Central and Eastern Europe as a New Center of Gravity

Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) as a New Centre of Gravity: Recommendation on Strengthening Regional, European and Transatlantic Security

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Recommendation on Strengthening Regional, European and Transatlantic Security

Introduction

Prof. Katarzyna Pisarska
Chair, Warsaw Security Forum

Dear Friends of the Warsaw Security Forum,

It is with great pleasure that I present to you the 2023 Warsaw Security Forum Report entitled *Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) as a New Centre of Gravity: Recommendation on Strengthening Regional, European and Transatlantic Security*. The report is a result of the work of over 30 internationally recognised experts and policy-makers in foreign policy, defence, energy and cybersecurity, supported by the Casimir Pulaski Foundation's team.

The geopolitical shift of gravity toward Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) is one of the many unintended – yet significant – consequences of the 2022 Russian aggression against Ukraine (#NewCEEnter). Directly after the launch of the invasion countries such as Poland, the Baltic States or Romania, acted the fastest, providing unprecedented military and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine, serving as a hub for international help, increasing their own defence spending, advocating for a reinforcement of NATO's Eastern Flank as well as for tougher sanctions against Russia. They have also become the outliers in advocating for Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO. For the first time in recent history, the region – which shares a direct border with both the war zone and Russian-controlled Belarus – has shown an ability to move from a security beneficiary to a security provider. As a consequence it has the potential to play a critical role in European and Transatlantic security.

At the same time, Central and Eastern Europe remains heavily reliant – for both its security and prosperity – on strong transatlantic ties with the United States and on a vibrant European Union. However, some observers pose serious questions regarding the long-term sustainability of US military engagement on the European continent and the ability of Europe to become self-sufficient (or at least less dependent on Washington) in defending its borders in face of a protracted military conflict. In order to counter the negative consequences which may stem from a weakened West, the region needs to learn how to channel its weight into greater political impact. Individual CEE states must also learn how to take on larger collective responsibility, acting as valuable members of both the European Union and the Transatlantic Alliance. Their Western partners, on the other hand, should recognise CEE's contribution in terms of policy-making input, especially in developing decisive and effective responses to the threat posed by a resurgent and aggressive Russia.

As a response to the dynamically changing regional environment, in early 2023 the Casimir Pulaski Foundation, has launched a research project in order to prepare a set of recommendations on how to sustain stability and security in the region of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as strengthen it politically. Over 30 international security experts have worked in four expert working groups – foreign policy, defence, energy

and cybersecurity – to formulate **eight advocacy causes.** These causes – presented below – serve as "calls for action" for decision-makers, reflecting the security needs of the CEE region and creating proposals for implementable policies on the Transatlantic, European and national levels.

The report defines the CEE region primarily as the NATO Eastern Flank countries (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia – so called "Bucharest Nine"). Nevertheless, countries such as Ukraine, Moldova or even Belarus, which share the distinctive elements of CEE, still await their chance to integrate into the world of Western institutions. Their aspirations and struggles – especially those of Ukraine – were key factors in the selection of the advocacy causes discussed beneath.

The eight advocacy-causes presented in this report are as follows:

1. **Promoting a better defined, clearer, and more urgent path for Ukraine's membership in NATO.** Ukrainian victory in the war waged by Russia is a prerequisite for a stable Europe, including the CEE region. To help this victory in the coming months the "escalation myth" must be challenged, sanctions need to be beefed up, an effective Black Sea strategy should be implemented and dynamic communications strategy ought to be exercised. But to improve long-term security on the continent Ukraine must be provided with tangible and credible security guarantees which would not only deter Russia from future attacks but also allow for the post-war rebuilding of the Ukrainian state. The contributors of the report agree that only NATO membership fulfills the definition of "credible and tangible". Ukrainians have earned the moral right to join NATO due to their sacrifices and heroic willingness to pay the ultimate price for upholding democratic values. On the other hand, by successfully holding Russia at bay, Ukrainians are already de facto defending NATO's frontiers. The inclusion of a battle-hardened Ukrainian army into NATO's collective defence system would be a major contribution to Allied security, effectively deterring future Russian aggressions. The upcoming 2024 NATO Summit in Washington D.C. is the time for clear decisions on Ukraine's membership path.

2. **Striving towards a paradigm shift in defence posture of the Western community.** The war of attrition waged by Russia has shone light on the deficiencies and weaknesses of European defence capabilities built up over the years. These include insufficient resources devoted to defence, underfunding of armed forces, and inadequate expenditures on modernisation and stockpiles of critical ammunition. At the top of all problems lies however a persistent mindset afflicting many policymakers, especially in Western Europe. It is thus imperative to generate urgency and greater determination on both sides of the Atlantic (but especially in Europe) to shift a political paradigm on defence posture among Allies. The goal should be to recreate the will and capability of the Western community to prepare for the eventuality of fighting a high-intensity war on the European continent. The report argues that such a shift is the only way to achieve genuine burden sharing across the Alliance, including through real solidarity with frontier states.

3. **Reviving CEE regional and cross-regional cooperation via formats such as Visegrad Four, Bucharest Nine, the Weimar Triangle, and the Lublin Triangle.** After the fall of communism in Europe in 1989, close cooperation between different countries of Central and Eastern Europe proved to be one of the most effective tools in anchoring the entire region into the Western institutional framework. Following these states' accession to NATO and the EU, formats such as the Visegrad Four or Bucharest Nine served as important platforms for the expression of regional interests, while formats such the Weimar or Lublin Triangle helped the largest of CEE countries – Poland – to better engage in cross-regional cooperation with key Western (Germany & France) and Eastern (Ukraine & Lithuania) neighbours. The authors of this report argue that faced with the resurgence of imperialistic Russia, the

region needs to look at a serious reboot of the formats mentioned. CEE intraregional and cross-regional cooperation can serve as an important platform for promoting future EU and NATO enlargements eastward as well as help shape better strategic understanding of Russia's regional ambitions among Western partners. It can also be a source of more agency for CEE in Europe and within the Transatlantic community.

4. **Strengthening EU's foreign policy by creating a coherent European policy on China.** While the war in Ukraine itself poses an immediate and tangible threat to the European Union and the Transatlantic community, it has also revealed several long-term challenges. One of them is redefining Europe's relations with China. The report argues that CEE states should play a proactive and creative role in bringing more coherence to the European assessment of China policy, as well as to create space for cooperation with the US in this regard. Leadership aspirations that CEE countries display within the European Union are related predominantly to security and defence and targeted mostly at opposing the Russian threat. However, the region that expects the US to act as a security provider, should also advocate for a better coordination of the security efforts that transatlantic allies have to face worldwide. The liberal democratic model once again needs to show its robustness in standing up for core values, and readiness to go off the beaten path in areas where the systemic competition is already becoming fierce. This exercise is crucial for both the well-being and coherence of the collective West and the long-term security of the CEE region.

5. **Strengthening transatlantic cooperation for energy security and supplies resilience.** The multifaceted challenges in European energy security posed by recent geopolitical events, including the war in Ukraine and the disruption of gas supplies from Russia uncover the vital role of U. S.–EU/CEE collaboration in ensuring energy security and supplies resilience. The report argues that by jointly diversifying

energy sources, investing in renewable energy, strengthening critical infrastructure, and aligning climate initiatives, both parties can establish a robust partnership that not only ensures the availability and reliability of energy supplies but also advances the global transition to a sustainable and low-carbon future. Such cooperation can also become a particularly important element in supporting the energy transition in CEE countries, which are struggling with the systemic challenges of high dependence on fossil fuels.

6. **Driving Ukraine's energy integration with Europe.** Energy solidarity with Ukraine is critical for the country's ability to win the war with Russia and assure future prosperity to its citizens. The authors of this report argue that integrating its energy systems with Europe would enable Ukraine to diversify energy sources, to bolster resilience against supply disruptions, and to pave the way for a sustainable and low-carbon energy future. The implementation of European standards, particularly the EU's Green Deal, would catalyse green initiatives within the Ukrainian energy sector and attract much-needed financing for infrastructure redevelopment. EU can leverage enhanced energy security, expanded market opportunities, alignment of standards, and green energy cooperation. Integration could also contribute to regional stability in CEE, economic growth, and the advancement of sustainable energy objectives.

7. **Analysing influence operations of adversarial states against CEE and creating common standard capabilities for the region.** The Russian large-scale invasion of Ukraine increased the probability of harmful operations against especially those CEE countries, which have responded most actively and publicly in assisting Ukraine. Russia's influence operations – both online and offline – may try to affect CEE societies to diminish their support for Ukraine and exploit possible divisions using a range of tools such as espionage, disruption of critical infrastructure, and cyber operations. As argued by the report, a comprehensive

analysis of the entire range of influence operations used by adversarial states will allow to establish a common standard of what capabilities the CEE countries should have to address these operations and be more effective in combating them in the future.

