

The break-up of Yugoslavia first started with tensions in Slovenia and Croatia, both of which accused Serbia of dominating the political, military and financial institutions of the federation. On June 25, 1991, Slovenia was the first state to declare its independence. The reaction of the Serb-dominant Yugoslavian government involved the mobilization of the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), which led to a brief conflict, known as the Ten-Day War⁶³. Unlike the other Balkan Wars, the independence of Slovenia was achieved with little violence and was almost bloodless. Conversely, despite declaring independence in

⁶¹ Ibidem

⁶² BBC, "Balkans War: A Brief Guide," *BBC News*, March 18, 2016.

⁶³ United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, "The Conflicts | International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia," ICTY (United Nations, 2017).

the same year, Croatia witnessed a more violent repression. The Serb minority present in the area, supported by Serbia and the JNA, rebelled and declared some parts of Croatia as independent Serb state⁶⁴. In this Serb state an ethnic cleansing campaign against Croats and non-Serbs started, especially in the cities of Dubrovnik and Vukovar. In 1992 the UN brokered a ceasefire, but the Croatian government was firm in reasserting its authority over the entire territory. In 1995, following two major offensives, Serbs forces were pushed out of the country, resulting in tens of thousands of Serbs fleeing to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to Serbia, allowing the Croatia to regain control over the disputed areas. The war effectively concluded in fall 1995, with UN administration of some areas until 1996, in order to complete the final settlement⁶⁵.

2.1.2 Bosnia's Tragedy: From Ethnic Strife to Shattered Unity

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the ethnic diversity was even more accentuated, with a population consisting of 43 per cent Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), 33 per cent Bosnian Serbs, 17 per cent Bosnian Croats, and the remaining seven per cent with other mixed nationalities⁶⁶. In December 1991, the national elections resulted in a coalition government, with a tripartite presidency representing the three principal ethnicities⁶⁷. Nonetheless, internal and external tensions remained, making cooperation and governance ineffective, especially in terms of collaboration with the Serb Democratic Party. Following the uprisings in Slovenia and Croatia, whose independence was recognized by the European Community, Bosnia and Herzegovina was encouraged to apply for independence as well. A referendum was held and, despite opposition from the Bosnian Serbs supported by the Yugoslav government, the 99.7% of Bosnian voted for independence⁶⁸. The results of the referendum, recognized by April 1992, intensified ethnic tensions between Bosnian Serbs, fomented by the Yugoslav People's Army (JNA), and Bosnian Croats for territorial control, resulting in an ethnic cleansing. After the referendum, the Serbs forces seized the Bosnian Capital, Sarajevo, which lasted four years. In May 1992, the Serbian general Ratko Mladić adopted a campaign of terror in

⁶⁴ Ibidem

⁶⁵ Ibidem

⁶⁶ John R Lampe, "Bosnian War," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, March 27, 2019.

⁶⁷ Ibidem

⁶⁸ Ibidem

the Capital, by targeting institutional and civilian areas through shelling and sniping. The city and its residential areas were partially or fully destroyed, demolishing Sarajevo's historical and cultural dimensions.

The main target was the Bosniak Muslims, particularly in the Cerska area in eastern Bosnia. Therefore, the Serbian attacks escalated in that area, forcing thousands of Muslim refugees to flee to United Nations Safe areas in the cities of Srebrenica and Žepa⁶⁹. In spite of the UN protection, the Serbs' objective to expel the Muslim minority led their forces to focus on capturing and control those enclaves and continue the ethnic cleansing. After continuous murders and deportations, by July 1995 over 7 thousand Muslims were executed, an atrocity now recognized as the Srebrenica massacre. The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina resulted in over 100,000 deaths and 2 million refugees, causing a catastrophic humanitarian crisis spreading throughout the region and Europe⁷⁰.

With the UN peacekeepers resulting in inefficiency and futility, being unable to protect the areas that were designated to be safe zones, the end of the war was reached following the intervention of NATO. In 1994, airstrikes ordered by NATO were launched against Bosnian Serbs. The military attack forced the Serbian army to accept negotiations, which were held in Dayton, Ohio, under U.S. leadership⁷¹. Through the Dayton Peace Accords, signed in December 1995, the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia (ICTY) was established, operating in the Hague, with the responsibility to give a trial and charge the Balkan Wars' criminals⁷². The Balkan Wars, specifically the Bosnian War, has been recognised as a genocide, being classified as an *“act committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group.”*⁷³

2.1.3 The Kosovo Conflict: A Case Study in International Peacebuilding and Post-War Reconstruction

In the former federation of Yugoslavia, Kosovo was granted the status of autonomous province. It was historically a Serbian province, but overtime its population became

⁶⁹ Arnesa B Kustura, “Bosnian War- a Brief Overview | Remembering Srebrenica,” Srebrenica.org.uk, June 24, 2021.

⁷⁰ Ibidem

⁷¹ Holocaust Museum Houston, “Genocide in Bosnia,” Hmh.org (Holocaust Museum Houston, 2019).

⁷² Ibidem

⁷³ Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, 1948.

predominantly Albanian. In 1989 ethnic tensions escalated as Serbian President, Slobodan Milošević, threatened to revoke Kosovo's autonomy⁷⁴. As a response, the Kosovars started a series of peaceful protests to boycott the Serbian institutions, with no relevant success. The Dayton Accords of 1995, which ended the war in Bosnia, did not include any provision concerning Kosovo; hence the hostilities did not cease. In 1998, the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a rebel group founded in the 1990s, started to openly oppose to the Serbian rule, engaging in an armed insurrection⁷⁵. The widespread violence and the Serbian response escalated the tension, which became a full-scale conflict, resulting in several atrocities committed by the Yugoslav army, and the forced displacement of thousands of ethnic Albanians.

In February 1999, a diplomatic consortium, supported mainly by NATO, was held in Rambouillet, France, as an attempt to negotiate a peace treaty. Despite the signature of the KLA representative, the Serbian delegation refused the agreement, worsening the situation even further and strengthening the international response to the crisis. In particular, in March 1999, NATO launched a military operation that lasted 11 weeks, targeting Serbian forces through air strikes⁷⁶. The operation was more effective thanks to the engagement of the KLA, which managed to weaken the Serbian and Yugoslav forces. Eventually, Yugoslavia, which after 1998 included only Serbia and Montenegro, had to sign a peace treaty in June 1999, and Serbian President Milošević accepted the international administration of Kosovo, coordinated by the United Nations⁷⁷. However, Kosovo's status is still unresolved, with 108 UN states recognising Kosovo's sovereignty⁷⁸.

2.2 The EU's Reaction: Peacebuilding Efforts and the Dayton Agreement

The Balkan Wars have been a series of conflicts that significantly affected European stability, marking the first armed conflicts on the continent since World War II. However, not all of them had the same magnitude, consequently, the international response varied

⁷⁴ Colleen Sullivan, "Kosovo Liberation Army | History & Facts," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, February 25, 2019.

⁷⁵ *Ibidem*

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*

⁷⁷ United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, "The Conflicts | International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia," ICTY (United Nations, 2017).

⁷⁸ World Population Review, "Countries That Recognize Kosovo 2021," worldpopulationreview.com, 2023.

remarkably. In the context of European External powers, the newly established European Union, formalised through the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, was still unable to settle and react to international crisis as a unified actor, nor to deploy full external capabilities. For this reason, the Balkan Wars acted both as a catalyst for Member States to enlarge their military and defence capacities, and as a testing ground for the EU's new competences, with the CFSP being introduced in the Maastricht Treaty in 1993.

In general, the resources that the Union used the most to address the crisis in the Balkans were: diplomatic pressure; post-conflict reconstruction; long-term peacebuilding efforts. Indeed, the Union was not involved in the direct response to the conflicts, as the military and defence strategies were deployed solely under the framework of NATO, hence the Member States did not intervene as part of the European Union, but as NATO members. The EU's role became more strategic thanks to the Dayton Agreements and in the post-conflict reconstruction. Annex 10 of the Dayton Peace Agreement established the Office of the High Representative (OHR), an EU-led entity whose task included the concrete implementation of civilian aspects of the peace agreements⁷⁹. Initially, the OHR was envisioned as a transitional body, only for the Dayton agreements implementation; nonetheless it was later strengthened under the Bonn Powers by the Peace Implementation Council in 1997⁸⁰. It was a set of special powers conceded to the High Representative (HR) to impose laws and to remove officials, allowing the HR to be influential in the political landscape of post-war Bosnia⁸¹. The OHR is still present in Bosnia Herzegovina, strengthening the country's stability to counteract the consequences of the differences in ethnical communities of the territory. However, since 2006, the EU has been trying to terminate the Bonn Powers to give centrality to the EU Special Representative, facilitating Bosnia's access in the EU⁸². Bosnia does not meet the criteria for EU access yet; hence the Bonn Powers are still operative.

⁷⁹ Bart M.J Szewczyk, "The EU in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Powers, Decisions and Legitimacy," Ssrn.com, 2024.

⁸⁰ Ibidem

⁸¹ Maja Sahadžić, "The Bonn Powers in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Between a Rock and a Hard Place," ConstitutionNet, 2022.

⁸² Bart M.J Szewczyk, "The EU in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Powers, Decisions and Legitimacy," Ssrn.com, 2024.

2.2.1 EU and NATO Approaches in Crisis Management

Although the EU played a significant role in peacekeeping in the aftermath of the conflict, as it had a de-facto control of the international governance in the area, its overall relevance in the Balkan Wars was limited. Beyond financial contributions to peacebuilding and the support to Bosnia's EU annexation process, the EU did not deploy any other external power⁸³. Instead, the Member States taking part in the operations acted as NATO members, rather than EU countries. For this reason, the response to the conflict was a mix of coordination on different dimensions, with NATO holding the military and defence strategy, whilst the EU as a financial supporter and stabilizer of the region, through the Office of the High Representative. The role of the UN, often criticised and defined as controversial and inefficient, will not be explored further in this thesis.

In the Balkan Wars, particularly in the Bosnian conflict, two distinct approaches emerged. NATO leveraged its military assets to coerce the Serbian and Yugoslav forces into a ceasefire; while the EU remained a marginal actor, engaged in post-conflict reconstruction and the stabilisation of the area through diplomacy and economic support. Reflecting their differing histories, mandates, and capacities, both NATO and the EU were crucial in the conflict response, although, based on an immediate crisis management, NATO's involvement was more reactive. Indeed, especially after the Srebrenica Massacre, the Alliance reaction was an air strike, the Operation Deliberate Force, resulting in the Dayton peace agreements in 1995⁸⁴. Nonetheless, NATO's intervention has been often defined as excessively reactive and military centred. Despite its initial inertia, the EU focused more on diplomatic efforts, and humanitarian aid, contributing to a different aspect of the war, hence the civilian, humanitarian consequences⁸⁵. However, the Member States acted more individually rather than on a European basis, given the early stage of the CFSP, maintaining their focus on economic integration.

In Kosovo, NATO was responsible for another air strike in response to the humanitarian crisis, which was effective for the conclusion of the conflict. As in the previous conflict, the EU's military input was non-existent, as its military and defence capacities were still

⁸³ Ibidem

⁸⁴ "13 - the Crisis in Former Yugoslavia," jfcnaples.nato.int, 2025.

⁸⁵ Mamoru Sadakata, "THE BALKANS between the EU and NATO: FOCUSING on the FORMER YUGOSLAVIA," *ROMANIAN JOURNAL of EUROPEAN AFFAIRS* 6, no. 3 (2006): 157.

underdeveloped⁸⁶. For this reason, its contribution regarded mostly the stabilisation of the area, by enhancing democratisation efforts in the region, with a balanced approach, as not all the EU members were aligned on the position of Kosovo's independence. Indeed, the EU's cautious approach was also influenced by internal disagreements, as not all the EU Member States recognise Kosovo's sovereignty, even today, such as Spain and Greece⁸⁷. As such, the strategy avoided strong political views, including only humanitarian, economic and civilian aspects.

In general, NATO's decisive military operations counterbalanced EU's inconsistent defence strategy, which was still at its initial phase. During the 1990s, the Union faced adversities in acting coherently and consistently in a common foreign policy, due to its emerging status as international political and diplomatic entity. Conversely, NATO, a well-established military and defensive alliance, had already well-defined objectives and internal structures. Consequently, the EU's preferred framework preferred at this initial stage was humanitarian aid, regional cooperation support, and economic reconstruction, exemplified by the 1999 Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe⁸⁸. The initiative aimed to promote stabilisation in the Balkans, integrating the region into European decision-making processes⁸⁹. Although not completely cohesive, the Pact fostered a stable collaboration between the EU and the Balkans, supporting integration and openness to the new potential Member States.

