

ATHENA

CRITICAL INQUIRIES IN LAW, PHILOSOPHY AND GLOBALIZATION

Wartime Enlargement: How the War in Ukraine Transforms the Development of EU

OLEKSIY KANDYUK

Walter Benjamin Professor, University of Konstanz (Germany)

✉ akandyuk@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3376-486X>

ABSTRACT

The war in Ukraine has profoundly transformed the European Union's enlargement policies, signalling a shift from economic-driven integration to a geopolitically motivated approach. Ukraine's pursuit of EU membership during wartime highlights the interplay between strategic security imperatives and the longstanding principle of conditionality. This process not only reflects the EU's adaptability to external pressures but also tests its ability to balance integration with the preservation of internal cohesion. The study explores how the conflict has acted as a catalyst for unprecedented consolidation among EU Member States, fostering unity on foreign policy while exposing institutional limits. The unique challenges of wartime accession underscore the need for new governance models and innovative strategies to maintain the EU's normative and regulatory influence. As Ukraine's integration unfolds, the findings illuminate broader implications for the EU's transformative potential amidst shifting geopolitical landscapes.

Keywords: European integration, EU enlargement, Ukraine accession, European security, EU institutional reform, EU strategic autonomy

ATHENA

Volume 4.2/2024, pp. 169-193

Conference Papers

ISSN 2724-6299 (Online)

<https://doi.org/10.6092/issn.2724-6299/20279>



1. Introduction

Since gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine has undergone numerous political, economic, and social transitions that, despite various challenges, have brought the country closer to the European Union (EU). The ongoing Russian invasion has not only intensified Ukraine's resolve but has also led to renewed commitments from both Ukrainian leadership and EU officials to strengthen Ukraine's association with the EU, offering a clear "European perspective" and laying the groundwork for European Integration of Ukraine which is likely to trigger another major expansion.

But compared to the Eastern enlargements of 2004 and 2007, the EU now faces entirely different internal political conditions in potential accession countries and has undergone significant changes itself (Anghel and Džankić, 2023). These altered accession conditions directly impact the EU's enlargement policy, as the previously consistently proven political frameworks no longer efficient and applicable in the wake of Russia's aggressive war. Even the recent discussions on "staged accession" (Emerson and Blockmans, 2022) appear outdated due to the geopolitical pressures demanding an accelerated accession for Ukraine (Börzel, 2023; Schimmelfennig, 2023). Thus, the EU's Eastern enlargement during wartime signifies a "geopolitical enlargement" (Osipchuk and Raik, 2023), where the EU plays a central role in reorganizing European security (Anghel and Džankić, 2023; Helwig, 2023; Scicluna and Auer, 2023). The EU's enlargement policy has now primarily become a policy of geopolitical adjustment, with Ukraine's EU accession process turning into a geostrategic litmus test for the EU.

Another consequence of the changed security policy landscape is that national and European directive bodies are now called upon to radically rethink the EU's Eastern enlargement strategy in light of Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine and to reorganize the European security architecture.

Similarly, academic study of relevant security and integration policy issues faces significant challenges in explaining these developments. The EU's principle of strict conditionality clashes with the political reality of a politicized EU, which had already manifested before the full-scale invasion through both internal and external contestation of the EU's norms and rules (Bélanger and Schimmelfennig, 2021; Johansson-Nogués et al., 2020). Russia's war against Ukraine has intensified the challenge for all participants in the process, leading to Ukraine's demands for rapid EU accession encountering resistance from member states (Gawrich and Wydra, 2024).

Therefore, the EU faces the task of developing enlargement tools that ensure maximum legitimacy for Ukraine's accession to the EU from all sides. Russia's aggressive war presents the EU with unprecedented challenges that ontologically threaten its stability, security, and international authority (Della Sala, 2018; Kinnvall, Manners and Mitzen, 2018; Mitzen, 2017).

To address these issues, the EU must develop new methods of enlargement and generate new knowledge, which it will formalize after achieving success. Meanwhile, it must test emerging and anticipated disagreements regarding the EU's norms catalogue during accession negotiations and provide special platforms to address contentious sections of the negotiations.

It is also worth noting that the EU's Eastern enlargement policy and Ukraine's accession process are taking place not only during wartime but also under drastically changed and highly politicized conditions within the EU and its neighbourhood (Bélanger and Schimmelfennig, 2021; Gawrich and Wydra, 2024; Börzel and Risse, 2018; Zeitlin et al., 2019). This is compounded by the fact that potential EU enlargement to ten new members will confront the EU that is not only fatigued by enlargement but also in urgent need of reforms (Börzel, 2023). The prospects and conditions of its membership do not inspire constant confidence due to its own rule of law crisis and do not meet the same readiness for domestic political reforms in all accession candidates: while Ukraine views both its resistance to Russia and its EU accession process as an embodiment of its aspiration for democracy

and liberalism, some governments in the Western Balkans are turning away from the EU—and towards Russia and China (Börzel, 2023; Vachudova, 2019). Along with the geostrategic imperative of enlargement, these unequal starting conditions call into question the “external incentives model” (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004; Vachudova, 2005; see also Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2019) with its focus on conditionality and require not only a new enlargement methodology (Emerson and Blockmans, 2022; Schimmelfennig, 2023) but also new governance models that can theoretically represent the EU’s enlargement policy in light of the changed European security architecture.