8. **Strengthening CEE cyber resilience by establishing an organisation that uses telemetry on cyber operations against Ukrainian infrastructure.** Ukraine currently lacks coordination of beneficial activities as well as a mechanism to holistically track cyber operations against Ukrainian targets. No organisation has full visibility of the ongoing cyber activities in Ukraine. The contributors to this report argue that the establishment of such organisation will lead to the centralization of efforts and would allow deeper cooperation between different actors and entities, which would in turn make them more effective in supporting Ukraine.

Times of crisis pose both immense challenges as well as unique opportunities. It is the hope of the authors and contributors of this report, that the transatlantic community makes the most of these times of trial, by first and foremost helping Ukraine to win the war with Russia and second by taking this opportunity to strengthen our own collective defence, as well as our democratic resilience. We trust this report will contribute to finding the right solutions for Central and Eastern Europe and the Transatlantic Alliance as a whole.

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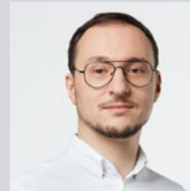
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1 Europe at War. Strengthening Defence Capabilities in Europe, including through increased role of CEE region

Introduction

The brutal war launched by Russia against Ukraine in February 2022 (a continuation of the aggression started in 2014) is the biggest military conflict in Europe since the end of the Second World War in 1945. While formally pitting neo-imperialist Russia against a neighbouring state, it is de facto part of the confrontation against the whole democratic community chosen as a policy by the Putin regime. As such, it has implications for European and global security – both through immediate consequences (military, political, legal, and economic), and as a test of effective response to direct threats posed by any actor to international peace and norms governing relations between sovereign states across the globe. In essence, this war should prompt all members of international community to support Ukraine without ambiguity. Such a reaction would be fully justified as a form of defence of principles, moral and legal standards, and own interests associated with stability and security. Sadly, the picture of support is not sufficiently universal, especially in the Global South.

The war has shaken the foundations of the European security architecture. It has exposed the hard truth of policies that relied for too long on naive assumptions about Russia's revisionist ambitions, an exaggerated belief in the strength of soft power and trade, as well as enlightened self-interest. It has laid bare deficiencies of European defence capabilities, degraded through years of financial and leadership neglect, with the proverbial peace dividend having been consumed many times over.

For the reasons outlined above, experts gathered by the Pulaski Foundation consider two issues of paramount importance. One – ensuring a speedy path of Ukraine towards membership in NATO, reflecting the reality that Ukraine's security and survival are critical to NATO's security. Two – generating urgency and greater determination on both sides of the Atlantic (but especially in Europe) to shift the political paradigm on defence posture among Allies. The goal should be to recreate the will and capability of the Western community to prepare for the eventuality of fighting a high-intensity war on the European continent. Successfully tackling the two tasks together would significantly improve the defence situation in Europe, and – thanks to the deterrent effect – lower the probability of an outbreak of a direct conflict between Russia and NATO.

In pursuing both causes, the Western community would benefit from giving more prominence to the insights – in terms of analysis and policy prescription – of the countries of the CEE region. Their contribution to Euro-Atlantic security has substantially grown, as illustrated by high spending on defence and commendable backing provided to Ukraine (per capita surpassing that of Western Europe).

Promoting a better defined, clearer, and more urgent path for Ukraine's membership in NATO

Opportunity missed at the 2023 NATO Vilnius Summit
— chance to redress on NATO's anniversary at the Washington 2024 Summit

As expected, the 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius did not bring a breakthrough on the issue of Ukraine's NATO membership aspirations. The voice and policy views of CEE did not fully carry the day, even if perhaps the majority of Allies shared the region's analysis on strategic importance of supporting Ukraine. The agreed language: "We will be in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join the Alliance when Allies agree, and conditions are met" does not represent sufficient progress on the pledge made already in Bucharest in 2008. In the weeks leading to the Summit, it became clear that some capitals led (in different ways) by Washington and Berlin, have become political hostages to the continued fear of alleged "Russian escalation" that could result from a clearer roadmap offered to Kyiv.

Thus, an opportunity was missed, even for sending a signal that the issue shall return to the agenda of the anniversary summit in Washington next year.

Roadmap for attaining the goal

SHORT TERM

1. The case becomes stronger

It is the unanimous view of the experts that the 2023 NATO Vilnius Summit results should not discourage those who believe that the case for advocating a membership path to Ukraine remains strong, if not stronger, than before. Ukrainians have earned the **moral right** due to their sacrifices and heroic willingness to pay the ultimate price for upholding values on which the Alliance is built. This right is just as legitimate as that of Finland and Sweden who applied to NATO once the invasion of Ukraine has started.

The Ukrainian armed forces and Ukraine's overall security system (including an exemplary model of defence through "whole of society" approach) have become battle-hardened. Its inclusion in NATO's collective defence system would be a major contribution to Allied security. **Ukrainian armed forces are, in essence, already defending NATO's frontiers**. The recognition of this fact as reality should be a driving imperative in all discussions on Ukraine's place in NATO.

Finally, a clear NATO membership perspective would introduce a new element of **fait accompli** into the calculations of the delusional Kremlin, which still tries to cling to the stale disinformation claim that it attacked Ukraine to prevent it from joining NATO.

MEDIUM TERM

2. Taking a chance to make amends on NATO's anniversary in Washington in 2024

Next year's anniversary NATO summit, to be held symbolically in Washington, D. C., will provide the ideal platform for further advocacy efforts. These efforts must start now, as time is of essence. Many stakeholders have a job to do, including the expert community. The next summit is the time by which any missed opportunities as far as Ukrainian membership in NATO is concerned, should be put right.

3. Civil society involvement

Experts and decision-shapers need to galvanize public opinion to support decision-makers by explaining the benefits and dispelling unfounded myths surrounding Ukrainian candidacy. There is a crucial role to play for American think-tanks (such as the Atlantic Council, Wilson Center, CSIS, CNAS, etc.) and think-tanks in other countries who should not shy away from public debates, advocacy via media platforms, and other forms of public diplomacy. Perhaps useful models to replicate are the campaigns conducted around the first and second waves of NATO enlargement (concluded successfully in 1999 and 2024). They mobilised communities of CEE descent in the Allied countries (incidentally Ukrainian organisations played a role in those campaigns, as well) to gather support, in a coordinated fashion, for admitting Poland and other former Warsaw Pact countries into the Alliance. Noteworthy value may be gained by inclusion of Finns and Swedes in such campaigns, representing countries that exercised successfully the same right established in Art.10 of the Washington Treaty, that Ukraine wants to utilise today.

4. Increasing interoperability with NATO

In the coming months, the governments of Allied countries supporting the Ukrainian case with the greatest vigour should use to the maximum opportunities created by the NATO Vilnius Summit decisions. One can refer to the newly established NATO-Ukraine Council and the whole package of assistance measures and mechanisms offered by NATO to help Ukraine win the war, including through the long-term process of achieving the high level of military, political, legal, and technical interoperability with required NATO standards. G7 countries should also deliver without delay on their pledges of security assurances with concrete follow-up work in financing this process.

Ukraine has a job to do as well. Of course, the most existential challenge is to achieve positive results on the battlefield – successful counteroffensive operations will bring the war closer to an acceptable end for Ukraine and thus open the door for a more concrete path to membership. Western partners on the other hand need to continue providing weapons, training, ammunition, and repairs but also limit restrictions placed on Ukraine fighting for its survival. This includes allowing Ukraine a full realization of Article 51 of the UN Charter, namely being able to strike Russian military or military industrial targets on internationally recognised territory of the Russian Federation, the aggressor state. Current hesitations encourage Russia to concentrate its air defence resources on the line of contact, by which Moscow gains another advantage over the embattled Ukraine.

Helping Ukraine win and bringing Ukraine into the Alliance are mutually reinforcing objectives that must be pursed simultaneously. Ukrainian victory must be a strategic choice of the West, with logical policies to follow.

1. Comprehensive approach to the Black Sea region

In the long-term perspective, experts also advocate for a more strategic approach to the entire Black Sea region – something which the NATO Vilnius Summit did not address properly.

The Black Sea regional strategy should emphasise all aspects of DIME (diplomacy, information, military, economy) in the region, including ensuring freedom of navigation. It matters to Ukraine, including to its ability to defend the coast, ensure overall security of borders, rebuild its economy and export grain. But a robust regional strategy matters also for the NATO Alliance, not least because three member states (Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey) are situated on the Black Sea.

Ukraine should count on external support for its goal of liberating Crimea. Reintegration plans need full attention now, not least due to the war crimes committed and the level of destruction expected to be discovered after liberation of the occupied Ukrainian territories.