2.3 The Long-Term Consequences and EU Enlargement in the Balkans

As previously discussed, a crucial point of the EU's strategy in the Balkans encompassed stabilisation and democratisation efforts in the post-war reconstruction. In order to address the issue, the Union's commitment verged to an incorporation of the regions into its own framework, hence opening the possibility to those countries to access the Union, considering enlargement as a key solution for peace keeping and augment economic development in the Southeastern regions. The goal was to integrate countries such as Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North

⁸⁶ Ibidem

⁸⁷ World Population Review, "Countries That Recognize Kosovo 2021," worldpopulationreview.com, 2023.

⁸⁸ Mamoru Sadakata, "THE BALKANS between the EU and NATO: FOCUSING on the FORMER YUGOSLAVIA," *ROMANIAN JOURNAL of EUROPEAN AFFAIRS* 6, no. 3 (2006): 157.

⁸⁹ Erhard Busek, "The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe: Achievements and Future Challenges," n.d.

Macedonia, and Albania, to foster economic and political reforms with the aim of European Memberships⁹⁰. The European Union served as a reference point for these countries aspiring to Europeanization through democratisation, stabilisation, marketisation, and institutional inclusion⁹¹.

A major attempt to integration was the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe, adopted in 199 following the Kosovo war. Whilst this Pact was essential for promoting democracy, economic development, and strengthening human rights, its imposition by international actors, rather than a balanced dialogue with the Balkans, hindered its success⁹². With the coordination of several funding organizations, including the EU, World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Pact served as a foundation for the EU enlargement in the region, but the efforts were inconsistent not sufficient⁹³.

In the same year, the EU launched a new policy: the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP). This institutional instrument emphasised the importance of regional cooperation, including the development of infrastructure and networks, and agreements for a free trade area⁹⁴. In this way, the SAP did not include only economic development or democratisation efforts but concretely encouraged the Balkan states to conform their policies to the EU's standards and norms, by offering them the prospective of EU's candidacy. The requirements to be eligible to join the Union, as defined by the Copenhagen Criteria, are very strict, but they had a positive effect on the Balkan regions, as they prompted them to significant economic and political progress, although not uniformly. Additionally, in 2008, the Regional Cooperation Council replaced the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe, reaffirming the efforts for the 'European perspective' in Western Balkans⁹⁵. Alongside with the SAP, the EU has

⁹⁰ Ibidem

⁹¹ Leeda Demetropoulou, "Europe and the Balkans: Membership Aspiration, EU Involvement and Europeanization Capacity in South Eastern Europe", *Southeast European Politics* 3, no. 2-3 (2002): 89.

⁹² Mamoru Sadakata, "THE BALKANS between the EU and NATO: FOCUSING on the FORMER YUGOSLAVIA," *ROMANIAN JOURNAL of EUROPEAN AFFAIRS* 6, no. 3 (2006): 157.

⁹³ Ibidem

⁹⁴ "EUR-Lex - Stabilisation_association_process - EN - EUR-Lex," eur-lex.europa.eu, n.d.

⁹⁵ European Parliament, "The Western Balkans | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament," Europa.eu, April 2019.

also deployed an Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance, granting financial support to the candidates to carry out the reforms required⁹⁶. In general, The integration process is legally grounded in the EU treaties, namely in Title V of the TEU; Article 207 TFEU (on international agreements); and specifically in Article 49 TEU (outlining the criteria for EU membership), which requires candidates to adopt and implement all EU legislation, the *aquis Communautaire*, and undergo continuous assessment monitored by the Commission⁹⁷.

The EU's enlargement in the Balkans, which is an ongoing process, has been described as a “*geo-strategic investment for Europe's peace, security, stability and prosperity*,” particularly considering Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022⁹⁸. Therefore, the enlargement is part of the EU's peacekeeping tools, partaking in the EU's external sphere, and prompting the Balkan states to higher standards of economic and social progress thanks to the potential eligibility and entrance in the Union. So far, the majority of the Balkan states remain with candidate country status, namely Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, and Serbia⁹⁹. Croatia is the only one that officially joined the Union, on July 1, 2013, while Kosovo submitted its application in December 2022¹⁰⁰. With the recent conflict in Ukraine, most of the negotiations that started in the previous years have been postponed, as new strategic priorities emerged; however, the EU's expansion towards the Balkans remains a key political and tactical objective.

2.4 Final Remarks

In conclusion, the Balkan Wars of the 1990s marked a gradual evolution of the EU's external powers. While initially marginal and inconsistent, the EU's strategic engagement began to develop in the aftermath of the conflicts. Military and defence tactics were mainly managed by NATO, which could rely on its solid internal structure and strict defensive scope. In contrast, the newly established EU still had to define its

⁹⁶ Ibidem

⁹⁷ European Parliament, “The Western Balkans | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament,” Europa.eu, April 2019.

⁹⁸ European Commission, “EU - Western Balkans Relations,” Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood, December 2022.

⁹⁹ European Parliament, “The Western Balkans | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament,” Europa.eu, April 2019.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem

own dimension in the crisis management process. For this reason, the EU's role in the Balkans lacked consistency and effectiveness, as the Member States acted on behalf of NATO or national interests, whilst the EU undertook external action in the humanitarian and civilian aspects of the post-conflict reality.

This chapter has explored key EU instruments, including the Office of High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the EU played a role in the governance and oversight function. Moreover, the EU's preferred tools were financial and humanitarian support, which could compromise the distinct political positions of the Member States. Nonetheless, the most influential instrument applied by the EU is the enlargement, although it was employed only after the end of the wars. This foreign policy, indeed, proved to have a significant impact on the political landscape of the region. Proposing the EU's accession was a driving force for reforms in economic, political, and social areas. Therefore, in this case the EU used its external powers not in military nor defensive terms, but rather as a soft power tool, centred mostly on other countries' expectations. Ultimately, the EU enlargement served as a mechanism for regional cooperation in the continent, reinforcing the external action instruments that were first established and created in the Maastricht treaty, initiating the first practical evolution of EU's external powers.

Chapter 3 - Russian invasion of Ukraine: a shift in the EU's response

3.1 Historical context of the conflict

3.1.1 From Ukraine's Independence until the Euromaidan Revolution

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic declared its independence on August 24, supported by a popular referendum¹⁰¹. This event marked a pivotal moment in contemporary Ukrainian history, embodying the post-communism and pro-European sentiment after the dissolution of the USSR. Notably, even before 1991, Western Ukraine saw the emergence of groups advocating for national concerns and an alternative to communism, particularly the Rukh (Popular Movement for Reconstructing Ukraine), founded in 1989. This movement played a significant role in a major protest in 1990, where demonstrators proclaimed Ukraine's informal independence on July 16, 1990, foreshadowing the official declaration of the following year¹⁰².

Ukraine's independence clearly set the stage for rising tensions with the Russian Federation under President Boris Yeltsin. Indeed, despite the formal recognition of Ukraine as a sovereign state on December 2, 1991, Yeltsin sought to reintegrate Ukraine through a Statute of Commonwealth. This Statute aimed at maintaining political and economic ties among the former Soviet Republics, with Russia as main actor, but the plan eventually failed¹⁰³. After achieving state sovereignty, Ukraine faced notable identity challenges, which President Leonid Kravchuk tried to address during the early phases of the country's independence. Kravchuk's main objective cantered on Ukrainian language expansion and institutionalization, together with establishing Ukraine's international position. Moreover, its geographic position as a buffer state between Western Europe and Russia complicated the work of the Ukrainian President during this period.

In 1994, Leonid Kuchma succeeded Kravchuk, initially continuing the plan for nationalization policies. However, Western Europe's reluctance to grant Ukraine full

¹⁰¹ Paul D'anieri, *Politics and Society in Ukraine* (Routledge, 2018).

¹⁰² Andrew Wilson, "The Donbas between Ukraine and Russia: The Use of History in Political Disputes," *Journal of Contemporary History* 30, no. 2 (April 1995): 265–89.

¹⁰³ Serhii Plokhy, *Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 330–332.

EU or NATO membership, regardless of the aspirations of Ukrainian society, led President Kuchma to change his policies. In response, he strengthened his ties with Russia, culminating in the Year of Russia in Ukraine in 2003, a series of cultural events to consolidate the cultural exchange of the two countries¹⁰⁴. This pro-Russian shift, combined with increasing privatization and corruption, caused a decline in the popular support for the presidency. A turning point occurred in September 2000, when the journalist and political opponent Georgiy Gongadze was found murdered. Allegations emerged implicating President Kuchma, which eventually resulted in a political crisis¹⁰⁵.

During the 2004 presidential elections, Kuchma endorsed his prime minister Viktor Yanukovich, who enjoyed the support of the Russian president Vladimir Putin. Nevertheless, signs of electoral fraud in favour of Viktor Yanukovich and an assassination attempt through the poisoning of his opponent, Viktor Yushchenko, the "Orange Coalition" leader, triggered massive protests. The movement, later known as the "Orange Revolution", forced new fair elections and political accountability. In response, the Orange coalition won in the reiterative presidential elections, with Yushchenko president and Yulia Tymoshenko appointed as Prime Minister.¹⁰⁶

The Orange Revolution marked a significant turning point, especially from Russia's standpoint. The increasing dissent in Ukraine was part of a broader phenomenon known as "Color Revolutions" - a series of political movements sweeping through former Soviet Republics driven by dissatisfaction with communism and inclined to Western ideals. Similar uprisings had happened in Serbia in 2000 and in Georgia in 2003. Consequently, Moscow's concerns were heightened, as President Putin signalled the trend as troubling for Russia's interests in its former sphere of influence¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁴ "President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma Opened the Year of Russia in Ukraine in an Official Ceremony," President of Russia, January 27, 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Serhii Plokhyy, *Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 330-332.

¹⁰⁶ Stepan Andriyovich Kryzhanivsky and Oleksa Eliseyovich Zasenka, "Ukraine - the Orange Revolution and the Yushchenko Presidency," in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, February 13, 2019.

¹⁰⁷ LINCOLN A. MITCHELL, *The Color Revolutions*, JSTOR (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

Despite the initial success of the Yushchenko presidency, enhancing stronger relations with the West, internal divisions and economical challenges prepared the ground for Yanukovich's return to power in the 2010 presidential elections. His governance reversed many pro-European policies, previously enforced by Yushchenko, encouraging a broader alliance and cooperation with Russia. In 2013, his refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, which would have endorsed a political association and economic integration, sparked the Euromaidan Revolution¹⁰⁸. This uprising, driven by Ukraine's civil society, demanded more democratic reforms and European integration. In 2014, Yanukovych fled to Moscow, welcomed by Vladimir Putin. Contrary to the events of 2004, the Euromaidan protest was characterized by increasing violence and chaos, leaving Ukraine in a tormenting and precarious political situation¹⁰⁹.

While this section aims to explain that tensions between Russia and Ukraine have deep historical roots, the Euromaidan Revolution definitely marked the key event of the conflict, albeit subtly at the beginning. Taking advantage of the lack of a president, in February 2014 Putin deployed troops in Crimea and Donbas, claiming the annexation of these regions to Russia, due to the high presence of Russian speakers in the territories. Whilst Crimea was easily annexed following a controversial referendum, the Donbas region resisted. This marked the beginning of a hybrid war, with the West - particularly the EU - largely ignoring the major implications of Russia's actions¹¹⁰.

3.1.2 The Beginning of the Hybrid War

A hybrid war, as defined by Frank G. Hoffman, is the purposeful and tailored violent application of conventional military capabilities, combined with irregular tactics, such as terrorism and criminal activities¹¹¹. Hence, it is a combination of regular and irregular forces, operating as part of a common framework in the same battlespace.

¹⁰⁸ Kitsoft, "Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine - Ukraine-EU Association Agreement," mfa.gov.ua, August 4, 2021.

¹⁰⁹ Taras Kuzio, "Russia-Ukraine Crisis: The Blame Game, Geopolitics and National Identity," *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 3 (March 16, 2018): 462–73.

¹¹⁰ Jure Vidmar, "The Annexation of Crimea and the Boundaries of the Will of the People," *German Law Journal* 16, no. 3 (July 2015): 365–83.

¹¹¹ Frank Hoffman, "The Rise of Hybrid Wars," 2007.

This concept accurately describes the period between 2014 and 2022. Russia's failure to annex the Donbas region led to a change in strategy, with Putin upholding the separatists' groups in the Donetsk and Luhansk, portraying the conflict as a civil war.