Analyzing Ukraine’s EU accession process thus becomes crucial not only for understanding the specific challenges and opportunities it presents but also for developing new frameworks for EU enlargement policy that can adapt to the rapidly evolving geopolitical realities of Europe.

2. Crisis or Transformation?

The last half-decade has been more than rich in overlapping crises for the European Union. The crises occurred in different areas, and it is difficult to say which one was more powerful and had a greater impact on the EU. The migration crisis, which has become a significant economic and social challenge for many member-states and has obfuscated relations between them, forcing countries sometimes to even depart from the Schengen Agreement by establishing control at the borders of national states. The crisis of the rule of law associated with several legal reforms in Hungary and Poland, which jeopardized the fundamental values of the European Union – the rule of law and democratic governance. Brexit, which forced the United Kingdom to leave the Union after almost 50 years of membership and shook the unity of the Community. Or COVID-19, which has become an unprecedented challenge to healthcare systems around the world.

But in fact, despite the problems and miscalculations associated with responding to multifaceted crises, the final decisions and transformations of the pan-European toolkit as a response allow some scholars to even conclude that crises are the indispensable basis for every transformational step on the path of the EU's institutional development, and only during crises does political decision-making in member states become receptive to further EU integration (Radović, 2022).

Leaving aside the certainly interesting hypothesis, we cannot but agree that the flow of crises has indeed significantly transformed the EU, and that transformation is not yet complete, because the war in Ukraine has become the most serious challenge for the European Union.

The discussion about the transformative powers of the European Union has been and is, in particular, a discussion about the peculiarities of the development and transformation of the EU itself, as a largely unique political construct of our time. Burgess considers the EU and its development to be a unique experiment, comparable to the birth of the United States of America 250 years ago. Attempts to categorize the EU in the straitjacket of the federation-confederation dichotomy do not reflect the fact that it is a new invention (Burgess, 2000, 266), a unique experiment:

The EU represents something distinctly new in the world of both inter-state and intrastate relations. It is not yet a union of individuals in a body politic, but it is more than a confederation understood in the classical sense. It exists, then, in a kind of conceptual limbo, in a twilight zone where the firm boundaries that once defined it have been gradually eroded, reducing many of its distinct features to a blurred and indistinct union which has no name. The nature of its origins and development have combined to shape a peculiar, unique form the like of which we have never seen before. (Burgess, 2000, 40-41).

After Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, this experiment entered a critical phase. Since Putin's aggression, EU member states have made serious efforts to counter it without engaging in active warfare. Contrary to all expectations, they have managed to create a system of economic sanctions against Russia and some of its prominent citizens, as well as a dynamic package of humanitarian and military instruments to help Ukraine defend itself. This situation is likely to have some important consequences for the development of EU itself.

3. The Logic of Transformation

In the formative years of European Studies as a discipline, most political scientists studying European integration viewed the EU as a form of international organization. A dominant perspective explained the puzzle of deep and extensive EU cooperation as a product of the economic interests of the participating states and their relative bargaining power in EU negotiations (Hoffmann & Keohane, 1991; Moravcsik, 1998). Another group of scholars emphasized the development of a governance regime with truly supranational characteristics, but they also remained conceptually rooted mostly in intra-state relations (Burley & Mattli, 1993; Haas, 1964). Since the EU did not possess essential elements of statehood, it could not, in their view, be fruitfully studied using state-building approaches. Instead, scholars in this tradition developed a new conceptual vocabulary built around concepts such as "multi-level governance" or various forms of supranational institutionalization (Hooghe & Marks, 2001; Sandholtz & Stone Sweet, 1998). Most researchers, with a few exceptions, do not place the EU in a comparative historical perspective of state formation, but instead tend to view it as a special case of supranational political integration.

However, some researchers have directly compared the development of the EU to historical processes of state formation or state building, without, of

course, assuming that the EU will or should become a state (Bartolini, 2005; Börner & Eigmüller, 2015; Mérand, 2008).

Positioning the EU in this way allows us to assess the transformative potential of the EU also in terms of the so-called “bellicist” logic that has stimulated the emergence of new states in the past: the logic of collective security associated with war, external threats and challenges. This logic is especially relevant at the current stage of European Union development.

Theorists of state formation and comparative political development have demonstrated the historical significance of war and security threats in promoting the transformation of political forms around the world (Centeno, 2002; Ertman, 1997; Herbst, 1990; Porter, 1994; Taylor & Botea, 2008).