Support to Ukraine must not be restricted to the military dimension. For example, it is high time to address **the problem of Ukrainian grain and agricultural exports**, without harming the interests of its immediate neighbours.

Even more political capital should be spent on raising economic stakes for the aggressor. While sanctions targeting Russia cannot on their own force Putin's regime to back down, they significantly restrict its ability to finance the war. Gradually they are also undermining the support to and legitimacy of the Kremlin, both within society at large and among the ruling elite.

Kyiv will also benefit greatly from devoting more energy, to a more organic and technocratic process of bringing its standards closer to those expected of a candidate country. It has to put aside an understandable feeling of disappointment following the NATO Vilnius Summit and make the most of what has been offered.

Finally, the process will be eased if the Ukrainian public communications show a greater understanding and appreciation of the already existing commitment (both political and financial) made to assist its war efforts by all its Allies. Remaining opened to well-meaning advice from CEE neighbours, especially those who have travelled the path to NATO in the past, would not go amiss either. This of course must be done with a full understanding that Ukraine is currently the largest contributor to European security.

Possible obstacles to the roadmap implementation

Escalation myth stands in the way and needs to be overcome

One of key challenges facing NATO enlargement to Ukraine is a persisting belief that European security realities will somehow return to the state prior to the Russian invasion of February 2022. Wishful thinking undermines the indispensable unity of Western effort to assist Ukraine over the long-term but also our ability to prepare for a protracted conflict on the European continent. Some promote the assumption that a war-devastated Ukraine will not be a viable candidate for NATO membership in the near future. Underlying this thesis is a belief that regardless of the outcome of the war, Russia will remain a power that should not be confronted openly in the post-Soviet space.

This thesis should be exposed as false. There are numerous arguments (growing in weight) proving that exactly the opposite is true.

First, the undefined security status of Ukraine (as well as countries such as Georgia and Moldova) has not prevented military threats. **Deterrence is unlikely to work for countries outside the NATO framework**. To the contrary, unclear status has encouraged neo-imperialist Russia to ramp up its aggressive policies, culminating in the new invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. On the other hand, no NATO member state – either on the Eastern or Southern Flank – has been openly attacked.

Second, the idea of postponing decisions on Ukraine's path to NATO membership until the end of the war encourages Russia to carry on with hostilities indefinitely and refrains it from reaching any peace settlement. The **Alliance can grant Ukraine membership in principle in conditions short of peace**. There are historical precedents for such a path, especially linked to the situation of Western Germany invited to NATO in 1955.

Third, Article 10 of the Washington Treaty stipulates **four requirements**: being a European state, to be in a position to further the principles of the treaty, contribute to North Atlantic security and benefit from unanimous support from current members. Ukraine meets the key criteria and this should be recognised by all Allies. Those standards that require more effort (for example the problem of tackling corruption) are not in themselves show-stoppers but success in addressing them would actually benefit from a clearly defined path for membership.

Thus fourth, laying out a route and conditions for Ukrainian accession to NATO will act more generally as both a **catalyst and accelerant for the important reforms** that Ukraine will have to make. They need to start now and having a goal will lend them discipline, momentum and purpose and a benchmark against which progress can be measured.

Fifth, Ukrainian membership provides a **unique opportunity to stem the Russian imperialist drive** (of Putin's regime or any future one). Kremlin miscalculation has exposed Russia's military weaknesses that results from the corrupt and inept condition of the state. Moscow lives in fear not of a NATO invasion (always a red herring), but of a possible defeat on the battlefield.

Sixth, the argument that EU membership should be seen as a substitute and that it will be easier to implement does not stand up to scrutiny. EU does not offer comparable security guarantees to those of NATO. And **EU's membership road for Ukraine likely will be long** – not least because of ingrained interests of EU member states and very severe reform requirements. On the other hand, inviting Ukraine to NATO is primarily a political decision which would bring immediate security benefits for the Alliance and the rest of Europe.

Seventh, **post-war reconstruction** of – and, especially, outside investment in – Ukraine will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, without credible security guarantees: and NATO is the best insurance outfit on the market.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly **it is in NATO's interest that Ukraine joins the Alliance**. It would bring to NATO Europe's most capable battle-tested armed force. Ukraine's membership will strengthen the Alliance's transatlantic outlook. In fact, Ukraine as member of NATO is critical to bringing maximum stability if not peace, to Europe's Eastern frontier – as has been the case with the Baltics and Norway.

Domestic political calculations or unjustified fears

Lurking behind (or even hiding in plain sight) is another fear, connected with **domestic politics of NATO Member States**. The gist is simple enough – if governments of today commit themselves to promising an invitation to NATO for Ukraine, voters may punish them at the ballot box, reflecting on "war fatigue" and desire to avoid any automatic confrontation in the future with resurgent Russia.

Such thinking is based on misleading assumptions. Public opinion in Allied countries has so far shown (overall) quite **strong backing for support to Ukraine**. Fears associated with widening the range of military assistance (vide in the category of provided weapon systems) have not been justified. Moreover, even the US, the largest donor of military hardware to Ukraine, has not undermined excessively its own stocks. By doing the right thing in helping Ukraine, Allies have managed to **degrade very substantially Russia's offensive capabilities** – thus decreasing the ability of Moscow to threaten NATO in the foreseeable future. National leaders should explain this to their publics and note that anchoring Ukraine in the Alliance will strengthen it, not weaken.

Opinion poll of allied citizens on support for Ukraine

In terms of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, how strongly do you support or oppose (COUNTRY) continuing to provide support to Ukraine?

65% — **Support for Ukraine is high across the Alliance**

- ■ Strongly support
- ■ Tend to support
- ■ Strongly oppose
- ■ Tend to oppose
- ■ Don't know

Country	Strongly support	Tend to support	Tend to oppose	Strongly oppose	Don't know
Alliance Total	34	32	14	12	9
Iceland	64	25	4	3	3
Finland	45	39	5	4	7
Portugal	53	31	6	5	6
Albania	42	40	7		11
The United Kingdom	50	29	9	6	5
Lithuania	46	32	9	7	5
Norway	58	20	8	8	6
Denmark	50	28	9	7	6
Canada	45	30	9	9	7
Spain	41	34	9	9	7
Estonia	40	34	14	5	7
Luxembourg	34	40	12	7	8
Turkey	38	34	11	8	8
Latvia	42	29	14	7	8
Poland	38	32	13	10	7
Croatia	23	44	15	8	9
The Netherlands	32	36	13	10	9
The United States	34	31	13	12	11
France	25	35	15	13	12
Belgium	24	35	18	12	11
Italy	26	32	18	15	10
Romania	25	32	23	13	7
Germany	26	30	19	15	9
Czechia	22	30	24	18	7
Slovenia	16	34	21	19	11
Hungary	20	29	20	17	14
Greece	15	30	22	25	8
Slovakia	14	29	26	22	9
Montenegro	13	29	30	27	
North Macedonia	14	26	15	24	20
Bulgaria	16	20	27	30	7
Sweden	53	22	8	9	8

Base (all respondents) = 30,481

Striving towards a paradigm shift in defence posture of the Western community

No more outsourcing of fighting capabilities

It has been said that wars start in the minds of people. But the same is true when it comes to designing and implementing the most effective forms of defence. The 31 (soon to be 32) NATO allies are lucky to be able to draw on the **collective strength of NATO**, resting on trans-Atlantic bonds and tested habits of defence integration and cooperation. The Alliance has risen to the challenge posed by Russian aggression rather impressively. The visible unity, fortified by the synergy between NATO and the EU, has enabled the Western community to deliver on many unprecedented policies. These included providing wide-range military assistance to Ukraine, sanctioning Russia and fortifying NATO's presence on its Eastern Flank.

But, in the view of Pulaski experts, the war of attrition waged by Russia has shone a light on the **deficiencies and weaknesses of the European and Western defence capabilities**. These include insufficient resources devoted to defence, underfunding of armed forces, and inadequate expenditures on modernisation and stockpiles of critical ammunition. The problems have for years been only amplified by the dislocation of Allied command and infrastructure not in line with NATO's geographical reality of today, though the new strategic concepts approved at the 2003 Vilnius Summit have set the Alliance on the road to rectifying some of these deficiencies.

At the root of all problems lies a persistent mind-set afflicting many policy makers, especially in Western Europe: the unwillingness to accept the fact that to respond effectively to the threats posed by adversarial states, democratic nations must invest sufficient resources in military capacities to deter against armed aggressions. For too long after the end of the Cold War, too many nations have tacitly accepted the practice of **outsourcing the military heavy lifting to Americans**.

That is why experts have chosen as an advocacy cause the goal of changing such mentality as the only way to achieve a genuine burden sharing across the Alliance, and solidarity with frontier states.