In June 2014, Petro Poroshenko was elected president of Ukraine. Poroshenko acknowledged the threat posed by Putin; thus, he attempted to mitigate the situation and focused his administration on developing policies to counter Russian influence in the eastern regions¹¹². Nonetheless, despite Poroshenko's efforts, Putin's objective was actually reached, as the international actors largely perceived the conflict as internal, until Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

A major question is: why did Russia not invade Ukraine directly in 2014? Putin's strategy was accurate and clever, as he intended to destabilize Ukraine, while avoiding jeopardizing its diplomatic relations within the international community. By avoiding direct involvement and instead supporting the rebel groups, Russia was able to maintain its economic agreements with Western Europe, while preventing Ukraine from joining the EU and NATO. The hybrid war allowed Russia to deny its direct role in the conflict, presenting itself as a mediator, rather than an aggressor. In this way, Putin managed to confuse the international arena regarding the real causes of the crisis, deceiving even the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky.

In 2019, Zelensky was elected, and his political agenda was centred on three main points: improvement of economic conditions for low-middle Ukrainian class, fight against corruption and, most importantly, peace in Donbas¹¹³. The last point of the agenda was the one that Ukrainians were advocating for. Poroshenko's administration, in fact, was perceived as too extremist, and his vision, although proven to be correct, was misunderstood by a great part of the electorate. Once in power, Zelensky reinitiated the Normandy Format, a set of diplomatic meetings between the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France, and Germany, started in June 2014¹¹⁴. In one of these

¹¹² Sergey Sayapin and Evhen Tsybulenko, *The Use of Force against Ukraine and International Law: Jus Ad Bellum, Jus in Bello, Jus Post Bellum* (The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press. C, 2018).

¹¹³ Mykhailo Minakov, "The Three Ages of Zelensky's Presidency | Wilson Center," www.wilsoncenter.org, June 9, 2022.

¹¹⁴ Andrew Lohsen and Pierre Morcos, "Understanding the Normandy Format and Its Relation to the Current Standoff with Russia," www.csis.org, February 9, 2022.

meetings, Putin convinced Zelensky to engage in negotiations with the Russian separatist groups. As a result, the conflict's portrayal as a civil war was further solidified. Eventually, Zelensky realized the real intentions of Putin, hence he came back to Poroshenko's policies, characterized by strengthening the Ukrainian army, consolidating the Ukrainian identity, and handling Russian propaganda.

Eventually, Zelensky's return to a defence-oriented administration underlined the failure of the diplomatic efforts. Furthermore, the hybrid war perpetrated by Russia proved both inefficient and incapable of securing decisive gains, as the region continued resisting the threats posed by the separatist groups. Consequently, in March-April 2021, Putin began deploying troops from the regular Russian army, providing direct military assistance in the Donetsk and Luhansk territories. Amid rising tensions, Russia proposed a Security Agreement in December 2021 (Agreement on measures to ensure the security of The Russian Federation and member States of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization), supposed to be signed by NATO's members. Particularly, three articles are of particular interest: Article 4, which prohibits NATO from stationing troops in Member States which joined after the NATO-Russia founding Act of 1997; Article 6, which blocks NATO's enlargement, specifically regarding Ukraine; and Article 7, which restricts NATO's military activities in Ukraine and surrounding areas¹¹⁵. Although Russia was the proposing party of this draft, the Russian Federation never withdrew its troops from the Ukrainian borders, leading to the full-scale invasion that officially started on February 24, 2022.

3.1.3 The Full-Scale Invasion

On February 24, 2022, Russian forces officially initiated the full-scale invasion, in response to the failure of the hybrid war. Branded by the Russian Federation as a 'special military operation', the move was described as necessary to restore stability and democracy in Ukraine, obscuring its true nature as an act of aggression. The invasion involved a coordinated multi-pronged attack, from the north, east, and south of Ukraine. The initial phase was crucial, as the Russian troops rapidly advanced

¹¹⁵ Yugom Interactive, "Russia Proposes a New Security Architecture in Europe and beyond | EDAM," Russia Proposes a New Security Architecture in Europe and Beyond | EDAM, 2022.

towards the capital, Kyiv, within a few weeks. Putin's strategy aimed to capture the capital and oust President Zelensky, in a swift and decisive campaign, akin to a 'Blitzkrieg'. Western Nations, sceptical of Ukraine's chances of victory, offered diplomatic protection to Volodymyr Zelensky. Nevertheless, the President's resolute decision to remain alongside his people, refusing the diplomatic protection, and his clever use of social media to spread news regarding the war, inspired Ukrainians and prompted the Western allies to provide substantial aid¹¹⁶.

In general, the initial phase of the war was marked by crucial battles in key locations such as Hostomel, Irpin, and Bucha¹¹⁷. The latter became infamous due to the Bucha Massacre, where many civilians were involved and killed by the Russian forces¹¹⁸. Even the Chernobyl area fell under Russian control, bolstering Putin's confidence in his strategy. Nevertheless, logistical challenges and the unexpected Ukrainian counteroffensive, which successfully resisted the assault of the Capital, severely disrupted Russia's plans. Therefore, the Kremlin was forced to adjust its military tactics, redirecting its military efforts solely toward the Donbas region¹¹⁹.

By May 2022, the Ukrainian army successfully liberated parts of the occupied territories, culminating in the recapture of the city of Kharkiv and its surrounding region, in southeastern Ukraine. Meanwhile, Mariupol and Kherson remained the only major cities under Russian control. The Russian army had to face the Ukrainian forces, which demonstrated superior strategic use of their nation's geographic features, leveraging their natural resources, such as the Dnipro River. This area proved crucial, serving as a central point for ongoing battles and changing territorial control, particularly around the city of Kherson¹²⁰.

¹¹⁶ Sebastián Sánchez-Castillo, Esteban Galán-Cubillo, and Lindsey Drylie-Carey, "Unmuting Leadership: The Impact of Zelensky's Social Media Strategy at the Inset of the Ukrainian War," *Journal of Risk Research* 26, no. 6 (April 12, 2023): 1–15.

¹¹⁷ Britannica, "Ukraine - the Russian Invasion of Ukraine | Britannica," www.britannica.com, 2024.

¹¹⁸ "The Bucha Massacre: Mapping a Year of Kremlin Denial," Representation in Ireland, April 3, 2023.

¹¹⁹ Stefan Ellerbeck, "1 Year On: A Timeline of the War in Ukraine," World Economic Forum, February 23, 2023.

¹²⁰ Vikram Mittal, "Russian and Ukrainian Forces Battle over Islands in the Dnipro River," *Forbes*, December 18, 2024.

On June 6, 2023, the destruction of the Nova Kakhovka Dam further intensified the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict. Indeed, the disaster unleashed widespread flooding in southern Ukraine, worsening the conditions in both Russian and Ukrainian-occupied territories¹²¹. The dam's breach was attributed to Russian occupiers, and the event not only resulted in humanitarian and environmental devastation alike. Furthermore, it marked a deep economic crisis as well, further straining Ukraine's fragile and impoverished economy. Despite the sanctions imposed on Russia by the Western States, extensive humanitarian, economic, and military aid provided to Ukraine, and the International Criminal Court's International Arrest Warrant against Putin, the conflict shows no signs of nearing resolution. Instead, the "Kursk Operation" initiated by Ukraine on August 6, 2024, which involved the direct attack and occupation of the Russian territories of Kursk Oblast, changed the narrative of the war, granting a new dimension and potential to Ukraine's military force¹²². This move undoubtedly raised significant concerns for Putin, prompting him to invoke a nuclear threat to deter any Western involvement in improving Ukraine's military capabilities¹²³.

In conclusion, the full-scale invasion has had profound geopolitical consequences, influencing not only the situation in the two countries involved, but also regional dynamics and global relations. In particular, the role of the European Union and its member states has been challenged, with many issues still unaddressed by the European community. The conflict has fostered scepticism about the Union's effectiveness throughout the Member States. Additionally, with the recent change in the American Governance, a shift of the war's trajectory is expected. This section provided a clear historical overview of key events, setting the stage for the analysis of the EU's role in the conflict. The next section will explore the EU's approach in the conflict before and after February 2022.

¹²¹ Katerina Sergatskova, "Aftermath of the Kakhovka Dam Collapse | Wilson Center," www.wilsoncenter.org, June 20, 2023.

¹²² Peter Rough, Can Kasapoglu, and Luke Coffey "100 Days of the Kursk Operation: What the US Can Do to Help Ukraine," Hudson Institute, April 16, 2025.

¹²³ Mick Ryan, "Putin's Chilling Nuclear Threat Has One Strategic Target," The Sydney Morning Herald, November 20, 2024.

3.2 Evolving Dynamics: The Development of the EU Foreign Policy in Response to Russia

Russia influenced the EU foreign policy even before the full invasion of Ukraine, leveraging its oil and gas supplies as an economic and political tool¹²⁴. As a collective entity, the EU has fostered a policy of dialogue and economic integration with Russia, particularly following the collapse of the USSR. In 1994, the EU and Russia signed the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), facilitating cooperation in regards of trade, energy, security, and economic issues¹²⁵. The enforcement of this agreement suggests that, since the formation of the Russian Federation, the EU has sought to strengthen its relations with Russia, opting for a nuanced approach to economic and market expansion.

However, the war marked a milestone, significantly evolving the approach used by the European Union. Notably, taking into consideration the two major protagonists of the Union: the war was able to shift Germany's historically cautious approach and to boost France's desire for an autonomous European defence. Neither approach was sufficient to end the war, impacting the EU's power and its global influence. The war altered the Euro-Atlantic security, as the EU and its member states acted in an innovative way, adapting and strengthening their existing tactics. Such change, given the recent political crisis and Euroscepticism spreading around Europe, will shape the Euro-Atlantic security in the coming decades, but the long-term outcomes remain uncertain.

3.2.1 The EU approach prior to 2022

Before 2022, the EU response was a plan of sanctions, which was targeted to specific individuals and sectors. Although the EU unanimously condemned Russia, Member states' positions were deeply divided, with different perspectives. Such divisions and the inefficiency of sanctions did not stem just from a West-East block, but from similar countries as well. Examining Europe's most influential nations, France and Germany, it is clear that these two countries, although perfectly integrated both in the EU and NATO, had very different approaches regarding the matter.

¹²⁴ Agata Strachota and Georg Zachmann, "Łoskot- Rebalancing the EU-Russia-Ukraine Gas Relationship," n.d.

¹²⁵ "Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation Establishing a Partnership between the European Communities and Their Member States, of the One Part, and the Russian Federation, of the Other Part," Consilium, 2025.

Before 2022, Russia's influence on European Security was already a complex issue, due to the deep reliance of European States on oil and gas. Germany used to import about 37% of its gas and around 25-34% of its oil from Russia¹²⁶. Hence, German strategy had to consider such vulnerability, preferring a multilateral and diplomatic approach. Indeed, Chancellor Merkel has always been involved in diplomatic attempts to mitigate Russia's interventions in Ukraine, seeking a balance between regional peace and her own state's interests, even if it affected the strategy's efficiency, as. Among the many attempts in which Germany tried to have a leading role, we must include the Minsk Agreements, and a Free Trade agreement proposed directly by Chancellor Merkel in January 2015¹²⁷. Nevertheless, all these agreements, especially in regard to the Ukrainian complex situation, eventually failed, creating discontent about the German approach. Furthermore, even after the annexation of Crimea, Germany continued its energy cooperation with Russia, especially through projects such as the Nord Stream pipelines, increasing the country's dependence on Russia and upsurging internal tension within the EU itself¹²⁸.

Conversely, France has never been threatened by a possible drop of Russian imports, as it possesses a robust nuclear energy production. Therefore, France's position has always been different from the German one, even before 2022. Despite having both participated in international agreements with Russia, either on behalf of the EU or of their own sovereign State, France's *modus operandi* has always considered military tactics as well. As a matter of fact, France has historically been the major promoter of a European common defence, especially under Macron's presidency. The French President, since his victory in 2017, has often underlined the need for a European common army¹²⁹. However, France still established stable diplomatic relations with Russia, participating in the negotiations of the Minsk Agreements as well. European Security, even in military terms, is the main difference between France and Germany before 2022, due to the fact that the latter was exposed to a significant demilitarization after World War II. Even if Germany is one of the most technologically advanced

¹²⁶ Julian Wettengel, "Germany's Dependence on Imported Fossil Fuels," *Clean Energy Wire*, April 3, 2024.

¹²⁷ Anne Le Gloannec, "The EU, Russia and Ukraine: A Double Track with No End? The Twenty-Year Transition: 1990-2000s: The EU and Member-State Policies on Russia," 2015.

¹²⁸ Julian Wettengel, "Gas Pipeline Nord Stream 2 Links Germany to Russia, but Splits Europe," *Clean Energy Wire*, August 16, 2018.

¹²⁹ BBC, "France's Macron Pushes for 'True European Army,'" *BBC News*, November 6, 2018, sec. Europe.

countries worldwide, with a great variety of military supplies, their deployment is carefully decided, due to the nation's past. Eventually, neither France or Germany, and in general the EU and the Western block, were able to prevent the full-scale invasion.