This literature emphasizes that the functional demands of war, including revenue extraction, payments, and logistical complexity, created strong incentives for elites to centralize administrative authority and move from personalized, traditional forms of politics to bureaucratized and impersonal ones (Hintze, 1975; Porter, 1994). Also of great political importance was the perception of a security threat, which was often used to overcome the objections of community groups and local authorities to the transfer of power to the center.

In their view, the EU’s institutional development is highly unbalanced: it has great legal power over European citizens and businesses through a powerful judiciary and a voluminous body of law (*acquis communautaire*), and it projects that legal influence internationally as the world’s leading regulatory force (Bradford, 2020). However, the EU’s powerful legal and regulatory powers stand in stark contrast to its minimal independent capacity, weak administrative apparatus, and virtually nonexistent enforcement power.

The incompleteness of the EU institutions has recently given rise to several major political crises with serious economic and humanitarian consequences. The tragedies surrounding the European refugee crisis were also partly due to the uneven development of the EU migration and asylum regime, which created an extensive legal framework for migration and asylum without

providing the EU authorities with meaningful centralized enforcement capacities.

Of course, the state-building analysis in the classical sense is not fully applicable to the EU, as it is not a state in the traditional sense as Weber characterized it. Moreover, the vast majority of EU citizens and leaders do not want it to be such. However, speaking from the perspective of state-building, the researchers do not mean or assume that the EU will ever completely overcome the national sovereignty of its members. The EU does not have to be a Weberian state or be doomed to become one for the state-building perspective to be a powerful tool to understand the EU's characteristic unbalanced development model and its transformative potential for the future (Kathleen and McNamara, 2022).

From this perspective, the EU is an innovative and coherent form of political organization that exercises significant political power over the citizens of its member states in several policy areas (McNamara, 2015). The EU has also been empowered to act externally on behalf of its members as a unite foreign policy actor in several diplomatic arenas (Hill & Smith, 2011; McNamara, 2015, p. 135-160).

The historical experience of the European Union's development illustrates the dominance of the market construction logic over the logic of security. Modern EU certainly has its origins in the market construction project. The Treaty of Rome, which established the European Economic Community in 1957, the progenitor of the modern EU, was primarily aimed at creating a single European market that would guarantee the free movement of goods, capital, services and labour. The Single European Act of 1985, which sought to eliminate all barriers to trade within the EU by 1992, was an important milestone in achieving this goal and a critical moment in the delegation of EU powers by member states. Private commercial interests themselves actively promoted the European single market, and European political elites saw the benefits of consolidating European markets (Cowles, 2012).

However, European political actors also strategically used the market framework as a powerful ideological resource to overcome resistance to centralization of power.

It was the desire to avoid renewed hostilities between the great powers in the post-World War II period that was the most important initial motivation for European integration, as expressed in the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) in 1952 and the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957 (Dinan, 1994; Trachtenberg, 1999). Similarly, the further deepening of the EU project over the following decades was widely understood as an attempt to solve the “German problem” by binding Germany to its former enemies through a set of deeply intertwined governance institutions.

In addition, the subsequent enlargements of the EU contained an equally powerful geopolitical component and had a significant geopolitical impetus for both the states that became new members of the European Union and the old EU “backbone”.

For example, it is obvious that the fourth enlargement was not possible for a long time solely for geopolitical reasons – the influence of the Soviet Union, the existence of East Germany, etc. The actual change in the foreign policy situation inspired the very rapid accession of Austria, Sweden, and Finland.

Moreover, the accession of the above countries to the EU made it possible to include the Baltic States and Slovenia in the enlargement agenda and in many ways determined the great enlargement of 2004.

Thus, of course, being driven by economic and market interests, the logic of enlargement has always contained a geopolitical component, which, in turn, has been a trigger for the transformation of not only the territories adjacent to the EU, but also the structure of the European Union itself.

4. Wartime Paradigm

In the context of the transformation of the European Union, there are several key issues that should be addressed after Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022.

First, an important question concerns whether the war in Ukraine has changed European foreign and security policy, whether the EU has managed to adapt to the new geopolitical reality? Was its activity enhanced or limited by the confrontation with Russia?

In fact, since the outbreak of the war, the EU has taken unprecedented steps to use its collective weight to punish Russia for its aggression. These include financial sanctions,¹ the exclusion of some Russian banks from the SWIFT international payment system, the imposition of a no-fly zone over the EU for all Russian aircrafts, a ban on Russian media broadcasting in the EU, and finally, the financing of arms shipments and the sending of fighter jets from the member-states for use by Ukraine.² The EU has never done anything like this before.

It may well be noted here that Russian aggression has consolidated the European Union in a rapid and unprecedented way. As Cross and Karolewski (2021) point out, the EU has been a largely reactive state, but as a result of Russian aggression in Eastern Europe, it is becoming increasingly proactive (Cross and Karolewski, 2021). The EU's activity and power are strengthened rather than restrained by Russia's actions.