Roadmap for attaining the goal

SHORT TERM

Changing the mindset of policy makers is not an easy matter and will require real leadership, not universally present. There is however a variety of tasks, if implemented, that would help in this endeavour.

1. Clear policy decisions required

Politically, Allied nations could take the cue from the UK, which in its latest (July 2023) Defence Command Paper, stated explicitly that the country's "**security is intrinsically linked to the outcome of the war in Ukraine**" – thus finally doing away with the comfortable assumption that security concerns in one region of Europe can somehow be isolated from one's own security.

2. NATO-Russia Founding Act revocation

Another political "low-hanging fruit" is the outstanding issue of the **NATO-Russia Founding Act** (NRFA). It is a document from a bygone era, when allies where still clinging to the notion that Russia could become a real partner. Now that almost every single provision of the NRFA has been violated by Russia, it is high time to renounce the document and thus firmly acknowledge that Russia is an adversary state with which no deals should be made.

3. Nuclear sharing review

While there is no appetite for any hasty modifications to the nuclear posture, a debate on **upgrading of the nuclear-sharing arrangement**s would be a concrete response to bellicose steps taken by Moscow, e.g., placing of nuclear weapons on the territory of Belarus.

4. Defence spending

Public **pressure on raising defence spending** by those lagging behind the 2% GDP NATO requirement is also imperative. Frontier states in particular have the right to be vocal and demanding. A lot of patient and determined work must be done within national political systems to change the paradigm. But perhaps certain drastic forms of encouragement are in order too – maybe nationals from countries not meeting their capability pledges should be discouraged from applying for top positions in NATO's institutions? Conversely, a personnel policy that would reward countries meeting their NATO pledges could help to improve a situation when there is a disproportionately low percentage of international officials from new member states, including CEE.

MEDIUM TERM

1. Military, industry, and logistic adjustments

Allies should agree on an even more rigorous NATO exercise regime, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, including snap exercises of significant scale and exercises involving operations under conditions of nuclear conflict. Russia has been exercising nuclear coercion and the Alliance needs to respond more vigorously.

More significant permanent deployments to frontline states are needed now. NATO's force posture in Europe must reflect geopolitical realities and thus focus on where the line of contact is today, not where it was decades ago. This applies to US military presence in the North East, but equally (or even more) to West European contribution to securing the front lines. The situation in which the US has more troops deployed in CEE than the West European Allies is not sustainable in the long run. A sustained committment of Western European allies to strengthen NATO's Eastern Flank, as well as invest in infrastructure used to assist Ukraine should be treated as key priority tasks in the coming months.

2. SACEUR's Area of Responsibility

The broadening of SACEUR's Area of Responsibility (AOR), by delegating greater authority to conduct force deployments at his/her discretion is highly needed. As far as military mobility is concerned – NATO forces must be able to move as fast or faster than Russian forces anywhere to/along NATO's Eastern Flank.

In order to improve the preparedness of the new NATO Force Model a stricter certification mechanism may be in order, preventing countries from declaring forces for the purposes of collective defence that meet the requirements more on paper than in reality. A more rigorous certification process to monitor and enforce readiness levels was used successfully during the Cold War, with SACEUR being able to draw on a dedicated team and process to certify readiness levels. Such a system should be reinstituted today.

3. Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD)

One specific capability that requires quick fixing is the improvement of IAMD (integrated air and missile defence) system in Europe. Both the conduct of the war in Ukraine and other recent incidents affecting Allies show that individual and collective tools are currently inadequate for the purposes of effective deterrence and defence posture.

4. Defence industry

While projects that could alleviate the defence industry plight are in the works (e.g., NATO's growing use of its Procurement Agency and the EU's European Defence Industry Reinforcement Through Common Procurement Act (EDIRPA)) the process would benefit from much clearer definition of priorities. These could include items that are in short supply (e.g., ammunition)

and offer key competitive advantages for Allied states against potential adversaries (e.g., data management for multi domain operations, C4ISR, processing of shared intelligence etc.).

5. NATO Central Europe Pipeline System

As European warfighting resilience is likely to be a hostage of the logistics battle, including in fuel supplies, it is time also to extend the current NATO Central Europe Pipeline System to cover countries that have joined the Alliance from 1999 onwards.

6. Communications strategy as a must

All the above-described efforts should be underpinned by a more pro-active and more sophisticated strategic communications policy. It is essential to explain better to domestic and international audiences (including in Russia) **why investments in defence must be made.** Not a day should pass without a **reminder of Russia's violations** of almost every agreement it entered and its extensive international crimes. The harm such a predator state is causing to world stability, economic prosperity, even ecology must be at the heart of this narrative. One of the key objectives should also be to ensure that every single Russian official and officer who is anywhere in the chain of command or decision-making for nuclear weapons, control of any nuclear power plant, or responsible for any war crimes, realise that they are **going to be held accountable**.

Special attention must be paid to **engaging countries in the Global South.** It is high time to take a lead in combating harmful disinformation campaigns of Russia (and China) painting a perverse picture of benefits and costs of international cooperation with democratic partners. A significant role can be played by the CEE countries that are not burdened with the colonial past.

Possible obstacles to the roadmap implementation

Good plans and doctrines for collective defence – but implementation is key

Although the outcome of the 2023 NATO Vilnius Summit had some disappointments in store for Ukraine, the results concerning collective defence were, on the face of it, very satisfactory. Two percent level of GDP spending on defence was agreed to be a floor rather than a ceiling. For the first time since 1990 convincing regional contingency plans were developed and agreed. Crucially, these plans provide the basis for real deterrence and an impressive defence posture by linking them to national capability goals and embedding them in the comprehensive framework of defence planning. Their value is further augmented by upgraded exercise schedules and prepositioning of equipment and other military enablers in the most vulnerable areas in frontier states. The goal of generating 300k strong forces on high readiness (compared to 40k before) is certainly at the right level of ambition. So is the agreement to beef up the Allied presence on the Eastern Flank to brigade-size units.

The challenge here however is that **policies, plans, and declarations are only as good as their implementation and the resources provided for that implementation**. There remain many questions however:

Defence spending

2% spending goal pledge has remained unfulfilled – almost 10 years after it was made in Newport in 2014 – for more than half of NATO Allies, including soon-to-be Ally, Sweden. No fancy wording can hide this inconvenient truth.

Stocks of ammunition, some weapon systems, and spare parts are **dangerously low** as industries have been starved of large and long-term orders from the governments.

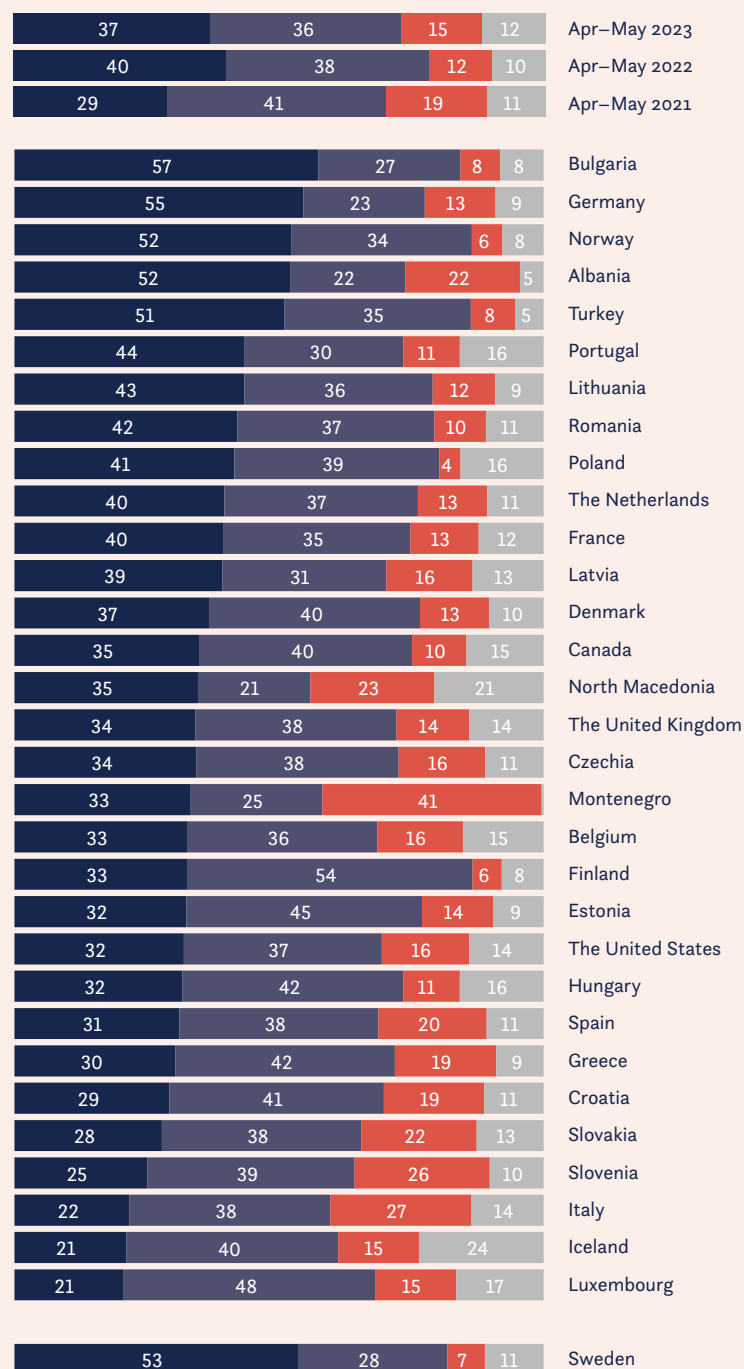## Opinion poll of allied citizens on increasing defence spending

Which of the following best reflects your view on your nation's defence spending?