3.2.2 February 2022: Redefining EU Foreign Policy and Strategic Autonomy

After Russia invaded Ukraine, all the European countries, whether they were EU Member States or not, underwent a period of uncertainty and crisis. In the case of Germany, since it was the Western European country which most relied on Russian supplies, its initial response was definitely reluctant. Although, through the EU, it condemned Russian actions, Germany waited before giving any assistance to Ukraine. Its approach can be defined as extremely cautious, as millions of German citizens faced the risk of a gas shortage for heating during the winter. However, after the initial hesitancy, the invasion acted as a catalyst for the policies of the German Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, who described the shift as “Zeitenwende” (‘turning point’)¹³⁰. Indeed, Germany is now ranked as the second-largest arms supplier¹³¹, with more than 15 billion euros allocated to support Ukraine¹³². Even if the supply proved to be often delayed and inefficient, it marked a significant watershed, especially because Germany's support is essential for the consensus-based mechanisms of the CFSP.

France's approach did not change significantly, as it continued its proactive role, engaging in more military support, without the threat of an energetic crisis. After 2022, the main difference between the two countries stems from their visions for the future of an European Strategic Autonomy. Indeed, Germany prioritizes the alliance with NATO and the strengthening of mechanisms already present in the EU; whilst France sees a more autonomous European Security, pursuing an acceleration of its independence from other alliances.

¹³⁰ Gesine Weber, “Give France Credit for Its Strategic Change - War on the Rocks,” War on the Rocks, May 6, 2024.

¹³¹ Stefan Meister, “Germany and France Are Drawing Two Completely Different Conclusions from the War in Ukraine,” *Le Monde.fr*, March 10, 2024.

¹³² Pietro Bompreszi, Ivan Kharitonov, and Christoph Trebesch, “Ukraine Support Tracker - a Database of Military, Financial and Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine,” Kiel Institute for the World Economy, February 16, 2024.

3.3 The shift in the EU's external action

The Russian-Ukraine war prompted a significant transformation in the EU's external action, leading to an adaptation of its priorities. The European Union's response to the conflict can be categorized in three different areas: Economic sanctions; Military aid to Ukraine; Energy independence. The next subparagraphs will delve deeper into each of them, providing a clear understanding of the alteration of the plans of action of the Union in response to the Russian aggression.

3.3.1 Economic Sanctions

The use of economic sanctions is not new within the EU's external action. Currently, the Union enforces 50 sanction programmes, affecting 40 different countries¹³³. While EU law does not explicitly provide for a definition for economic sanction, they aligned with the one presented in Art. 41 of the UN Charter¹³⁴:

“The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.”

In the EU framework, sanctions are imposed to implement the decisions of either the Council of the EU or of the United Nations. They are temporary, lasting up to one year, but they can be extended by the Council of the EU. Under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) sanctions can be adopted, following a two-steps procedure: first, the Council of the EU endorses a decision, based on the proposal of the EU's High Representative¹³⁵; simultaneously, the Council enacts, by a qualified majority, a regulation detailing the implementation of economic and financial measures, based on a joint proposal of the Commission and the High Representative¹³⁶.

¹³³Beatrix Immenkamp, “EU Sanctions: A Key Foreign and Security Policy Instrument,” 2024.

¹³⁴ United Nations, “Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51),” United Nations (United Nations, 1945).

¹³⁵ “Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union,” Legislation.gov.uk, 2019.

¹³⁶ Article 215, TEU,

As these measures fall outside of the EU competences, every Member State is responsible for the application of the measures at national level¹³⁷.

In response to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the EU imposed a package of unprecedented sanctions against Russia. Indeed, before 2022, Russia was already the target of some economic sanctions, but those were principally directed to individual citizens. After the invasion, the EU sanctioned Russia in collaboration with other partners, namely the US, Japan, Canada, and Australia, expanded the scope of sanctions not only to individuals, but also to key sectors of the Russian economy. This included an oil embargo, the freezing of Russian Central Bank assets, restrictions on exports, and bans on oil and coal imports¹³⁸.

The scale and scope of these sanctions was unprecedented for the EU, marking a pivotal moment for the evolution of the EU's external action under the CFSP framework. While the overall effects were insufficient, as Russia was able to recover by expanding its market toward Asia and strengthening its ties with BRICS countries, it is still a milestone in the EU's external policy development.

3.3.2 Military Aid

The military support provided to Ukraine is estimated to be, counting both the EU and member States contributions, 48.3 billion euros. Without considering the national investments in military equipment and training supplied by each country, the EU furnished 6 billion euro, between 2022 and 2024, under the European Peace Facility¹³⁹. In particular, the European Peace facility is a mechanism for EU military and defence actions, comprehended under the CFSP¹⁴⁰. The activation of such a mechanism has a relevant implication, as the EU posed itself with a more proactive role in the military sector, and not depending merely on the member States intervention in the matter, proving again a shift in the EU's approach for the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

¹³⁷ Beatrix Immenkamp, "EU Sanctions: A Key Foreign and Security Policy Instrument," 2024.

¹³⁸ Anna Caprile and Carmen-Cristina Cirlig, "EU Sanctions against Russia 2025: State of Play, Perspectives and Challenges | Think Tank | European Parliament," Europa.eu, 2025.

¹³⁹ European Council, "EU Military Support for Ukraine," Consilium, 2022.

¹⁴⁰ European Commission, "European Peace Facility," fpi.ec.europa.eu, 2025.

3.3.3 Energy Independence

Energy has proven to be one of the most salient aspects shaping the EU's *modus operandi*. Indeed, as previously discussed, many of the European countries that initially opposed a strong response to Russia's invasion were those most dependent on Russian oil, coal and gas supplies. Following February 2022, the war caused the gas prices to surge, provoking economic hardships and exposing Europe's over-dependence on Russian resources¹⁴¹. Therefore, energy independence has been deemed a crucial strategy for reducing Russia's dominance in the European Energy sector.

To modernize the European energy system, the EU launched a flagship initiative funded by the EU Budget and the *NextGenerationEU* program, through the *REPowerEU* plan¹⁴². The core of this initiative, proposed by the European Commission, is a green and clean energy transition, redirecting the *NextGenEU* finances to more urgent needs, such as the war¹⁴³. This plan would allow the Union to foster an "Energy Union", a more solid and resilient framework for energy cooperation, less vulnerable to external factors¹⁴⁴. The measures identified by the plan include incentives for renewable energy sources, increasing the EU target for 2030; boosting the European hydrogen energy transition as an alternative to fossil sources; enhancing energy efficiency; and developing infrastructure projects for energy storage and distribution under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)¹⁴⁵.

Nonetheless, the project has probably been overly ambitious, and the Member States are still not fully committed to implement it, as it has major implications for major sectors. Despite the challenges, the program must be considered among the three major tools deployed by the Union, reflecting the shift in the external action approach that has started due to the conflict.

¹⁴¹ European Commission, "REPowerEU Plan," Europa.eu, 2022.

¹⁴² Ibidem

¹⁴³ Federico Fabbrini and Christy A Petit, *Research Handbook on Post-Pandemic EU Economic Governance and NGEU Law* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024).

¹⁴⁴ Ibidem

¹⁴⁵ International Energy Agency, "RePowerEU Plan : Joint European Action on Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency – Policies," IEA, January 30, 2024.

3.4 Differences in the EU Countries: Eastern EU countries

3.4.1 The integration of the Eastern European countries in the EU

The process of European integration for former Soviet Republics and communist states differed from that of other European countries. During the 1980s, and particularly after 1991, countries like the Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Ukraine, aspired to a process of democratization. Indeed, the communist experience in these countries, which suppressed political and civil freedoms, nurtured a strong desire for European integration in the civil societies. Before Gorbachev's presidency, openness to the West was deemed impossible. However, after the USSR's collapse, these countries demonstrated their intention to enter the European Community¹⁴⁶.

Nonetheless, despite the great desire expressed by the citizens, not all countries met the necessary criteria to access the membership of the Community. For this reason, after 1991, the European Community engaged in the pursuit of economic cooperation and integration with the Eastern countries, providing aid to their unstable economies¹⁴⁷. Thanks to this economic recovery, many Eastern countries managed to apply for European Union Membership. Namely, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania joined the EU in 2004; while Bulgaria and Romania joined in 2007¹⁴⁸. Ukraine's application was never accepted.

3.4.2 Differences in the approach before and after 2022

Following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, countries previously under the Soviet sphere of influence adopted a different approach from their Western EU counterparts. While countries such as Germany, France and Italy maintained a nuanced approach, the Eastern EU countries advocated for stronger EU policies against Russia. The Eastern European countries were not only concerned about Ukraine, but also about

¹⁴⁶Ebru Voyvoda, "Contextual Analysis of European Integration Sentiments in Post-Communist Countries: Trends, Changing Rhetoric, and Sequence of Practical Steps (1991-2021)," *EUROPEAN CHRONICLE* 7, no. 1 (February 9, 2022): 22–29.

¹⁴⁷ "European Community Aid to Eastern Europe - Geopolitical Upheavals in Europe after 1989 - CVCE Website," www.cvce.eu, n.d.

¹⁴⁸ "Eastern Europe | EEAS," www.eeas.europa.eu, n.d.

their own national security, having witnessed previous Russian incursions into sovereign states, such as the 2008 invasion of Georgia¹⁴⁹. As a result, they firmly opposed Russia's actions and advocated for a greater EU and NATO involvement. Until 2014, NATO refrained from deploying any troops in the former Soviet Republics, to uphold the NATO-Russia founding Act of 1997¹⁵⁰. Indeed, at the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit the allies agreed to intensify NATO presence, particularly in the eastern part of the Alliance, in response to Russia's annexation of Crimea¹⁵¹.

In the years leading up to 2022, despite the precarious approach based on dialogue and diplomatic agreements proposed by the EU in general, the Baltic states, Poland and Czech Republic continuously stressed the need for a firm response¹⁵². These internal divisions over the strategy complicated the ability of the EU to act as a united body, hindering efforts to develop a unified and coherent external policy toward Russia.

The full-scale invasion clearly demonstrated that the demands and concerns of Eastern European countries were justified, emphasizing the need for a stronger EU response. Due to the proximity of certain countries to the conflict, the Baltic states and Poland were the major advocates for Ukraine support, calling for military, humanitarian, and financial support, underscoring the right to self-defence of Ukraine. Furthermore, these countries resolutely demanded financial sanctions to undermine Russia's financial system, oligarchic structures and energy sector. In general, the Eastern countries were less reliant on Russia's energy supplies, thus they had recommended energy diversification in Western Europe even before 2022. After the full-scale invasion, the most substantial shift in the EU policies was indeed the pursuit of energy independence. Alongside the EU's leadership, the aforementioned countries advocated for increasing investments in renewable energy and alternative energy sources.

Overall, the solid stance of the North-Eastern states - namely the Baltic states, Poland and Czech Republic - was crucial in countering the "strategic patience" of Western

¹⁴⁹ Peter Dickinson, "The 2008 Russo-Georgian War: Putin's Green Light," Atlantic Council, August 7, 2021.

¹⁵⁰ NATO, "Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation Signed in Paris, France," NATO, May 27, 1997.

¹⁵¹ Elena Lazarou and Lana Peric, "Briefing the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw Expectations and Priorities," 2016.

¹⁵² Emily Sullivan and Gabriela Ivanova, "Explainer: Eastern Europeans Split over Russia's War in Ukraine," globalaffairs.org, November 8, 2022.

EU, which underestimated the potential risks of Russia's actions and prioritized maintaining economic and diplomatic relations with the Kremlin to safeguard national interests. Their role was also remarkable in responding to the refugee crisis. Following the invasion, millions of Ukrainian refugees were forced to flee their country and, aside from Russia and Belarus, the majority crossed the neighbouring borders, finding protection in Poland, Romania, and the Baltics¹⁵³. Therefore, Eastern countries aided almost 6 million Ukrainian refugees following the invasion, functioning as an instrumental tool to coordinate the humanitarian response of the Union, despite the EU's internal challenges.

3.4.3 The exception: the case of Hungary and South-eastern EU countries

While the North-Eastern EU countries proved to be crucial in opposing the invasion of Ukraine, their South-Eastern counterparts, in particular Hungary, adopted more controversial stances. In general, despite the pro-Russian position of Hungary's president Viktor Orbán, all the Eastern European countries have condemned Putin's actions¹⁵⁴. However, the public's perception of the war and Russia is extremely diversified among North-Eastern countries and South-Eastern countries - namely, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Hungary - with the southern part being more reluctant to fully support Ukraine in military and financial terms¹⁵⁵. In general, the divide North-South is evident in the commitment in military and financial aid to Ukraine; in the vision of Russia as a threat; and in the support for financial sanctions toward Russia.