Another important issue is whether the European Union has retained its transformative power. The EU's enlargements to the South in the 1980s and to the East in the 2000s were undoubtedly success stories, despite nuances in consequences and setbacks in some countries. However, the delay in the accession of the Western Balkans and Turkey once again underscores the

¹<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions/restrictive-measures-against-russia-over-ukraine/>.

² <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/03/02/these-are-the-7-russian-banks-banned-from-swift-and-the-two-exempted>.

importance of a credible membership perspective to pay off the costs of internal reforms. Pro-Russian factions and rent-seeking governments are gaining strength in areas where the EU fails to deliver on its membership commitments. In the case of Ukraine, the unique case of enlargement during wartime also matters.

Certainly, the EU's ability to bring about change relies heavily on the credible prospect of membership provided by a community of democracies within the security domain, serving as an effective means to reinforce liberal democracy from an external standpoint. The conditions for EU accession empower coalitions advocating for liberal reforms against conservative nationalists and authoritarian populists. Additionally, these conditions create compelling incentives for governments driven by self-interest and a desire for power to implement challenging reforms aimed at enhancing democracy and good governance (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2004; Vachudova, 2005).

Undoubtedly, candidate status, along with sanctions and weapons, has become a powerful political signal that the West supports Ukraine in its fight against Putin's aggression and that Europeans are ready to contribute to preserving the liberal international order. However, providing security guarantees to future member states in Eastern Europe will require the EU to develop strategic autonomy in defence policy. So far, EU governments are only willing "to contribute, together with partners, to future security commitments to Ukraine, which will help Ukraine defend itself in the long term, deter acts of aggression and resist destabilisation efforts" (European Council, 2023). This marks the first instance in which EU member states have made security commitments to a third nation. However, a security obligation that requires collaboration with other nations differs from a security guarantee provided solely by the EU. Even if such a guarantee were offered, it would not be credible, given that the EU currently does not possess independent military capabilities.

In this context, the study of the EU's external subjectivity is particularly interesting. In other words, how the EU is perceived and reacted to by external actors as an agent of foreign policy. Particularly interesting in our context is the analysis of the perception of EU foreign policy by the Ukrainian side. Natalia Chaban and Ole Elgström in the book "The Ukrainian Crisis and the EU's Roles in Foreign Policy" use role theory and perception research to study EU foreign policy and EU-Ukraine relations.

Four roles of the EU in politics have been identified in the Ukrainian crisis: the EU as a global and regional leader; the EU as a bilateral partner; the EU as a mediator; and the EU as an actor in public diplomacy. While EU policy makers' own perceptions of effectiveness and efficiency are generally positive, an analysis of the perceptions of the Ukrainian elite shows a different picture. The EU is seen as a significant force in the economic and regulatory sphere, but as an ineffective mediator, weak in public diplomacy, and non-existent in the security sphere (Chaban & Elgström, 2021). Without going beyond the scope of our article, we would venture to assume that similar perceptions can be established by analyzing the attitudes of political elites in other European countries as well.

One of the main reasons for this perception is the striking asymmetry between the economic and geopolitical power of the European Union. The EU is the third largest economy in the world, but it does not consider itself – and is not considered by others – one of the world's leading political and military powers.

After the failure of the European Defence Community Treaty of 1954 and West Germany's accession to NATO in 1955, US-led NATO became the dominant collective security organization for the emerging political Union of Europe, and this relieved pressure on the EU to assume this role as it developed (Howorth and Keeler, 2004). Even when the EU later established a Common Foreign and Security Policy and a European Security and Defence Policy, the development of the Union as a security actor has always lagged far behind its development as an economic and legal state. Although it is

impossible to determine now what security policy of the EU would have been like without the support of the United States and NATO, it is clear that, since NATO met the EU's collective security needs, the EU had far fewer incentives to develop coercive capabilities than in most historical state formation processes (Menon, 2017; Wallander, 2000).

While Europe may face the urgent need to develop its own military and defence capabilities already after the next U.S. presidential election, however, the prospects for such a development remain unclear.

But, while it can be agreed that neither the COVID-19 crisis nor the war in Ukraine has created a situation in which member states are willing to supplement the EU's regulatory powers with "core state powers" (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2014), such as independent fiscal revenues, a significant bureaucratic apparatus, and external security forces. The war in Ukraine has pushed the EU towards greater unity and intergovernmental cooperation rather than supranational centralization in the realm of security and defence (Genschel, 2022).

At the same time, the war in Ukraine demonstrates that the EU is indeed capable of acting as a cohesive entity when unanimity is achieved (Kelemen and McNamara, 2022). Never before has the EU been so united on issues of foreign policy and security. The author believes that the current security pressures will finally encourage member states to enhance the EU's fiscal and coercive power, bringing it closer to the vision of a United States of Europe.