73% of Allied citizens think their country should maintain or increase defence spending

■ Country should spend more on defence
■ Country should maintain current spending levels
■ Country should spend less on defence
■ Don't know

Alliance total

	Country should spend more on defence	Country should maintain current spending levels	Country should spend less on defence	Don't know	
	37	36	15	12	Apr–May 2023
	40	38	12	10	Apr–May 2022
	29	41	19	11	Apr–May 2021
	57	27	8	8	Bulgaria
	55	23	13	9	Germany
	52	34	6	8	Norway
	52	22	22	5	Albania
	51	35	8	5	Turkey
	44	30	11	16	Portugal
	43	36	12	9	Lithuania
	42	37	10	11	Romania
	41	39	4	16	Poland
	40	37	13	11	The Netherlands
	40	35	13	12	France
	39	31	16	13	Latvia
	37	40	13	10	Denmark
	35	40	10	15	Canada
	35	21	23	21	North Macedonia
	34	38	14	14	The United Kingdom
	34	38	16	11	Czechia
	33	25	41		Montenegro
	33	36	16	15	Belgium
	33	54	6	8	Finland
	32	45	14	9	Estonia
	32	37	16	14	The United States
	32	42	11	16	Hungary
	31	38	20	11	Spain
	30	42	19	9	Greece
	29	41	19	11	Croatia
	28	38	22	13	Slovakia
	25	39	26	10	Slovenia
	22	38	27	14	Italy
	21	40	15	24	Iceland
	21	48	15	17	Luxembourg
	53	28	7	11	Sweden

Base (all respondents) = 30,481

Military Expenditures of Ukrainie, B9 Group, France, and Germany

in GDP growth (annual %)

Bulgaria Czechia Estonia
Hungary Latvia Lithuania
Poland Romania Slovakia
Ukraine France Germany
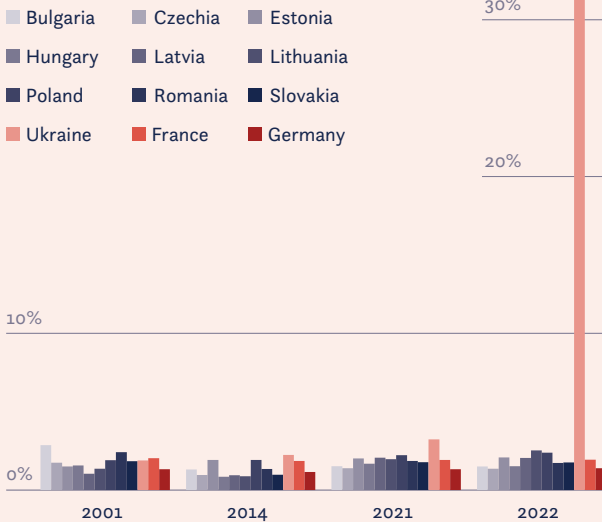
in US Dollars at constant 2021 price
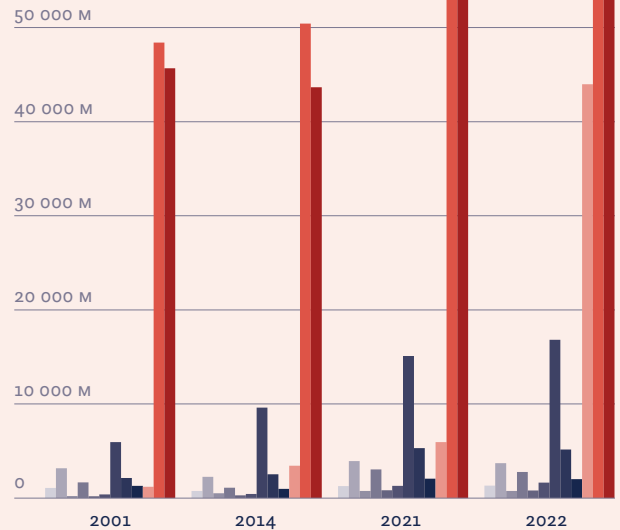
Size of Armed Forces

West European Allies – including Germany, UK, France – as well as Canada, have not yet moved fast enough to ensure the **availability of large land-forces** that seem indispensable for collective defence tasks. **Germany,** in particular, is well behind in the process of generating properly equipped and trained armoured divisions expected of its contribution on the Eastern Flank – though its actions since February 2022 have been impressive in many respects. The potential of Germany in the NATO defence system cannot be underestimated. It should not only provide the necessary strategic depth to collective defence but, due to geography, should be able to come up with the prompt, substantial and effective assistance, and military support to frontier states of the Alliance.

Overall, if these problems persist, the **frontier states** will have to rely primarily on their own efforts and the traditional backing of US to bear the bulk of the burden of collective defence, at least in the first phase of any potential confrontation. This is not an acceptable situation for the Alliance.

Unity of the Allies

Finally, the habits of **political blackmail** which have become a policy choice of some of the Allies (vide blocking of Swedish membership on spurious grounds) must be discouraged and not rewarded. Otherwise, the Alliance which bases its *modus operandi* on consensus building may become semi-paralyzed.

Taken together, these indicators demand fast action and bolder political decisions, especially on defence expenditure.

Conclusion

Magical realism does not work in the realm of hard security. The war in Europe is a tragic fact and those who want to wish it would go away are not acting responsibly. In fact, a commendable desire for peace in today's realities calls for helping Ukraine win the war that was started without provocation and conducted barbarically by Russia. If this objective is not achieved, Europe and the world may face more wars, waged by emboldened autocrats elsewhere.

Developing a clear path for Ukraine's membership in NATO and harnessing a political will to recreate a war-fighting capabilities by countries with a big stake in European security, are thus **two separate but interlinked objectives**. As such they deserve energetic support and strong advocacy in the months to come.

2 Ensuring Regional Stability Through Larger CEE Agency

Introduction

The region of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has been profoundly affected by the changes in the security realm resulting from the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. This includes not only an increased presence of disruptive factors directly stemming from the invasion but also an opening for historical political changes. Ukraine and Moldova obtained EU candidate status, while NATO's CEE members formulated a more robust security policy based on increased military spending. Changes of this kind add to over 30 years-long economic growth and the continuous integration process of CEE into the transatlantic community, defined mostly through the EU and NATO membership. Through participation in these international organisations, countries of the region constantly proved their dedication to the interests of the Western world, while on many occasions standing at the forefront of political developments i.e., by providing a realistic assessment of a need for a coordinated security policy against non-democratic malign actors, such as Russia.

The current security situation in Europe positions CEE countries in an even more unique position as they can profoundly impact the policies of their Western allies for years to come: CEE has risen to the place of a new strategic centre of transatlantic security gravity. To use this momentum the region's policymakers, have to however clearly define main interests that could serve as advocacy causes for the whole region. The suggestions we make beneath are based on 4 assumptions: (1) integration of Eastern Europe (especially Ukraine and Moldova) into the Western institutional framework and preservation of the rules-based order worldwide are crucial for the longstanding security of CEE; (2) reviving the CEE intraregional cooperation can be beneficial for speeding the process of bringing new countries into the EU and NATO (3) ambitions and pursuit of CEE's interests should be aligned with a proactive posture to the problems that go beyond sole regional focus. CEE has to show leadership beyond security and defence; (4) the transatlantic alliance needs more convergence, especially when it comes to the US-China global rivalry.

CEE shall consequently become active in shaping the new strategic understanding of Russia and creating secure space in Europe's direct neighbourhood by supporting the advancement of transatlantic integration eastward. It is also well-equipped to prevent the rules-based order from further deterioration by opposing – through different means – the unjustified use of force and the violation of territorial integrity by Russia. The region, due to its strong relations with the United States, can also provide more convergence to the transatlantic alliance itself, by shaping Europe's strategic autonomy in regard to China with respect to the coordinated transatlantic interests. CEE which expects the US to act as the security provider to the region, should advocate for a common EU China policy that better coordinates security efforts rising from Chinese malign activity worldwide. Nevertheless, these bold goals can be achieved only if CEE overcomes its internal problems: limited effectiveness of the intraregional cooperation or existing tensions in relations with the Western European partners resulting from democratic backsliding observed in some countries in the region.