The key aspect that emerges from these findings, aside from the singular position of each country, is the role that they played in shaping the EU's approach. Remarkably, Orbán's Hungary was the most influential in the decision-making process, as it was able to veto EU sanctions in the CFSP framework under article 31 of the TEU. Orbán's closeness to Putin's regime created tensions among the EU member states, as its standpoint opposes the unified European stance, damaging the EU's credibility and reliability as a unified diplomatic body as well.

¹⁵³ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Ukraine Refugee Situation," data.unhcr.org (UNHCR, December 6, 2024).

¹⁵⁴ William Nattrass, "Hungary's 'Pro-Russia' Stance Was Inevitable," POLITICO, September 15, 2022.

¹⁵⁵ European Commission, "Eurobarometer," europa.eu, n.d.

Tensions and controversies arose not only in the internal cohesion of the Union, but also in the long-term effectiveness of the CFSP. By leveraging its veto power, Hungary has repeatedly delayed EU's sanctions targeting Russia, such as in January 2025, when President Orbán advocated for the reopening of the pipelines for the flow of Russian gas¹⁵⁶. This obstructionism was criticised by Western and North-Eastern EU members, which recognized it as a threat to the maintenance of a clear European external diplomatic position and a direct threat to the principle of European Solidarity enshrined in Art. 2 of the TEU¹⁵⁷.

These divergences have weakened the efforts to build a solid European diplomatic bloc, diminishing the EU's impact in the negotiations, and creating a power vacuum that has been exploited by emerging geopolitical actors, such as China and Turkey¹⁵⁸. Nevertheless, despite Hungary's opposition and regardless of the change in the American governance, the EU was still able to persist in the deployment of the sanction packages, demonstrating a certain degree of resilience and independence. This period represents a pivotal moment in the history of the European Union, as major political crises unfold throughout the continent, particularly in Germany and France. The coming years will be decisive in determining the EU's identity and redefining its geopolitical role in the current multipolar international order.

3.5 Final remarks

In general, the full-scale military invasion of Ukraine marked an unprecedented event in contemporary European history. As analysed in the previous chapter, whilst other conflicts occurred on the European continent since World War II, such as the Balkan wars in the 90's, the fact that a major European power successfully invaded and assaulted another foreign state served as a reminder that a threat of war still exists in Europe. This represented a turning point that cannot be ignored. The EU played a

¹⁵⁶ Gabriel Gavin, Csongor Körömi, and Nicholas Vinocur, "Orbán's New Threat: I'll End Russia Sanctions Unless Ukraine Pumps Putin's Gas," POLITICO, January 24, 2025.

¹⁵⁷ "Solidarity Principle | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions," Europa.eu, 2024.

¹⁵⁸ Valeriia Burlachenko, "The Leadership of Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Diplomatic Relations: The Case of the Russian-Ukrainian War 2022 - 2023," Wwww.vdu.lt, May 23, 2024.

remarkable role in responding to the conflict and acting against the aggressor state. However, as already discussed, the approach adopted by the Member States remains fragile and, initially, it was highly precarious due to the long-standing diplomatic and economic ties that many Western Europe countries had fostered with Russia. Despite the early hesitance, the European Union managed to extend its framework regarding external power in three key areas: economy, military, and energy.

Recent political shifts in Europe and in the US may alter the trajectory of the precedent policies, and the future of the ongoing war remains unpredictable. Nevertheless, one undeniable aspect is the EU's increasing willingness to define itself as a geopolitical actor. This ambition persists despite the rise of sovereigntist sentiments across Member States and continuous internal challenges. To redefine its role in the current international scenario, the EU is required to pursue a serious commitment, and the results will depend on its capability to maintain internal stability and a compact external strategy to address the ongoing crisis.

Chapter 4: A Comparative Analysis and Potential Outcomes

4.1 Comparative Analysis Overview

After having explored the European Union's responses to international crisis on the European Continent, particularly its involvement in addressing the Balkan Wars and the conflict in Ukraine, this chapter will provide a comparative analysis of the distinct approaches to assess the evolution of the Union's external power. It will examine whether and how the EU's strategies have developed over time, considering multi-faceted aspects, including diplomacy, military, and defence tactics. Furthermore, future scenarios will be discussed, estimating the impact that emerging challenges and recent geopolitical changes may have to EU foreign policies in the near future. While clear assumptions are unlikely, latest global trends can suggest potential developments.

4.2 From Post-Conflict Stabilisation to Immediate Strategic Response

The comparative analysis of the European Union's response in the Balkan Wars and in the Russia-Ukraine war reveals a progressive advancement and consolidation of the Union's external powers. Whereas the Balkan Wars exposed the institutional limits and the hesitation of the Union, the war in Ukraine served as a catalyst, encouraging the EU to reshape its foreign policies and to adopt a more cohesive strategy for crisis management. As discussed in the previous chapters, one of the key differences in the Union's methods lies on the capacity of the EU to rely on its own tools in the security and defence field, marking a shift between two distinct, yet equally important, conflicts.

In the 1990s, the EU was still in its early stage, with its legal framework which was not consolidated yet. Consequently, the EU did not manage to effectively engage in the disputes in the former Yugoslavia. Its contribution included thus only domains were not politically divisive and not limited by legal constrictions, namely humanitarian aid, and feeble diplomatic efforts. Following the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999, the external competences were clarified and further expanded, enabling the EU to respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine not only with humanitarian assistance, but also with its own instruments, such as the imposition of economic sanctions; the supply of military aid; and a strategic plan towards energy independence¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁹ Cfr. § 3.3

While, during the Balkan Wars, the EU was dependent on the military and strategic interventions launched by NATO, such as air strikes, in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, a more autonomous and coherent military dimension emerged. The EU did not directly send any troop, nor engage in direct combat operations. However, its role was crucial in allocating, through the European Peace Facility, six billion euros to Ukraine, and furnishing military equipment based on Member States' national capacity, becoming the largest investor in Ukraine's defence sector¹⁶⁰. Therefore, the distinct approaches are clearly different, particularly in defining the EU as a unified actor. In fact, in the Balkan Wars there was no cohesion among the states, because the framework of security and defence was still out of the states' perspectives and interests. Conversely, Russia's actions destabilised Europe and, being the EU a consolidated reality, it was better equipped to react and the experience in the Balkans prompted it to take concrete actions to safeguard a recognised state's sovereignty.

Furthermore, it is important to underline that no entirely new legal frameworks were created after the 2007 Lisbon Treaty. Therefore, the real turning point concerns the unprecedented activation of pre-existing legal mechanisms¹⁶¹. Economic sanctions, for instance, were a tool already envisioned in the EU legal framework, nonetheless they had never been used with the coordination and breadth deployed after February 24, 2022. Namely, in response to the Russian attack, the Union implemented two different sanction regimes – global human rights and a country-specific regime – alongside asset freezes and travel bans¹⁶². The magnitude of the sanctions, although not completely effective, marked an unprecedented event, which deeply influenced the EU's willingness and capacity to develop its foreign policy. The Russian invasion also expanded the institutional role of the European Commission, which oversaw key responsibilities, such as addressing the refugee crisis and trade facilitation¹⁶³.

Overall, both the Balkan Wars and the Russia-Ukraine conflict had a significant impact on the EU's foreign policy development. The armed conflicts in the former Yugoslavia functioned as a reminder that war could return on the European continent, exposing the European Union fallacies and inadequacies in the security and defence sector. Despite being unprepared, the

¹⁶⁰ Cfr. § 3.3.2

¹⁶¹ Elisabeth Johansson-Nogués, "The 2022 Russia: Ukraine War—a 'Watershed' for the EU's Foreign Policy in the Region?," January 1, 2024, 193–213.

¹⁶² European Council, "EU Sanctions against Russia," Consilium, 2024.

¹⁶³ Elisabeth Johansson-Nogués, "The 2022 Russia: Ukraine War—a 'Watershed' for the EU's Foreign Policy in the Region?," January 1, 2024, 193–213.

war inspired the Member States to seek a strategic and security dimension also in a European framework, beyond NATO and national defence structures, leading to the establishment of the CFSP through the Amsterdam Treaty. In contrast, the response to Russia's invasion constituted a watershed moment for the EU. For the first time, it acted within a strategic framework, expanding the use of existing legal tools. Its strategy is still to be considered reactive and fragmented, nevertheless it is still a step forward in the political integration within the Union.

Although internal divisions are an ongoing issue which will inevitably cause fractures and uncoherent behaviours, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of these two historical moments in the broader trajectory of European progress. Through the analysis of these events, it is possible to assess how the Union is in continuous development, and how it is capable to adapt to complex and external threats and challenges. This does not mean that the strategies adopted are effective and free from criticism, but rather it confirms that the EU can manage to undergo internal and external difficulties, as it has done from the 1990s until present day.

4.3 Potential Scenarios in the Near Future

Expanding on the information discussed in the previous section, the focus will be now shifted on the future of the EU External Action. Remarkably, it examines the potential scenarios that the EU could face in the coming years and the key factors influencing the EU policies at the moment. The current scenario comprises shifting power dynamics, global challenges, and ongoing conflicts. The war in Ukraine, in fact, remains far from being resolved, and new armed conflicts have escalated, such as the Israel's military attacks against Palestinians, and renewed tensions between India and Pakistan¹⁶⁴. Accordingly, the European Union has the possibility, and the responsibility, to prove its relevance in the international scenario, in order to contribute added value in the global governance.

Firstly, as previously explored, new dimensions have been recognised by the Union, namely the military and the security sectors. As mentioned in Chapter 3, there have even been proposals concerning the creation of a "European army", advanced by French President Emmanuel Macron, alongside with his 2022 initiative for a European Political Community¹⁶⁵. Although

¹⁶⁴ Geneva Academy, "Today's Armed Conflicts," [geneva-academy.ch](https://www.geneva-academy.ch), 2023.

¹⁶⁵ Cfr. § 3.2

these options unlikely in the short term, in the last decade the EU has concretely advanced in the evolution of its external power. For instance, the foundation of a Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which grants the possibility to Member States to actively and voluntarily cooperate in the area of security and defence, based on Article 46(2) of the Treaty on the European Union¹⁶⁶, and officially formed through a Council Decision in December 2017¹⁶⁷. The innovative trait introduced by the PESCO is the legally binding nature of the decisions approved by the participating states, being the engagement in the cooperation voluntary.

Additionally, building on the PESCO project and on proposal of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council introduced the European Defence Fund in 2021¹⁶⁸. This fund allows the Member States to develop their own companies' competition and attractivity in defence projects aligned with a collaborative European perspective¹⁶⁹. Through these initiatives, the European Union is aiming at coordinating its Member States in a European defence and strategic dimension, shifting the vision of an EU capable of civilian and humanitarian aid only. Therefore, a more strategic and military transition is to be expected in the next years, albeit not all the member countries agree on further political or defensive cooperation.

A decisive event that will inevitably remodel the EU foreign policy is the re-election of Donald Trump as President of the USA in November 2024. From the beginning of his second administration in January 2025, the American President has shown a repositioning of the US foreign policy, centred in isolationist foreign policies and protectionists trade measures, by imposing massive tariffs to allied countries, including the EU. In parallel, his policies include even a progressive withdrawal of the support to Ukraine, which led to a reactive response from the EU and European leaders. Indeed, the European countries witnessed the abrupt loss of a historical strategic partner. For this reason, on April 24, 2025, the European Commission President, Ursula Von der Leyen, met with UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer in London¹⁷⁰. The

¹⁶⁶ "Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union," Legislation.gov.uk, 2020.

¹⁶⁷ PESCO, "About | PESCO," Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), n.d.

¹⁶⁸ European Commission, "European Defence Fund (EDF) - Official Webpage of the European Commission. - European Commission," defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu, 2025.

¹⁶⁹ Ibidem

¹⁷⁰ Lisa O'Carroll and Jessica Elgot, "UK and EU Defy Trump with New Strategic Partnership to Boost Trade and Security," the Guardian (The Guardian, April 29, 2025).

summit had the aim of defining a strategic partnership to address the renewed challenges posed by the second Trump administration. This plan would enhance a defence and security pact to strengthen the cooperation in Ukraine, considering diminishing American support and interest in the ongoing war¹⁷¹.

Although the impact of the tensions between the US and the EU are still to be assessed, and the EU approach is divergent, as countries like Italy are maintaining a certain closure with the American President, this situation offers a crucial indicator for this analysis. Indeed, due to the deepening crisis within the Atlantic block, the European Union has a stronger incentive in reinforcing its own autonomy and defensive capacities. The unreliability of its closest ally is prompting the EU to seek innovative solutions; hence future trends will likely reflect a more assertive response from the European front in its external actions.