While some historical quasi state-building projects, like the EU, were initially oriented toward market development and the rule of law, those that successfully consolidated into strong states eventually gained ultimate power over the coercive apparatus associated with the Weberian state. The EU has come a long way on the path of institutional development by focusing on building a rule-of-law state, but it is unclear whether it can maintain this path without a fuller set of state powers.

This applies equally to pandemics and migration crises and is certainly relevant to the EU's political and military role in the world. In 2021, Bruno

Maçães argued that the EU was facing a choice: either it will become an actor in geopolitics, or it will disappear: “A larger crisis would force the EU either to finally take a decisive step toward a more perfect union, or to enter a state of terminal decline.” (Maçães, 2021, 154-155).

Thus, the full-scale war in Ukraine has become the greatest challenge for the European Union, while simultaneously acting as a catalyst for changes whose scale we have yet to fully comprehend. Despite average rates of deepening integration overall, the EU is demonstrating unprecedented consolidation among member states, particularly on foreign policy issues. This, in our view, creates significant conditions for further strengthening the institutions of the European Union.

5. Will Enlargement be the Answer?

A separate question arises as to whether the enlargement of the EU constitutes a logical and effective response to the destruction of Europe’s security architecture by Russia.

The concept of integration capacity relates to the risks of enlargement that could undermine the integrity of the single market, the functioning of EU institutions, and public support for the accession of new member states. Börzel, Dimitrova, and Schimmelfennig (2017, 160), referring to it as the fourth Copenhagen criterion, define integration capacity as “the ability of the EU to expand its membership successfully, i.e., to turn non-member states into member states while maintaining the cohesion and functioning of the EU”. According to this definition, integration potential has both external and internal dimensions. The external aspect involves transforming non-EU countries into member states, emphasizing the EU’s capacity to closely associate these states and prepare them for membership. The internal aspect pertains to maintaining the cohesion and functioning of the EU, which means the EU’s ability to prepare for enlargement.

The accession of up to ten new members raises questions about both the external and internal integration potential of the EU. The apprehensions mirror those raised during the significant Eastern enlargement of 2004 and 2007. The nations in question are relatively underdeveloped and have faced challenges in progressing towards a democratic market economy, largely attributed to widespread corruption.

Meanwhile, the extensive enlargement of the EU in the mid-2000s did not systematically negatively impact neither the legislative capacity of the EU nor its legal system. In fact, the pace of decision-making accelerated, resulting in the adoption of more legislation, not fewer laws (Toshkov, 2017). The accession of 12 new member states did not negatively impact the adherence to and enforcement of EU regulations. (Börzel, 2021); it also did not result in a broader use of soft law and differentiated integration in the long term (Schimmelfennig and Winzen, 2017). Also, the European Union's economic integration capabilities have proven to be remarkably effective. Pre-accession assistance initiatives played a crucial role in averting economic collapse following the end of communism. The synergy of opening markets, transferring regulations, and providing substantial economic support facilitated the transition for Eastern European candidates, easing the challenges associated with joining the EU market and helping to narrow the economic disparities between older and newer member states. (Bruszt and Langbein, 2017).

Undoubtedly, it can be agreed that concerns about enlargement and associated migration have become fodder for Eurosceptic parties and movements across Europe (Toshkov and Kortenska, 2015; Dimitrova and Kortenska, 2016). Following the EU's enlargement in 2004, there was a trend toward declining public support for future EU enlargements (Toshkov et al., 2014; Dimitrova and Kortenska, 2017). Previously, a public majority opposed the accession of new members. However, the situation changed following Russia's aggressive war against Ukraine. In the spring of 2023, 53% of EU citizens supported EU enlargement. While it remains unclear how sustainable

this public support for future enlargement will be, it can already be said that we are witnessing the most favourable moment for enlargement since the mid-2000s.

6. Conclusions and Observations

Thus, if we consider the transformations of the European Union in the paradigm of state development, then at the moment there are clearly “bellicose” preconditions and incentives for strengthening and consolidating the central government.

Russian invasion of Ukraine poses a clear and present danger to the collective security of the EU member states. Moreover, Putin’s authoritarian regime, which is launching an unprovoked attack on a peaceful democracy, represents exactly the kind of common enemy that can help sharpen Europeans’ sense of shared identity.

Without attempting to predict the future in such an uncertain and dynamically changing situation, we can emphasize a number of consequences of the war in Ukraine that are already present and may contribute to the transformation of the EU in the direction of the trends outlined in the previous paragraphs.

1) The mostly consolidated position of the member-states on most foreign policy issues (apart from Hungary, whose case should obviously be considered as part of a different discourse - the crisis of the rule of law in the EU member-states). But even the Hungarian government, a big supporter of Putin regime, backed collective sanctions, emphasizing that EU unity is paramount. In a very near past, researchers seriously feared that the growing economic and ideological differences between member states could weaken the communal institutions (the Commission, the European Parliament). At this stage, the opposite trends are more likely to be observed.