CEE countries have the potential to effectively pursue their common interests as formulated within the selected advocacy causes presented beneath. To use this momentum, it takes a pro-active approach to global problems and leadership forged through constructive participation in the international structures of the collective West.

Reviving CEE regional and cross-region cooperation via formats such as Visegrad Four, Bucharest Nine, Weimar Triangle, and the Lublin Triangle

More than 30 years after the peaceful democratic transition, most of Central and Eastern European states have strongly anchored themselves in the Western institutional framework. Joining the European Union and NATO was a political choice, which has profoundly shaped the fate of the region, impacting its security, political stability, economic prosperity, and international significance. Today few remember that intraregional cooperation of the 1990s (through formats such as the Visegrad Four or CEFTA)

was incremental for the coordination of the 2004 enlargement process. Few also appreciate the potential value of such coordination in better expressing the interests of the region, including in areas such as further strengthening of NATO's Eastern Flank or promoting future enlargements (particularly to Ukraine) of both the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance and the European Union.

As of 2023, CEE's most important regional cooperation formats include Visegrad Group (V4: Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia), Bucharest Nine (B9: Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia), and Lublin Triangle (Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine). The format of high importance for the region is also the Weimar Triangle (France, Germany, Poland), as it can coordinate policies between the biggest CEE player with the EU's leading nations.

Regional formats were crucial for the success of CEE

Ever since the transition of 1989–1991, Central and Eastern Europe has been the most tangible proof that **Western institutional integration can bring astonishing benefits**. The GDP of Poland alone has increased tenfold since 1990, and the country's vibrant economy hosting one of Europe's biggest IT hubs symbolizes the extreme

Diagram of alliances and allied organisations in the Central Eastern Europe
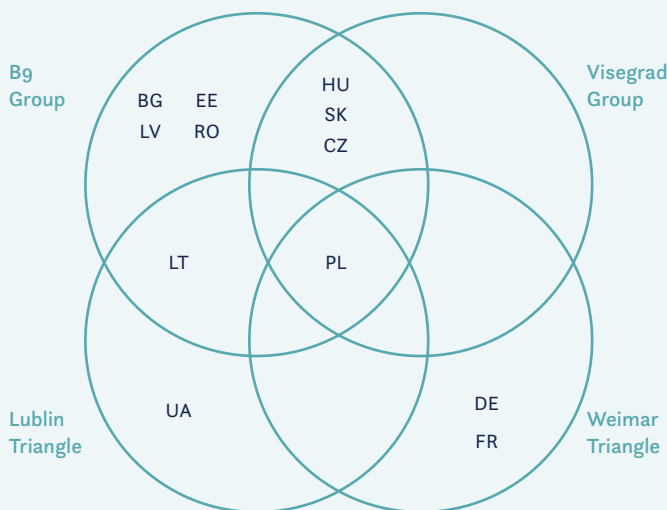
change in the model of business as compared to the obsolete heavy industry before 1989. Poland ranks fifth among Germany's main trading partners with the turnout exceeding EUR 168 billion in 2022. When all Visegrad Group countries (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) are combined, they sit at the top of the table.[1] Estonia in particular and the Baltic states in general offer one of the friendliest legislations for private entrepreneurship with a high level of digitalisation and incentives for innovations.

The economic success would not have been possible without political reforms. Started by spontaneous protests that crushed Soviet domination, they quickly evolved into methodical anchoring of the CEE countries into the democratic world. The first step was joining the Council of Europe and several sectoral organisations. By 2004 most countries of the region were already members of both NATO and the European Union. While the EU membership paved the way to the growing economic prosperity of the region, embedding CEE in NATO proved to be crucial to effectively protect the region from the external hostile activity of the Russian regime. The impact of this change can be seen clearly when the security environment of NATO's Eastern Flank countries and Ukraine are compared.

Although there was a slight degree of rivalry, CEE would not have achieved all of this without **intraregional cooperation.** The establishment of the V4 or CEFTA was an important signal that what mattered for Tallinn, Warsaw or Prague was the well-being of the whole region spanning between the Baltic, the Adriatic, and the Black Seas. CEE proved its determination to overcome the legacy of the communist past. Its countries successfully addressed historical grievances and embarked on the path of development boosted by regional cooperation. Moreover, they have become indispensable allies and **active providers to the international organisations they joined**, especially in the area of security and defence.

Continuous need for deeper intraregional cooperation

While the intraregional cooperation was often perceived – at best – as a tool for the coordination of efforts on the road to membership

in the EU & NATO, CEE countries favoured creating **more horizontal connections with Western Europe rather than a more harmonious and balanced regional approach**. This became visible by the mid-2010s when the lack of transport infrastructure impaired trade in the North-South axis. Neither of the region's leaders is convincingly powerful enough to impact the Western political institutions alone. At the same time, CEE is still too weak as a region in terms of its economic output, innovativeness, and internal cohesion to act without its Western partners.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine triggered **a great deal of solidarity inside the region, but it also revealed serious cracks.** Hungary became the oddball of the EU and NATO, largely withdrawing from providing direct support for Ukraine and only reluctantly accepting consecutive EU sanctions packages against Russia. Polish government proved to be ineffective in forming convincing Trans-European coalitions because of open ideological conflicts with the European Commission and some Western partners. Regional and cross-regional coordination were harmed by political conflicts, such as the one between Poland and Germany, resulting from both the objective long-standing differences in addressing the Russian threat (e.g. the issue of North Stream II and recently – the scale of military support for Ukraine), as well as from Poland's instrumentalization of its bilateral relations with Germany for domestic electoral purposes.

In this light, the reviving of the established formats of intraregional cooperation can serve as the main tool for building more convergence in the region. A common understanding of the mutual interests in areas such as security (incl. energy security), the future of the transatlantic integration in the region, new EU policy on Russia and China, the shape of the European strategic autonomy, or even the need for more investments in large-scale transport infrastructure, require the rise of CEE agency when shaping the European and Transatlantic agenda. The effectiveness of this process lies within the region's capability to: (1) identify the distinctive role for each of the formats of intraregional cooperation; (2) drive away from the Eurosceptic

GDP growth of B9 countries

percentage
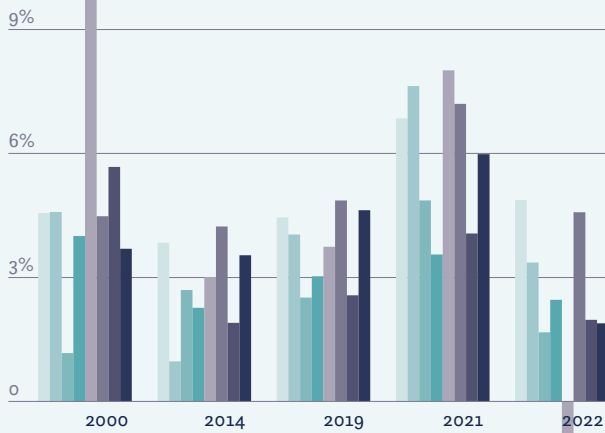
US Dollars at constant 2015 price
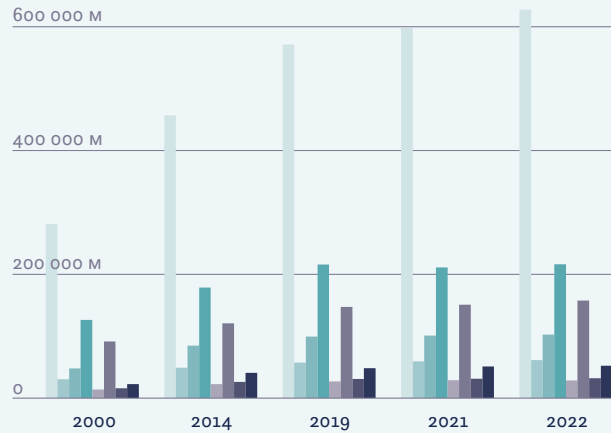
Poland Bulgaria Slovakia Czechia Estonia Hungary Latvia Lithuania

and anti-German narrative present in some CEE countries; (3) convince key Western European partners to recognise and incorporate into policies existential interests of CEE; (4) rebuild Poland's credibility as a responsible EU member state that participates in shaping policies on the European level and is capable of representing the region's interests; (5) shape a clear and ambitious, yet realistic path for Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration; (6) maintain the West's support in creating an environment for Ukraine's reconstruction.