4.3.1 “Rearm Europe”: a Possible Common European Response

In response to the major challenge posed by the second Trump administration, the Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen advanced a major initiative with the purpose of investing in European defence capacities: the Rearm Europe, also known as Readiness 2030 Plan¹⁷². As a consequence of increasing geopolitical instability in the continent and on the global stage, a consensus is emerging across the Member States regarding the need of a more autonomous defence under the EU framework. The initiative involves the mobilisation of 800 billion euros over the next four years in the investment and the purchase of special equipment to encourage military readiness and security, additionally to counterbalance the gap left in the support of Ukraine. The budget predicted is supposed to be divided into two main financial pillars: 150 billion euros funded through joint borrowing from the European budget, thus through collective agreement among the member states (SAFE Fund – Security Action for Europe); and 650 billion euros from potential national borrowing¹⁷³. The aim is to spend on European military facilities to reach a strategic independence from the US, create new economies of scale and be prepared for the evolution of the conflicts worldwide.

¹⁷¹ Ibidem

¹⁷² Lenin Navas, ““Rearm Europe: What’s next for European Security?–the New Federalist.”,” Young European Federalists, 2025.

¹⁷³ Ibidem

However, the project presents several limits which undermine its applicability, such as its reliance on national debt capacity. Indeed, not all the EU states have the ability to sustain a further national public debt for the rearmament, countries such as Italy, Greece or Spain have less fiscal capacity than Germany or Denmark. For this reason, a financial pillar based on national debt for an amount consisting of 650 billion euros is not feasible in the short run. The support to Ukraine remains uncertain as well because, despite the theoretical support offered by the Member States – excluding Hungary – replacing the US contribution is both costly and logistically impractical, given the EU's shortage in facilities production and limited supply chains.

Moreover, the initiative has also drawn criticisms from various political exponents throughout Europe, who argue that the European governance is privileging a strict military approach at the expense of other priorities, such as integration, education, and green transition. Therefore, internal divergencies may reflect a troubling political negotiation among the European states, which is necessary to unlock the access to the 150 billion euros based on the EU budget. It would also lead to inconsistencies in the spending of national borrowing, as countries like Poland or the Baltics still favour the purchase of American equipment, whilst others encourage a European-made production¹⁷⁴. Additionally, legal and constitutional constraints must be considered equally because countries like Malta, Austria, and Ireland have neutrality clauses included in their constitutions in regard to military development, constituting an inability to fulfil to the military commitments¹⁷⁵.

Lastly, the most critical aspect of the Rearm Europe Plan lies in its intentions. Indeed, however proposing a purchase of military equipment, it does not articulate any clear prospects for the war in Ukraine and the general strategic stance of the Union. Its current framing does not include whether the EU wants to pursue a deterrence policy, a hostility plan, full support to Ukraine, or just a strategic response to the adverse USA's current foreign policy. Consequently, the project seems ambiguous in its goals, serving merely as a (joint) procurement plan, without a defined outlook and positions on the ongoing conflict. The European strategy, therefore, risks

¹⁷⁴ Ibidem

¹⁷⁵ Clara Sophie Cramer and Ulrike Franke, "Ambiguous Alliance: Neutrality, Opt-Outs, and European Defence – European Council on Foreign Relations," ECFR, June 28, 2021.

to be not as effective as it was supposed to be, rather functioning as a symbolic act to bolster the Union's own soft power.

The proposal issued by the Commission, altogether, seems to be the only one which concretely poses a military objective, with the purpose of coordinating and creating a common European system for defence. Nonetheless, due to the limitations analysed, it is unlikely to be put into practice in the short term, but it serves more as a symbol of a European autonomy and independence attempt. Furthermore, the summits organised in cooperation with the United Kingdom represent an openness to strategic collaboration even in the post-Brexit era, demonstrating the ability of the EU to redefine its role as a strategic partner for military matters as well. The discussion initiated in these summits concerns not only the military dimension, but a broader defence project encompassing cyber warfare, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), and further warfare technological production, considering the vulnerability of the Union in these sectors as well.

Ultimately, the Rearm Europe plan has underlined a necessity more pressing than ever, by acknowledging the importance of developing an autonomous foreign policy dimension for the EU, which would otherwise vanish among the political pressure of other global actors. Indeed, this newly recognised need has led a country such as Germany, which after World War II went through the process of demilitarisation, to foster and boost its military spending, as announced by Chancellor Friedrich Merz¹⁷⁶. Germany's own rearmament could serve as an indicator for the feasibility of Rearm Europe, depending on whether the German investment remains a national effort or whether it will fall under a broader EU framework. The current situation suggests that the EU, despite the incredible progress achieved through its response to the Ukrainian crisis, remains at a crossroads. Rearmament alone will not be sufficient for a credible military independence, rather a political and strategic harmonisation is required, in parallel with a coordination of technological capabilities production.

4.4 Conclusions

Overall, the comparative analysis presented in this chapter shows a tangible evolution in the external powers of the EU, with a renewed deployment of existing legal tools. What seemed

¹⁷⁶ David Axe, "Germany Is Re-Arming for War with Russia," *Forbes*, March 18, 2025.

too abstract and ambitious in the 1990s has become more concrete from February 2022, marking a gradual progression in the autonomous foreign dimension of the Union. Nonetheless, the efficacy of the EU's response remains inadequate, given the magnitude of the crisis faced. Several weaknesses continue to undermine the efforts of the Union to function as a cohesive actor, particularly the internal divisions and differences in fiscal capacities and armament production; legal constraints due to constitutional limits; and technological dependence on foreign suppliers.

The major lesson drawn from the conflicts analysed is that the EU cannot rely completely on its allies and that strategic ambiguity is risky and unsustainable in the long term. Indeed, the recent withdrawal of the American leadership in supporting Ukraine has intensified the need for autonomy. The Union has understood that its normative nature and economic influence must be complemented by an increased political cohesion, together with a credible military plan, to increase its own relevance in the current international scenario. While Rearm Europe may not be a definitive nor feasible solution, it must be considered as an initial attempt to centralise military and security planning within a European Union context. Whilst it is less ambitious than the option of a European Army, it remains probably too progressive for some of the Member States.

The success of the proposals analysed will depend on the ability of the European Union to adapt to the emerging necessities, despite internal divergencies, with a shared vision not only to the plans to adopt, but also of the risks and the Union's global responsibility. Although the Union has made remarkable progress since the 1990s, it has not obtained any solid solution yet. Indeed, Rearm Europe and a European Political Community are far from being realised, and instead of focusing on a growing technological production, which should not be limited to military weapons alone, but communication tools, drones, and other facilities, the Union is only encouraging a rapid and chaotic rearmament, without precise guidelines.

Contrary to the Balkan wars, the war in Ukraine is an unresolved challenge, which requires a rapid EU reaction, as Ukraine's sovereignty and resistance is further hindered by Trump's administration. Although a peace agreement would be the most desirable option, the EU must still consider how it will proceed in case of a total American disengagement, hence whether it would align with its Western partner, or rather maintain its support to Ukraine, independently. Although a direct involvement in the war is unlikely and politically unsustainable, as it would

start a dangerous escalation, the participation of the EU should get stronger and more coherent. Therefore, the intervention should start with the resolution of internal divisions and the recognition of common interests and values in assisting Ukraine. Only following this fundamental step can the Union proceed with the definition and implementation of a military plan.

As a result, Member States may risk interpreting the call for this rearmament agenda as a national reinforcement of military facilities rather than an establishment of a European autonomous reality. For this reason, despite the progress made, the EU remains far from consolidating its identity in the security sector and it seems still anchored to its founding values, namely economic and trade integration. Without a common view on the priorities, the EU will not be able to assert its role as a coherent military actor and to actively respond to global challenges, in an autonomous way. Therefore, the fallacies of the Union have, in part, been addressed, but not resolved, requiring more coordinating efforts to consolidate the European Union's relevance as a geopolitical power.

Conclusion

This dissertation sought to assess the extent to which the EU's external powers have evolved over time, considering two pivotal events in contemporary European history, namely the Balkan Wars and the war in Ukraine. After providing a brief overview of the historical and legal evolution of these powers, describing the key mechanisms and tools applied by the EU in foreign affairs, the thesis has concentrated on the armed conflicts mentioned. Overall, the comparative analysis has demonstrated that there has been a gradual, yet relevant, advancement in terms of the Union's competences to act externally.

Indeed, the EU has progressively modified its approach: from being primarily a normative and economic power to a more strategic geopolitical actor. Despite the initial challenges, as exemplified by the failure of the European Defence Community Plan in 1954, the succession of conflicts on European soil has underlined the need for a coordinated external action also in a European framework. For this reason, the 1990s and the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia sparked a new desire for a common strategic and defence dimension among the EU Member States. The Balkan Wars, indeed, exposed the EU's institutional and structural weaknesses, as it failed to propose itself as a solid mediator or a geopolitical actor, instead ceding power to other international organisations, namely the UN and NATO. More progress was achieved after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, although initially hesitant, and especially after February 24, 2022. The invasion of Ukraine served as a catalyst, forcing the EU to recognise the gravity of the situation and to decisively reject marginalisation.

As analysed in the previous chapters, the EU intervention has not been fully effective nor cohesive, as Member States continue to struggle to forge a common, unified position, as exemplified by the opposing positions of France and Germany. The divergence among Member States remains the main obstacle to creating a truly cohesive foreign approach for the EU, even in other urgent questions, such as the situation in Gaza and Israel's alleged crimes against humanity. In this case, the EU is failing to act coherently, as its Member

States align on opposing fronts, thereby impeding a more concrete approach, with Italy and Germany blocking the revision of the EU-Israel Association Agreement¹⁷⁷.

In general, the proposals analysed for a future European foreign policy, in particular *Rearm Europe*, are committed to expand the scope of the European Union from just soft to hard power as well. The issue that emerged, however, concerns the possibility of this plan to fall under a national scope only, isolating the European dimension. Indeed, the project relates to a military procurement, whose structure is still based on external manufactures purchased by Member States, reflecting national rather than EU priorities. The structure of the procurement envisaged by the plan does not include the creation of a European army; rather it focuses on a reinforcement of national armed forces through a coordinated European perspective and funding, making the EU's role necessary, but limited.

The strategy relies on the EU's intention to invest in the military through an economic approach. In fact, the main purpose is to build an economy of scale in the military and strategic sector as well, consequently reaching a defence European cohesion not through a political approach, but rather through economic integration. As analysed in Chapter 1, the history of the EU reveals that economic integration has been an efficient instrument for achieving political consolidation¹⁷⁸. This insight suggests that the economic approach could offer a potential perspective for EU security and defence as well.

The comparative analysis presented by this thesis reveals a relevant shift in the EU's approach and necessities, from a marginal and symbolic role to a more coherent and direct response to international crisis. This evolution should not be mistaken for a transformation of the foundational European values of peace and prosperity upon which the EU was established. Instead, the real repositioning concerns the necessities of the Union, not its values. Despite the choice of the name *Rearm Europe*, which suggests a specific intention in terms of militarisation, this name is to be intended more as an attempt to differentiate and underscore the revolutionary character of the proposal. Indeed, in recent years the EU had to confront several geopolitical challenges, which required a decisive response. As

¹⁷⁷ "The EU Has Opened the Door to Revising the Association Agreement with Israel, but Sanctions on Settlers Skip," EU News, May 20, 2025.

¹⁷⁸ Cfr. § 1.1

affirmed by the thesis, the Union was not sufficiently effective in its intervention. However, those challenges allowed the Union to develop its strategic framework, not to alter its core value, but to safeguard the peace and security it sought since its creation.

These emerging needs reflect a shifting and unbalanced geopolitical scenario, where a multipolar system is likely to expand, and where the EU has yet to clearly define its strategic role. Recent events and conflicts have intensified the ambitions of individual Member States to advocate for their own national interests to assert their own relevance within the international arena. However, singular Member States are not able to persuasively play a role in international matters, but the EU appears to offer the best option for this aim. Consequently, developing a strategic and defensive framework is essential considering the recent geopolitical crisis.

Furthermore, the external power should not be developed merely through military procurement, but with a comprehensive intervention, including cybersecurity efforts, hybrid warfare, and technological advancements, such as the use of drones, satellites, and the AI. While policies on the cybersecurity have already been implemented, in 2020 and 2024; the technological production sector is still highly dependent on third countries, namely the US and China¹⁷⁹. For this reason, it is evident that, despite the progress analysed in this thesis, the EU still needs refinement for its external powers if it aspires to a solid crisis management capabilities and strategic independence from the US and other third states.