2) The willingness of member states to support the powers of supranational bodies as never before. Moreover, outside the context of the

Ukrainian war, the powerful and intersecting crises that have hit the EU in recent years (the migration crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, etc.) have demonstrated that the main reaction and organizational conclusions of European leaders were not to weaken central government, but to transfer even more powers to the EU in various policy areas.

3) The Franco-German core and traditionally more pro-Atlantic countries demonstrate nearly unanimity in foreign policy goals. The locomotives of the United Europe, Germany and France, were more or less immersed in their own national projects of European security before the war in Ukraine. France was nurturing the idea of European strategic autonomy, traditionally aimed at revising roles in transatlantic relations, including building its own security structure. Germany has taken a more moderate position, emphasizing that “Europeans will not be able to replace America as a key security provider”.³ However, in recent years, the French idea of strategic autonomy has enjoyed support not only from Paris but also from Berlin. Moreover, in many respects, it has gained more and more interest throughout Europe and has been related not only strictly to military security, but also, for example, to energy security. This concept caused some tension, leading to a split between those member states, especially France, who believed that Europe was ready to become strategically independent of America, and those countries, especially in the East of the EU, who believed that Europe was not ready. That is why the reaction of France and Germany to Russia’s military aggression was so important and was in fact a test of confidence in the Franco-German leadership in the European Union. Germany has increased its own defence capabilities by creating a special fund for the armed forces (*Bundeswehr*) and allocating a one-time 100 billion Euros to be used in 2022 for necessary investments in military defence

³ H.J. von der Burchard, *German defense minister expresses surprise over Macron criticism*, Politico, 24 November 2020, <https://www.politico.eu/article/annegret-kramp-karrenbauer-defense-ger-many-nato-macron-alliance/>.

projects.⁴ While Germany will spend more than 2% of its GDP on security issues, EU member states that abstained from joining NATO, such as Finland and Sweden, have taken a tougher stance and applied to the Alliance.

4) Weakening of Euroscepticism. At first glance, this point seems controversial. Certainly, in the last decade, the EU political arena, and especially the political systems of its member states, have largely witnessed the rise of populism, including those based on Euroscepticism. But at the same time, even before the war, the 2019 European Parliament elections showed the limits of these forces' influence. At the European level, all Eurosceptic groups, including those in mainstream parties, won about 30% of the seats in the European Parliament.⁵ At the same time, the overwhelming majority of them are soft Eurosceptics who do not seek to destroy the EU, but only to return to the national level some of the previously communitarized powers. This means that 70% of the European political elite support the level of integration achieved in the EU, and a significant part of it is in favour of further communitarization of certain policies. Despite the anticipated strengthening of the right-wing positions, the election of 2024 did not dramatically alter the situation.⁶ Centrist parties maintained their majority. Thus, despite the apparent "rightward shift", the dominant forces in the European Parliament remain the Christian Democrats and Socialists, with the centre-right European People's Party continuing to be the strongest faction. Moreover, it is important to note that today's Eurosceptics differ from those of 5-7 years ago: they are now working towards a pan-European agenda and the strengthening of the European Union, particularly in enhancing its strategic autonomy.

5) Finally, the case of Ukraine is unique in the sense that it is obvious that Ukraine cannot join the North Atlantic Alliance at this stage, at least not

⁴<https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378>.

⁵ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en>.

⁶ <https://results.elections.europa.eu/en/index.html>.

until the end of the war. This situation has forced Ukraine, on the one hand, to look for security guarantees in its potential accession to the EU, and the EU, on the other hand, to think more deeply about its foreign policy capabilities and geopolitical subjectivity. In other words, the war in Ukraine has raised the issue of the EU's defence and security potential with renewed vigour and urgency.

In general, looking at the EU's development from the perspective of state-building (or, more correctly, quasi-state-building) encourages us to expand the time horizon of our academic analysis and see a large-scale, slowly developing logic that we may miss. Observing the EU's ineffective responses to several recent crises, we can conclude that the EU has not made significant progress in developing the institutional capacity necessary to address pressing issues and respond effectively to crises. However, in our opinion, the mirror conclusion would be more correct – that it is the insufficient consolidation of power and centralization of authority that has prevented the EU from providing adequate responses to the challenges of the times. And considering the way the EU's foreign policy has changed in the wake of the war in Ukraine, the trends are changing. This perspective allows us to believe that deep crises within the EU should be seen as an integral part of its development, not as harbingers of its demise.

If the EU continues to develop in this direction, it will likely have to face questions about the limits of its current political foundations. Of course, the war in Ukraine will not immediately transform the European Union into a federation. Such a prospect is debatable and raises reasonable doubts even in the long run. However, in the long-term perspective we cannot ignore the striking centralization of power that took place before the war in Ukraine, even in the absence of the usually critical causal impetus of war.