Roadmap for attaining the goal

SHORT TERM

1. New impetus for regional cooperation

In recent years we have witnessed both an extraordinary level of regional solidarity, as well as some serious cracks in the intraregional cohesion of CEE. Factors such as democratic backsliding, the rising importance of security & defence policies, Hungary's odd stance towards the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and the transatlantic ambitions of Ukraine & Moldova, defined most of the political developments between the countries in the region. As the result of diverging interests among its members surrounding the War in Ukraine, the V4 was seriously weakened, while other formats – such as Weimar Triangle – were revived for some

occasional political gains. Today, the whole **region needs new impulses for redefining its joint interests**, increasing its standing in discussions on international fora, and embarking on joint large-scale projects related to the rising importance of security and defence. CEE needs to revive regional and cross-regional cooperation formats to build more internal cohesion and advocate for its common interests within the European Union and NATO.

Bucharest Nine, Visegrad Group, Lublin Triangle, and Weimar Triangle all serve different functions but only together can substantially contribute to the region's hard and soft security. Within this generous network of alliances, the

regional stakeholders shall **identify the distinctive role of each of the formats of intraregional cooperation**. The Bucharest Nine has a very clear security & defence focus that shall be used to strengthen NATO's Eastern Flank by better coordinating CEE's activities within NATO. The Lublin Triangle is the perfect hub for cooperation focused on the advancement of Ukraine's membership aspirations to the EU, and NATO, with the potential to coordinate joint advocacy activities in this regard. The Visegrad Four, which currently faces the crisis resulting from diverging Ukraine-related interests of its members, can still focus on more tangible and less ideological projects such as transport infrastructure. The Weimar Triangle is well positioned to extend the mandate of the informal Franco-German engine to lead the EU by incorporating Poland, and therefore opening Western Europe to CEE strategic interests. It could be also used to influence Germany's vision of its future foreign policy towards Russia and supporting the new, much-needed policy of Zeitenwende. The advantage of these networks, which encompass different aspects of intraregional cooperation, is clear, as it serves the purpose of **consulting policy guidelines with regional partners**.

2. Germany still the key partner, EU still the key alliance

As a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine Berlin opened a new discussion about the necessity of a reshaped approach to the changing nature of the security environment in Europe (*Zeitenwende*). Although the belligerent rhetoric about the lack of a tangible success of this process is often heard in Central European capitals, the region's governments know how crucial the role of their Western neighbour would be in co-creating a comprehensive and coherent EU policy on Russia. **Especially Poland needs to reestablish good neighbourly relations with Germany** built on the enormous success of bilateral trade and present its interest in a partner-like and responsible manner.

At the same time the dominant rhetoric picturing the policy developments in the EU as highly negative and ideologically driven, has to give way to a constructive approach to the pan-European problems. If CEE wants the Western European allies to share an understanding of the region's interests, it has to show its activity in **debates about the future of the EU.** Moreover, ambitions and pursuit of CEE's interests should be aligned with a proactive posture to the problems that **go beyond the clear regional focus**. CEE needs to show leadership beyond security and defence and start creating solutions to global challenges, such as climate change, or participate in fundamental debates, such as the one related to the EU's common policy on China. This **return to the European mainstream** is important, especially given the ambitions of CEE countries to become advocates for Ukraine's membership in the European Union.

MEDIUM TERM

1. Rebuilding Poland's credibility

The events following February 24th, 2022 have, shifted the core of European security eastwards. Under the new circumstances, **Poland's role as a regional security provider has risen to a degree unknown after 1989**. With the significant level of threat stemming from Russia and Belarus and the need for both integration with the West and reconstruction of Ukraine, Warsaw in particular needs to act as a responsible and constructive player. Polish decision-makers need to **rebuild trust with the EU institutions and take an active role in shaping the EU agenda.**

This of course requires the resolution of all the conflicts with the European Commission related to the rule of law. Building trust and credibility as one of the EU leaders requires **broad engagement in policies that burden not only CEE.** It also needs building a positive ambiance in relations with the key European allies, Germany included. If Poland aspires to the role of the region's leader, the country needs to learn how to **coordinate key policies with other CEE partners** and further use the potential of the Weimar Triangle, as it gives the platform to consult directly with the EU's leading nations (France and Germany).

2. Embedding Ukraine into the West

CEE needs to continue advocating for a **swift and full integration of Ukraine with Western institutions.** The region shall advocate for **a clear and ambitious, yet realistic path for Kyiv's membership in NATO, and the EU.** Transatlantic integration of Ukraine is essential to create new security dynamics and decrease the long-term threat stemming from Russia for the whole region. For this sake, CEE should act towards finding such a peace solution that will be accepted by Ukrainians, will not weaken Ukraine's sovereignty, will enable the reconstruction of the country, and **will provide long-term security to the whole CEE region.**

Road to the above-mentioned leads through **embedding Ukraine into the regional cooperation framework**, which will not serve as an alternative to Kyiv's transatlantic aspirations but strengthen its bet in the forthcoming advocacy activities. CEE should use its experience from the 1990s: while pushing for membership in the European Union, NATO, and other Western organisations, it built a network of more and less formalised structures of its own to increase intraregional political cooperation, boost trade relations and create people-to-people ties. **Ukraine needs the CEE expertise** to pursue the same goals today. A project of this kind could be based on the Lublin Triangle. This already existing intraregional format of cooperation, conceived from the beginning by Ukraine as one of the founders (alongside with Lithuania and Poland), makes the perfect start for cooperation focused on the advancement of Ukraine's EU and NATO membership aspirations, with a potential to coordinate joint CEE advocacy activities in this regard.

LONG TERM

1. Remaining a hub for post-war support to Ukraine

The support for the transatlantic future of Ukraine should not be limited by the timeframe of the ongoing war. Security of the CEE was always closely **intertwined with the success story of spreading prosperity in the region.** Joining Western institutions brings a security umbrella to the new member states of the EU and NATO, but it is also an investment into a democratic system and a well-functioning economic model. The long-term aim for CEE countries shall be **maintaining the other Western states' support in creating an environment for Ukraine's reconstruction and modernisation.**

Already when the Russian invasion of Ukraine started, countries of the CEE region established humanitarian and military transportation corridors for Ukraine that have been extensively used ever since. Such a considerable flow of military and civilian goods from the West has been possible thanks to infrastructural investments, including motorways, railroads, and harbour infrastructure. The degree of integration of CEE with its Western neighbours has proven to be robust. **CEE needs to continue these efforts and prepare for delivering even greater support when the reconstruction of Ukraine begins.** The most tangible idea could be building more **vertical connections and intermodal transport hubs,** which are needed not only to ensure the flow of goods but also to bring the added value of increasing intraregional cohesion with Ukraine onboard. By doing so, the reconstruction efforts are more likely to fulfil the additional, long-term goal of bringing Ukraine into a broader CEE cooperation framework.

2. Supporting Moldova's (and Belarus') integration with the West

Russian invasion of Ukraine has shown at least two other trouble spots: Belarus and Moldova. The former's dependency on Russia has reached a whole new level since the August 2020 presidential election. In military terms, the country has become an informal part of the Russian Western Military District.[2] In the face of nearly total domination of the Kremlin over Minsk, **CEE countries need to maintain interest in supporting democratic Belarusian forces in exile.** Moldova on the other hand has been the showcase of how frozen conflicts in the post-Soviet area can become a political tool

Views about NATO among citizens of B9 states with a comparison to western members of the alliance

Thinking about everything you have read, heard and experienced, how favourably or unfavourably do you view NATO?