In conclusion, the European Union is progressively building a solid basis, with proposals aimed at a military evolution in its external competences through its foundational instrument: economic integration. The war in Ukraine served as a catalyst for a real transformation initially sparked by the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the Balkan Wars in the 1990s. This demonstrates that the evolution of the EU in its normative and legal aspects is interconnected with the geopolitical realities the Union faces, prompting for changes and adaptations to the shifting international scenario. The current events, shaped by emerging conflicts, unstable alliances and the crisis of the West hegemony, will require the EU to act

¹⁷⁹ European Commission, “Cybersecurity | Shaping Europe’s Digital Future,” [digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu](https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/), n.d.

more firmly and coherently, overcoming its internal divisions and establishing a concrete supranational framework for strategic and external action. If the economic integration in the sector is not followed by political cohesion and military reinforcement, maintaining a credible and influential role as a geopolitical and diplomatic actor among the emerging great powers.

Bibliography

Academic Resources:

1. Bartoloni, Maria Eugenia. “‘Restrictive Measures’ under Art. 215 TFEU: Towards a Unitary Legal Regime? Brief Reflections on the Bank Refah Judgment.” *DOAJ (DOAJ: Directory of Open Access Journals)*, January 1, 2021. Accessed March 7, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.15166/2499-8249/442>.
2. Burlachenko, Valeriia. “The Leadership of Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Diplomatic Relations: The Case of the Russian-Ukrainian War 2022 - 2023.” *Www.vdu.lt*, May 23, 2024. Accessed October 13, 2024. <https://www.vdu.lt/cris/entities/etd/a20869b8-b133-48b9-84e3-54f73f87226b>.
3. D’anieri, Paul. *Politics and Society in Ukraine*. Routledge, 2018.
4. Deighton, Anne. “The European Security and Defence Policy.” *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 4 (November 2002): 719–41. Accessed November 7, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5965.00395>.
5. Fabbrini, Federico, and Christy A Petit. *Research Handbook on Post-Pandemic EU Economic Governance and NGEU Law*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2024.
6. Han, ten Broeke, Alessandra Barrow, Patrick Willemsen, de Wijk Rob, Paul Sinning, Frank Bekkers, Laura Birkman, et al. “Focus Area: The Russian Invasion of Ukraine.” *Annual Report 2022*. Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2022. Accessed November 25, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.2307/resrep46997.5>.
7. Hoffman, Frank. *The Rise of Hybrid Wars*. Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007.
8. Johansson-Nogués, E. "The 2022 Russia-Ukraine War—A 'Watershed' for the EU’s Foreign Policy in the Region?" In *EU Geopolitical Actorness in a Changing World*, edited by Lika L. and Riga D., 193–213. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-81160-9_8.
9. Klamert, Marcus, Manuel Kellerbauer, and Jonathan Tomkin. “Title v General Provisions on the Union’s External Action and Specific Provisions on the Common Foreign and Security Policy.” *The EU Treaties and the Charter of Fundamental Rights*, May 23, 2019. Accessed March 7, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198759393.003.27>.

10. Kuijper, Pieter Jan. "Case 21-24/72, International Fruit Company v Produktschap Voor Siergewassen, Court of Justice of the EC, [1972] ECR 1219." *Judicial Decisions on the Law of International Organizations*, March 1, 2016, 235–44. Accessed March 7, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1093/law/9780198743620.003.0025>.
11. Kuzio, Taras. "Russia–Ukraine Crisis: The Blame Game, Geopolitics and National Identity." *Europe-Asia Studies* 70, no. 3 (March 16, 2018): 462–73. Accessed November 30, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2018.1443643>.
12. MITCHELL, LINCOLN A. *The Color Revolutions*. JSTOR. University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. Accessed October 28, 2024. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fj606>.
13. Noël, Emile. "Reflections on the Maastricht Treaty." *Government and Opposition* 27, no. 2 (April 1, 1992): 148–57. Accessed March 25, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.1992.tb00593.x>.
14. Plokhyy, Serhii. *Gates of Europe: A History of Ukraine*. New York: Basic Books, 2015.
15. Rizwan, Syed, Haider Bukhari, Ullah Amir, Shabana Khan², Noreen, Mr Tehsin, Ullah Khan, Mr Khan, and Ul Haq. "Kurdish Studies Ukraine and Russia: A Historical Analysis of Geopolitical Dynamics, National Identity, and Conflict Escalation Leading to the Present-Day Crisis." *Kurdish Studies* 12, no. 2 (2024). Accessed November 11, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.58262/ks.v12i2.430>.
16. Sadakata, Mamoru. "THE BALKANS between the EU and NATO: FOCUSING on the FORMER YUGOSLAVIA." *ROMANIAN JOURNAL of EUROPEAN AFFAIRS* 6, no. 3 (2006): 157.
17. Sánchez-Castillo, Sebastián, Esteban Galán-Cubillo, and Lindsey Drylie-Carey. "Unmuting Leadership: The Impact of Zelensky's Social Media Strategy at the Inset of the Ukrainian War." *Journal of Risk Research* 26, no. 6 (April 12, 2023): 1–15. Accessed January 16, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13669877.2023.2194900>.
18. Schutze, Robert. *European Union Law*. 3rd ed. S.L.: Oxford Univ Press, 2021.
19. Sjøvaag, Marit. "The Single European Act." *Foreign and Security Policy in the European Union*, 1998, 22–42. Accessed March 2, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446279304.n3>.
20. Strachota, Agata, and Georg Zachmann. "Łoskot- Rebalancing the EU-Russia-Ukraine Gas Relationship," n.d. Accessed May 7, 2025.

21. Vidmar, Jure. "The Annexation of Crimea and the Boundaries of the Will of the People." *German Law Journal* 16, no. 3 (July 2015): 365–83. Accessed January 3, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s2071832200020903>.
22. Voyvoda, Ebru. "Contextual Analysis of European Integration Sentiments in Post-Communist Countries: Trends, Changing Rhetoric, and Sequence of Practical Steps (1991-2021)." *EUROPEAN CHRONICLE* 7, no. 1 (February 9, 2022): 22–29. Accessed January 21, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.59430/euch/1.2022.22>.
23. Wilson, Andrew. "The Donbas between Ukraine and Russia: The Use of History in Political Disputes." *Journal of Contemporary History* 30, no. 2 (April 1995): 265–89. Accessed January 11, 2025. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200949503000204>.
- 24.

Policy Resources:

1. Axe, David. "Germany Is Re-Arming for War with Russia." *Forbes*, March 18, 2025. Accessed May 15, 2025. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2025/03/18/germany-is-re-arming-for-war-with-russia-heres-what-hundreds-of-billions-of-dollars-will-buy/>.
2. "Balkan Wars Summary | Britannica," n.d. Accessed April 12, 2024 <https://www.britannica.com/summary/Balkan-Wars>.
3. BBC. "Balkans War: A Brief Guide." *BBC News*, March 18, 2016. Accessed May 3, 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-17632399>.
4. Bompreszi, Pietro, Ivan Kharitonov, and Christoph Trebesch. "Ukraine Support Tracker - a Database of Military, Financial and Humanitarian Aid to Ukraine." Kiel Institute for the World Economy, February 16, 2024. Accessed November 27, 2024. <https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/ukraine-support-tracker/>.
5. Britannica. "Ukraine - the Russian Invasion of Ukraine | Britannica." *www.britannica.com*, 2024. Accessed October 7, 2024 <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-Russian-invasion-of-Ukraine>.
6. Busek, Erhard. "The Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe: Achievements and Future Challenges," n.d. Accessed May 6, 2025.

7. Caprile, Anna, and Carmen-Cristina Cirlig. “EU Sanctions against Russia 2025: State of Play, Perspectives and Challenges | Think Tank | European Parliament.” Europa.eu, 2025. Accessed December 17, 2024. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI\(2025\)767243](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2025)767243).
8. Cramer, Clara Sophie, and Ulrike Franke. “Ambiguous Alliance: Neutrality, Opt-Outs, and European Defence – European Council on Foreign Relations.” ECFR, June 28, 2021. <https://ecfr.eu/publication/ambiguous-alliance-neutrality-opt-outs-and-european-defence/>.
9. Consilium. “Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation Establishing a Partnership between the European Communities and Their Member States, of the One Part, and the Russian Federation, of the Other Part,” 2025. Accessed March 7, 2025. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents/treaties-agreements/agreement/?id=1994022>.
10. Consilium. “EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy,” 2024. Accessed March 17, 2025. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/high-representative-foreign-affairs-security-policy/>.
11. Consilium. “How the EU Adopts and Reviews Sanctions,” 2019. Accessed March 17, 2025. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-adoption-review-procedure/>.
12. Consilium. “Why the EU Adopts Sanctions,” 2022. Accessed November 27, 2024. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/why-sanctions/>.
13. Cremona, Marise. “EU WORKING PAPERS EU ROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE a Constitutional Basis for Effective External Action? An Assessment of the Provisions on EU External Action in the Constitutional Treaty. Department of Law,” 2003. Accessed April 15, 2025. https://cadmus.eui.eu/bitstream/handle/1814/6293/LAW_2006-30.pdf?sequence=1.
14. Dickinson, Peter. “The 2008 Russo-Georgian War: Putin’s Green Light.” Atlantic Council, August 7, 2021. Accessed November 17, 2024. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-2008-russo-georgian-war-putins-green-light/>.
15. EEAS. “EEAS | EEAS Website.” www.eeas.europa.eu, 2025. Accessed March 7, 2025. <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/en>.

16. EEAS. “European Union Military Staff: 20 Years Contributing to European Defence and Security,” 2024. Accessed March 24, 2025. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-union-military-staff-20-years-contributing-european-defence-and-security_en.
17. “Eastern Europe | EEAS,” n.d. Accessed December 12, 2024 https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eastern-europe_en.
18. Ellerbeck, Stefan. “1 Year On: A Timeline of the War in Ukraine.” World Economic Forum, February 23, 2023. Accessed November 24, 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2023/02/ukraine-war-timeline-one-year/>.
19. EU News. “The EU Has Opened the Door to Revising the Association Agreement with Israel, but Sanctions on Settlers Skip.” May 20, 2025. Accessed May 23, 2025. <https://www.eunews.it/en/2025/05/20/the-eu-has-opened-the-door-to-revising-the-association-agreement-with-israel-but-sanctions-on-settlers-skip/>.
20. “EU WORKING PAPERS EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE a Constitutional Basis for Effective External Action? An Assessment of the Provisions on EU External Action in the Constitutional Treaty MARISE CREMONA Depa R T Ment of Law,” n.d.
21. eur-lex.europa.eu. “EUR-Lex - High_representative_cfsp - EN - EUR-Lex,” n.d. Accessed March 30, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/high-representative-of-the-union-for-foreign-affairs-and-security-policy.html>.
22. eur-lex.europa.eu. “EUR-Lex - Stabilisation_association_process - EN - EUR-Lex,” n.d. Accessed May 2, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/stabilisation-and-association-process.html>.
23. “EUR-Lex - 12008E216 - EN.” *Europa.eu*, 2025. Accessed March 7, 2025. <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:12008E216:EN:HTML>.
24. “EUR-Lex - 12008E218 - EN.” *Europa.eu*, 2025. Accessed March 7, 2025. <http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/lex/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:12008E218:EN:HTML>.
25. Europa.eu. “EUR-Lex - 12008M021 - EN - EUR-Lex,” 2025. Accessed April 27, 2025. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/treaty/teu_2008/art_21/oj/eng.

26. Europa.eu. “EUR-Lex - 61970CJ0022 - EN - EUR-Lex,” 2025. Accessed April 27, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:61970CJ0022>.
27. Europa.eu. “EUR-Lex - Xy0023 - EN - EUR-Lex,” 2017. Accessed April 14, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM:xy0023>.
28. Europa.eu. “Solidarity Principle | European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions,” 2024. Accessed March 7, 2025. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/en/european-industrial-relations-dictionary/solidarity-principle>.
29. European Commission. “Cybersecurity | Shaping Europe’s Digital Future.” digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu, n.d. Accessed May 18, 2025. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/cybersecurity>.
30. European Commission. “EU - Western Balkans Relations.” Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood, December 2022. Accessed April 28, 2025. https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/eu-western-balkans-relations_en.
31. European Commission. “Eurobarometer.” europa.eu, n.d. Accessed October 27, 2024. <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2693>.
32. European Commission, “European Defence Fund (EDF) - Official Webpage of the European Commission. - European Commission,” defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu, 2025. Accessed May 14, 2025. https://defence-industry-space.ec.europa.eu/eu-defence-industry/european-defence-fund-edf-official-webpage-european-commission_en.
33. “European Community Aid to Eastern Europe - Geopolitical Upheavals in Europe after 1989 - CVCE Website,” n.d. Accessed October 12, 2024. <https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/1f5d29d1-bc79-44af-ae41-6fdb3f41608e/d41c0d3f-3bed-4585-a9a9-1a13320f39b9>.
34. European Council. “EU Military Support for Ukraine.” Consilium, 2022. Accessed November 15, 2024. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/military-support-ukraine/>.
35. European Council, “EU Sanctions against Russia,” Consilium, 2024. Accessed May 12, 2025. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-russia/>.