Consequently, it becomes evident that Russia's military aggression in Ukraine has triggered the consolidation of the European Union to counter the disruption of the geopolitical balance and security architecture in Europe.

Alongside the remarkable alignment of member states on foreign policy matters, this significant challenge has reintroduced the enlargement paradigm as a strategy to counter the threats facing the security framework in Europe.

However, this new phase of enlargement requires a transformation of the EU's governance mechanisms, particularly given the unprecedented external political challenges at play. As a result, the current foreign policy dilemmas are driving the structural evolution of the European Union, creating the preconditions for deepening the integration and strengthening its governance structures. This, in our view, represents the most fitting response to contemporary foreign policy challenges and a logical progression towards an “ever closer Union”.

References

- Anghel V. and Džankić J. (2023). Wartime EU: consequences of the Russia – Ukraine war on the enlargement process, in *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 45, n. 3, 487.
- Bartolini S. (2005). *Restructuring Europe* (Oxford University Press).
- Bélanger M. and Schimmelfennig F. (2021). Politicization and rebordering in EU enlargement: membership discourses in European parliaments, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 28, n. 3, 407.
- Börner S. and Eigmüller M. (Eds) (2015). *European integration, processes of change and the National experience* (Palgrave Macmillan).
- Börzel T. and Risse T. (2018). From the euro to the Schengen crises: European integration theories, politicization, and identity politics, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 25, n. 1, 83.
- Börzel T. (2023). Widening without Deepening: Why Treaty Reforms Will Not Make the EU Fit for Enlargement, in G. von Sydow and V. Kreilinger (eds.), *Fit for 35? Reforming the Politics and Institutions of the EU for an Enlarged Union*, (SIEPS), 54.

- Börzel T. (2021). *Why Noncompliance: The Politics of Law in the European Union* (Cornell University Press).
- Börzel T., Dimitrova A. and Schimmelfennig F. (2017). European Union Enlargement and Integration Capacity: Concepts, Findings, and Policy Implications, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 24, no. 2, 157.
- Bradford A. (2020). *The Brussels Effect* (Oxford University Press).
- Bruszt L. and Langbein J. (2017). The Role of the European Union in the Economic Transformation of Eastern Europe, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 24, no. 2, 297.
- Burgess M. (2000). *Federalism and European Union: The Building of Europe, 1950-2000* (Routledge).
- Burley A.-M. and Mattli W. (1993). Europe before the court: A political theory of legal integration, in *International Organization*, vol. 47, n. 1, 41.
- Centeno M. (2002). *Blood and debt* (University Park Penn State University Press).
- Chaban N. and Elgström O. (2021). *The Ukraine Crisis and EU Foreign Policy Roles, Images of the EU in the Context* (Edward Elgar).
- Cowles M. G. (2012). The Single European Act, in E. Jones, A. Menon and S. Weatherill (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the European Union* (Oxford University Press).
- Cross M. and Karolewski P. (eds.) (2021). *European-Russian Power Relations in Turbulent Times* (University of Michigan Press).
- Della Sala V. (2018). Narrating Europe: the EU's ontological security dilemma, in *European Security*, vol. 27, n. 3, 266.
- Dimitrova A. and Kortenska E. (2016). Enlargement as foreign policy in the Western Balkans: has it reached its limits?, in *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 68, n. 3, 395.
- Dimitrova, A. and Kortenska E. (2017). European Union Enlargement and Integration Capacity, in *The European Union's Integration Capacity: A Comparative Analysis*, 103-121 (Routledge).
- Dinan D. (1994). *Ever closer union?* (Lynne Rienner).

- Emerson M. and Blockmans S. (2022) *The New Agenda for the EU's Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policies*. CEPS Policy Insight (No 2022-20/ June 2022). Available at: <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/the-new-agenda-for-the-eus-enlargement-and- neighbourhood-policies/>.
- Ertman T. (1997). *Birth of the Leviathan* (Cambridge University Press).
- European Council (1993). European Council meeting in Copenhagen 21-23 June 1993. *Conclusions of the Presidency* (Brussels: European Council).
- Gawrich A. and Wydra D. (2024). Conditions and Contestation: Ukraine on its Way to EU- Membership, in C. Wiesner and M. Knodt (eds), *The War Against Ukraine and the EU: Facing New Realities* (London: Palgrave Macmillan), 161.
- Genschel P. (2022). Bellicist Integration? The War in Ukraine, the European Union and Core State Powers, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, 29, no. 12, 1885.
- Genschel P. and Jachtenfuchs M. (eds.). (2014). *Beyond the Regulatory Polity? The European Integration of Core State Powers* (Oxford University Press).
- Haas E. B. (1964). *Beyond the nation-state* (Stanford University Press).
- Helwig N. (2023). EU Strategic Autonomy after the Russian Invasion of Ukraine: Europe's Capacity to Act in Times of War, in *Journal of Common Market Studies* 61, S1, 57.
- Herbst J. (1989). The creation and maintenance of national boundaries in Africa, in *International Organization*, 43, no. 4, 673.
- Hill C. and Smith M. (eds.). (2011). *International relations and the European union*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press).
- Hintze O. (1975). *The historical essays of Otto Hintze* (Oxford University Press).
- Hoffmann S. and Keohane R. (1991). *The new European community*, 1st ed. (Westview).
- Hooghe L. and Marks G. (2001). *Multi-level governance and European integration* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers).

- Howorth J. and Keeler J.T.S. (eds). (2004). *Defending Europe: The EU, NATO, and the quest for European autonomy* (Palgrave).
- Johansson-Nogués E., Vlaskamp M. and Barbé E. (eds.) (2020). *European Union contested: Foreign policy in a new global context* (Springer).
- Kelemen D. and McNamara K. (2022). State-building and the European Union: Markets, War, and Europe's Uneven Political Development, in *Comparative Political Studies*, Vol. 55, no. 6, 963.
- Kinnvall C., Manners I. and Mitzen J. (2018) Introduction to 2018 special issue of European Security "ontological (in)security in the European Union", in *European Security*, vol. 27, no. 3, 249.
- Maçães B. (2021). *Geopolitics for the End of Time. From the Pandemic to the Climate Crisis* (Hurst).
- McNamara K. R. (2015). *The politics of everyday Europe* (Oxford University Press).
- Mérand F. (2008). *European defence policy*, 1st ed. (Oxford University Press).
- Menon A. (2017). Defense policy and the European state, in D. King and P. Le Gales (eds.), *The Reconfiguration of the State in Europe* (Oxford University Press).
- Mitzen J. (2017). Anxious community: EU as (in)security community, in *European Security*, vol. 27, no. 3, 393.
- Moravcsik A. (1998). *The choice for Europe* (Cornell University Press).
- Osypchuk A. and Raik K. (2023). *The EU's Geopolitical Enlargement – Ukraine's Accession Will Make the EU a Stronger Security Actor*. JOINT Brief (no. 30, November), <https://www.jointproject.eu/2023/11/08/the-eus-geopolitical-enlargement-ukraines-accession-will-make-the-eu-a-stronger-security-actor/>.
- Porter B. (1994). *War and the rise of the state* (Free Press).
- Radović M. (2022) *Crises and institutional transformations of the EU* (Project: Pandemic. Law. Society).
- Sandholtz W. and Stone Sweet A. (1998). *European integration and*

supranational governance (Oxford University Press).

Schimmelfennig F. and Sedelmeier U. (2020). The Europeanization of Eastern Europe: the external incentives model revisited, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 27, no. 6, 814.

Schimmelfennig F. (2023). Fit through Flexibility? Differentiated Integration and Geopolitical EU Enlargement, in G. von Sydow and V. Kreilinger (eds.), in *Fit for 35? Reforming the Politics and Institutions of the EU for an Enlarged Union* (SIEPS), 14.

Schimmelfennig F. and Sedelmeier U. (2004). Governance by conditionality: EU rule transfer to the candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 11, no. 4, 661.

Schimmelfennig F. and Winzen T. (2017). Instrumental and Normative Dimensions of Differentiated Integration: The Case of the EU, in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 52, no. 2, 354.

Scicluna N. and Auer S. (2023). Pushing the EU's Boundaries: Enlargement and Foreign Policy Actorness after the Russian Invasion of Ukraine, in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 61, S1, 45.

Taylor B. D. and Botea R. (2008). Tilly tally: War-making and state-making in the contemporary third world, in *International Studies Review*, vol. 10, no. 1, 27.

Toshkov D. (2017). The Impact of the Eastern Enlargement on the Decision-Making Capacity of the European Union, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 24, no. 2, 251.

Toshkov D. and Kortenska E. (2015). Does immigration undermine public support for integration in the European Union?, in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 53, no. 4, 910.

Toshkov D., Kortenska E., Dimitrova A., and Fagan A. (2014). The "Old" and the "New" Europeans: Analyses of Public Opinion on EU Enlargement in Review, in *MAXCAP Working Paper Series*, No. 2 (Freie Universität Berlin).

Trachtenberg M. (1999). *A constructed peace* (Princeton University Press).

- Vachudova M. (2018). EU Enlargement and State Capture in the Western Balkans, in J. Džankić, S. Keil and M. Kmezić (eds.), *The Europeanisation of the Western Balkans a failure of EU conditionality?* (Springer Nature), 63.
- Vachudová M. (2005). *Europe undivided: Democracy, leverage, and integration after communism* (Oxford University Press).
- Wallander C. A. (2000). Institutional assets and adaptability: NATO after the Cold war, in *International Organization*, vol. 54, no. 4, 705.
- Zeitlin J., Nicoli F. and Laffan B. (2019). Introduction: The European Union beyond the polycrisis? Integration and politicization in an age of shifting cleavages, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, vol. 26, no. 7, 963.