36. European Court of Auditors. “Special Report 02/2024: The Coordination Role of the European External Action Service,” 2024. Accessed March 7, 2025. <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/publications?ref=SR-2024-02>.
37. European Parliament. “Foreign Policy: Aims, Instruments and Achievements | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament.” Europa.eu, April 2019. Accessed March 13, 2025. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/158/foreign-policy-aims-instruments-and-achievements>.
38. European Union External Action. “About the European External Action Service | EEAS Website.” www.eeas.europa.eu, August 18, 2021. Accessed April 7, 2025. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/about-european-external-action-service_en.
39. European Union. “EU Enlargement - European Union.” european-union.europa.eu, 2025. Accessed May 4, 2025. https://european-union.europa.eu/principles-countries-history/eu-enlargement_en.
40. “France’s Macron Pushes for ‘True European Army.’” *BBC News*, November 6, 2018, sec. Europe. Accessed October 7, 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46108633>.
41. Gavin, Gabriel, Csongor Körömi, and Nicholas Vinocur. “Orbán’s New Threat: I’ll End Russia Sanctions Unless Ukraine Pumps Putin’s Gas.” *POLITICO*, January 24, 2025. Accessed April 27, 2025. <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-viktor-orban-threat-sanction-russia-ukraine-putin-gas/>.
42. Geneva Academy, “Today’s Armed Conflicts,” geneva-academy.ch, 2023. Accessed May 14, 2025. <https://geneva-academy.ch/galleries/today-s-armed-conflicts>.
43. “Germany’s Dependence on Imported Fossil Fuels.” *Clean Energy Wire*, April 3, 2024. Accessed October 7, 2025. <https://www.cleanenergywire.org/factsheets/germanys-dependence-imported-fossil-fuels>.
44. History.com Editors. “Tito Is Made President of Yugoslavia for Life | April 7, 1963 | HISTORY.” *HISTORY*, March 4, 2010. Accessed April 17, 2025. <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/april-7/tito-is-made-president-for-life>.

45. Holocaust Museum Houston. "Genocide in Bosnia." Hmh.org. Holocaust Museum Houston, 2019. Accessed April 29, 2025. <https://hnh.org/library/research/genocide-in-bosnia-guide/>.
46. Hudson Institute. "100 Days of the Kursk Operation: What the US Can Do to Help Ukraine," 2025. Accessed January 7, 2025. <https://www.hudson.org/events/100-days-kursk-operation-what-us-can-do-help-ukraine-peter-rough-can-kasapoglu-luke-coffee>.
47. Immenkamp, Beatrix. "EU Sanctions: A Key Foreign and Security Policy Instrument," 2024.
48. International Energy Agency. "RePowerEU Plan: Joint European Action on Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency – Policies." IEA, January 30, 2024. Accessed November 20, 2024. <https://www.iea.org/policies/15691-repowereu-plan-joint-european-action-on-renewable-energy-and-energy-efficiency>.
49. jfcnaples.nato.int. "13 - the Crisis in Former Yugoslavia," 2025. Accessed April 27, 2025. <https://jfcnaples.nato.int/page6322744/13-the-crisis-in-former-yugoslavia->.
50. Kitsoft. "Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine - Ukraine-EU Association Agreement." mfa.gov.ua, August 4, 2021. Accessed December 13, 2024. <https://mfa.gov.ua/en/about-ukraine/european-integration/eu-ukraine-association-agreement>.
51. Kustura, Arnesa B. "Bosnian War- a Brief Overview | Remembering Srebrenica." Srebrenica.org.uk, June 24, 2021. Accessed April 30, 2025. <https://srebrenica.org.uk/what-happened/history/bosnian-war-a-brief-overview>.
52. Lampe, John R. "Bosnian War." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*, March 27, 2019. Accessed May 2, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Bosnian-War>.
53. Lazarou, Elena, and Lana Peric. "Briefing the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw Expectations and Priorities," 2016.
54. Le Gloannec, Anne. "The EU, Russia and Ukraine: A Double Track with No End? The Twenty-Year Transition: 1990-2000s: The EU and Member-State Policies on Russia," 2015.
55. Legislation.gov.uk. "Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union," 2020. Accessed March 3, 2025. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eut/teu/article/40>.

56. Legislation.gov.uk. “Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,” 2020. Accessed March 3, 2025. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/eut/teec/article/21>.
57. Lohsen, Andrew, and Pierre Morcos. “Understanding the Normandy Format and Its Relation to the Current Standoff with Russia.” *www.csis.org*, February 9, 2022. Accessed October 27, 2024. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/understanding-normandy-format-and-its-relation-current-standoff-russia>.
58. Maciejewski, Mariusz . “The Maastricht and Amsterdam Treaties | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament.”, 2024. Accessed March 7, 2025. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/3/the-maastricht-and-amsterdam-treaties>.
59. Meister, Stefan. ““Germany and France Are Drawing Two Completely Different Conclusions from the War in Ukraine.”” *Le Monde.fr*, March 10, 2024. Accessed October 29, 2024. https://www.lemonde.fr/en/opinion/article/2024/03/10/germany-and-france-are-drawing-two-completely-different-conclusions-from-the-war-in-ukraine_6604289_23.html.
60. Minakov, Mykhailo. “The Three Ages of Zelensky’s Presidency | Wilson Center.” *www.wilsoncenter.org*, June 9, 2022. Accessed November 7, 2024. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/three-ages-zelenskys-presidency>.
61. Mittal, Vikram. “Russian and Ukrainian Forces Battle over Islands in the Dnipro River.” *Forbes*, December 18, 2024. Accessed January 15, 2025. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/vikrammittal/2024/12/18/russian-and-ukrainian-forces-battle-over-islands-in-the-dnipro-river/>.
62. NATO. “Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between NATO and the Russian Federation Signed in Paris, France.” NATO, May 27, 1997. Accessed January 17, 2025. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_25468.htm.
63. Nattrass, William. “Hungary’s ‘Pro-Russia’ Stance Was Inevitable.” *POLITICO*, September 15, 2022. Accessed January 17, 2025. <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-pro-russia-stance-inevitable/>.
64. Navas, Lenin. “Rearm Europe: What’s next for European Security?–the New Federalist. .” *Young European Federalists*, 2025. Accessed May 14, 2025.

<https://www.thenewfederalist.eu/rearm-europe-what-s-next-for-european-security?lang=fr>.

65. O’Carroll, Lisa, and Jessica Elgot. “UK and EU Defy Trump with New Strategic Partnership to Boost Trade and Security.” *the Guardian*. The Guardian, April 29, 2025. Accessed May 14, 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/apr/28/uk-offers-eu-a-strategic-partnership-to-boost-trade-and-security>.
66. PESCO, “About | PESCO,” Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), n.d. Accessed 14 May, 2025. <https://www.pesco.europa.eu/about/>.
67. President of Russia. “President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma Opened the Year of Russia in Ukraine in an Official Ceremony,” January 27, 2003. Accessed November 25, 2024. <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/28058>.
68. Prometheus. “Донбас в огні. Путівник зоною конфлікту,” August 10, 2023. Accessed December 16, 2024. <https://prometheus.ngo/donbas-v-ogni>.
69. “REPowerEU Plan.” Europa.eu, 2022. Accessed October 28, 2024. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52022DC0230>.
70. Representation in Ireland. “The Bucha Massacre: Mapping a Year of Kremlin Denial,” April 3, 2023. Accessed November 27, 2024. https://ireland.representation.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/bucha-massacre-mapping-year-kremlin-denial-2023-04-03-0_en.
71. Ryan, Mick. “Putin’s Chilling Nuclear Threat Has One Strategic Target.” *The Sydney Morning Herald*, November 20, 2024. Accessed January 29, 2025. <https://www.smh.com.au/world/europe/putin-s-chilling-nuclear-threat-has-one-strategic-target-20241120-p5ks6w.html>.
72. Sahadžić, Maja. “The Bonn Powers in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Between a Rock and a Hard Place.” *ConstitutionNet*, 2022. Accessed April 27, 2025. <https://constitutionnet.org/news/bonn-powers-bosnia-and-herzegovina-between-rock-and-hard-place>.
73. Sergatskova, Katerina. “Aftermath of the Kakhovka Dam Collapse | Wilson Center.” *www.wilsoncenter.org*, June 20, 2023. Accessed November 7, 2024. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/aftermath-kakhovka-dam-collapse>.
74. Sergey Sayapin, and Evhen Tsybulenko. *The Use of Force against Ukraine and International Law: Jus Ad Bellum, Jus in Bello, Jus Post Bellum*. The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press. C, 2018.

75. "SHAPE History | That a 1952 Treaty Created a European Army within NATO," n.d. Accessed February 17, 2025. <https://shape.nato.int/page21485221>.
76. Stepan Andriyovich Kryzhanivsky, and Oleksa Eliseyovich Zasenko. "Ukraine - the Orange Revolution and the Yushchenko Presidency." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*, February 13, 2019. Accessed October 11, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Ukraine/The-Orange-Revolution-and-the-Yushchenko-presidency>.
77. Sullivan, Colleen. "Kosovo Liberation Army | History & Facts." In *Encyclopædia Britannica*, February 25, 2019. Accessed April 16, 2025. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Kosovo-Liberation-Army>.
78. Sullivan, Emily, and Gabriela Ivanova. "Explainer: Eastern Europeans Split over Russia's War in Ukraine." *globalaffairs.org*, November 8, 2022. Accessed January 7, 2025. <https://globalaffairs.org/commentary-and-analysis/blogs/explainer-eastern-europeans-split-over-russias-war-ukraine>.
79. Szewczyk, Bart M.J. "The EU in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Powers, Decisions and Legitimacy." *Ssrn.com*, 2024. Accessed April 30, 2025. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1881717>.
80. "The European Political Community (EPC) - Historical Events in the European Integration Process (1945–2014) - CVCE Website," n.d. Accessed March 2, 2025. <https://www.cvce.eu/en/recherche/unit-content/-/unit/02bb76df-d066-4c08-a58a-d4686a3e68ff/6550430e-98c0-4441-8a60-ec7c001c357b>.
81. "The Leadership of Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Diplomatic Relations: The Case of the Russian-Ukrainian War 2022-2023." 2024.
82. "The Treaty of Lisbon - Historical Events in the European Integration Process (1945–2014) - CVCE Website," n.d. Accessed March 12, 2025. <https://www.cvce.eu/en/education/unit-content/-/unit/02bb76df-d066-4c08-a58a-d4686a3e68ff/d7da2396-d047-4c4e-ae1b-f9edb47e3739>.
83. "The Strategic Compass of the European Union," n.d. Accessed October 12, 2024. <https://www.strategic-compass-european-union.com/>.
84. "The Western Balkans | Fact Sheets on the European Union | European Parliament." *Europa.eu*, April 2019. Accessed April 7, 2025. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/168/the-western-balkans>

85. “Treaty Establishing the European Coal and Steel Community, ECSC Treaty.” Europa.eu, 2017. Accessed March 7, 2025. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=legisum:xy0022>.
86. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “Ukraine Refugee Situation.” data.unhcr.org. UNHCR, December 6, 2024. Accessed January 17, 2025. <https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>.
87. United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. “The Conflicts | International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.” ICTY. United Nations, 2017. Accessed April 11, 2025. <https://www.icty.org/en/about/what-former-yugoslavia/conflicts>.
88. United Nations. “Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression (Articles 39-51).” United Nations. United Nations, 1945. Accessed March 7, 2025. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-7>.
89. Weber, Gesine. “Give France Credit for Its Strategic Change - War on the Rocks.” War on the Rocks, May 6, 2024. Accessed November 14, 2024. <https://warontherocks.com/2024/05/31143/>.
90. Wettengel, Julian. “Gas Pipeline Nord Stream 2 Links Germany to Russia, but Splits Europe.” Clean Energy Wire, August 16, 2018. Accessed November 23, 2024. <https://www.cleanenergywire.org/factsheets/gas-pipeline-nord-stream-2-links-germany-russia-splits-europe>.
91. World Population Review. “Countries That Recognize Kosovo 2021.” worldpopulationreview.com, 2023. Accessed May 2, 2025. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-that-recognize-kosovo>.
92. Yugom Interactive. “Russia Proposes a New Security Architecture in Europe and beyond | EDAM.” Russia Proposes a New Security Architecture in Europe and Beyond | EDAM, 2022. Accessed January 7, 2025. <https://edam.org.tr/en/blog/russia-proposes-a-new-security-architecture-in-europe-and-beyond>.