- ■ Favourable
- ■ Neither favourable nor unfavourable
- ■ Unfavourable
- ■ Don't know

Country	Favourable	Neither	Unfavourable	Don't know
Poland	77	15	6	2
Lithuania	70	14	11	5
Romania	70	13	13	4
Estonia	66	12	16	5
Hungary	58	20	16	7
Latvia	55	21	17	6
Czechia	51	19	25	5
Bulgaria	46	18	31	5
Slovakia	40	21	35	4
The United Kingdom	60	18	9	13
The United States	58	18	10	14
France	54	21	13	11
Germany	52	25	16	7

58% of Allied citizens have a favourable opinion of NATO

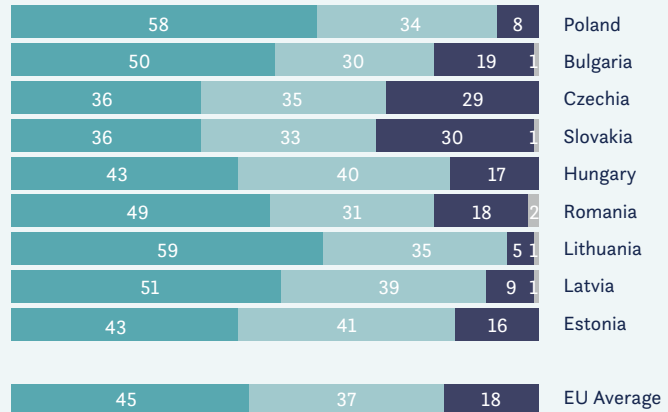source NATO, 2022 Annual Tracking Research
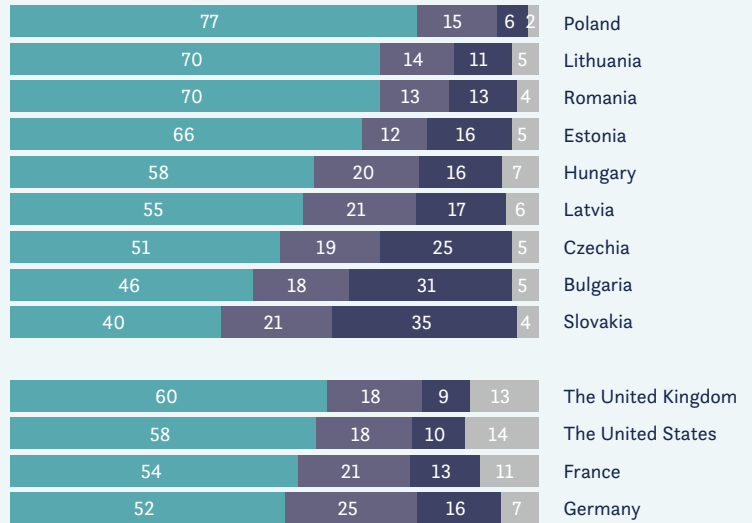
Views about the European Union among citizens of B9 states

In general, does the EU conjure up for you a very positive, fairly positive, neutral, fairly negative or very negative image?

- ■ 'Positive' total
- ■ Neutral
- ■ 'Negative' total
- ■ Don't know

Country	'Positive' total	Neutral	'Negative' total	Don't know
Poland	58	34	8	
Bulgaria	50	30	19	1
Czechia	36	35	29	
Slovakia	36	33	30	1
Hungary	43	40	17	
Romania	49	31	18	2
Lithuania	59	35	5	1
Latvia	51	39	9	1
Estonia	43	41	16	
EU Average	45	37	18	

source Eurobarometer, Spring 2023

of Russia's imperial policy, effectively limiting the possibility of democratic reforms. Now that Chisinau is on the path to eradicating corruption and creating foundations for a resilient, Western nation-state, **CEE needs to show decisive support to Moldova.**

Further **integrating Eastern Europe into the Western institutional framework is crucial for** **the longstanding security of the whole CEE** as it eliminates any Russian political and territorial gains coming from imperial and hostile foreign policy. It creates a safe space for the prosperity of nations in the region and elevates their democratic standards. It also prevents the rules-based order from further degeneration by opposing the unjustified use of force and the violation of territorial integrity.

Possible obstacles to the roadmap implementation

Divergence of CEE from the transatlantic core

For a number of years now, Central and Eastern Europe has been faced with the daunting reality of growing populism and democratic backsliding. Some CEE ruling parties (most notably those in Hungary and Poland) have taken steps which lead to degrading the rule of law – a core component of EU membership. Actions of this kind, led to legal disputes between the European Commission and these governments. The region is not isolated in this trend, as similar tendencies can be seen in many Western countries, including in France (with the raise of the National Front) and in Germany (where Alternative fur Deutschland has made significant electoral gains in some German lands).

As mentioned before, CEE has the potential of co-creating not only Western policies towards Russia but also impacting the discussion about the future European security architecture (including security guarantees for a post-war Ukraine). Yet without becoming a predictable and goal-driven group of states, CEE risks not being heard by its Western partners, and simply losing the momentum created by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Most importantly, any democratic backsliding in the CEE region only accelerates the already existing weakening of democratic standards in EU and NATO member states. This in turn **undermines the West's coherence, security, and resilience against malign actors such as Russia or China.**

Therefore, one of the biggest obstacles to attaining the goal of reviving regional and cross-regional cooperation formats lies within the actions of CEE countries themselves, as the **growing populism acts against the internal coherence of the region.** Moreover, it simply undermines the mere goal of the existence of the formats of cooperation, as they **lack credibility, which is needed to impact the desired changes.**

Transatlantic integration of Ukraine becomes illusive

The lack of a clear NATO membership perspective, which was expected as a result of the 2023 Vilnius Summit, has provoked a lot of resentment among both Ukrainian decision-makers and the general public. What for some was an overly ambitious goal, for Ukraine constituted a justified step recognizing the country's wartime sacrifices stemming from the Russian invasion. At the same time – since the 2004 and 2009 enlargements – EU accession process of new member states has very much stalled. With the Western Balkans still in the waiting room, there is little optimism for Ukraine to join the European Union anytime soon. As previous enlargements have proved, the process is always lengthy and requires from candidate states constant efforts in building democratic institutions, advancing reforms, as well organizing advocacy campaigns addressing any concerns the enlargement might spark among Western governments and publics.

The lack of a credible timeframe for integration would have however a disastrous effect on both Ukraine and the region. If European and Euro-Atlantic integration proves illusive, this might have a damaging effect first and foremost on the Ukrainian public opinion. Since the Euromaidan revolution in 2014, the price that Ukraine is paying for choosing democracy and freedom is bore with the hope of a clear end goal: joining the Western community. If this goal is not attainable in a foreseeable future, the entire reform and transformation effort in Ukraine might be undermined. This in turn will be used by malign actors, including Russia, to indefinitely push Ukraine (and potentially the region) into a "no-mans-land" ridden by instability and conflict. This is why the CEE region must advocate for a clear and ambitious, yet realistic path for Ukraine's accession to NATO and the EU.

Strengthening EU's foreign policy by creating a coherent European policy on China

Recent years have seen a slow deterioration of relations between China and the West, which stems primarily from the direction the country is heading under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. Pervasive surveillance and mounting social controls within China; an increasingly assertive foreign and defence policy in its direct neighbourhood, coupled with China's response to COVID-19 and an ambiguous reaction to the Russian aggression in Ukraine, have all done much damage to the country's image in the West in general and in Central and Eastern Europe in particular. Although today, the EU admits that Beijing is '**a partner for cooperation and negotiation, an economic competitor and a systemic rival**',[3] Europe is still unable to form a common policy towards its largest trade partner. As the obstacles on the path to creating EU China policy, we identify: (1) strong economic interdependence between the EU and China; (2) competition between European countries in access to the Chinese market and in creating positive economic relations with China; (3) malign political influence of Beijing; (4) lack of a coordinated US-Europe approach to China; (5) Chinese impact on international trade and cross-cutting technologies worldwide. The common denominator of these challenges lies **in the inability of the transatlantic partners to create convergence in response to the rising Chinese destructive impact on the rules-based order.**

CEE shall aim to play a **proactive and creative role in bringing more coherence to the European assessment of China policy**, as well as to create space for **cooperation with the US** in this regard. Leadership aspirations that CEE countries display within the European Union are related predominantly to security and defence and targeted mostly at opposing the Russian threat. However, the region that expects the US to act as the security provider, should also advocate for a better coordination of the security efforts that transatlantic allies have to face worldwide. Otherwise, the stretched interest of the US, which considers Beijing as its vital competitor, will certainly downplay CEE's security and make it more vulnerable to malign influence. Furthermore, the region bears responsibility to prevent the advancement of destructive tendencies that undermine the existing rules-based order, especially when unjustified use of force and the violation of territorial integrity is mentioned, both in neighbouring Ukraine and in the distant South China Sea.

Common EU China policy is however not limited only to security. It includes creating space for the advancement of the European economy, de-risking from technological dependence on Chinese production capabilities, or even winning Chinese support in combatting global challenges such as climate change. This makes it
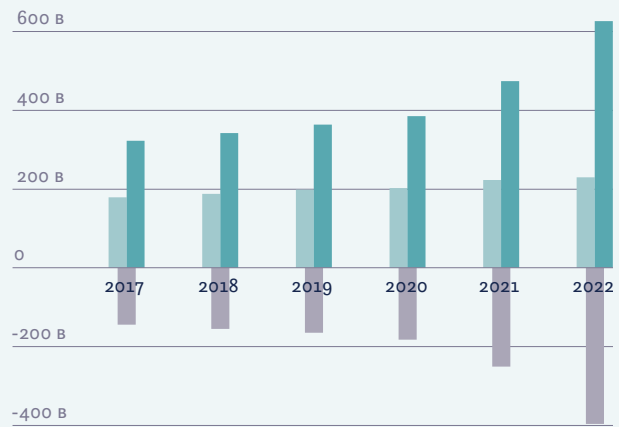
Overview of trade with China – Comparison between the United States and the European Union

United States ($)
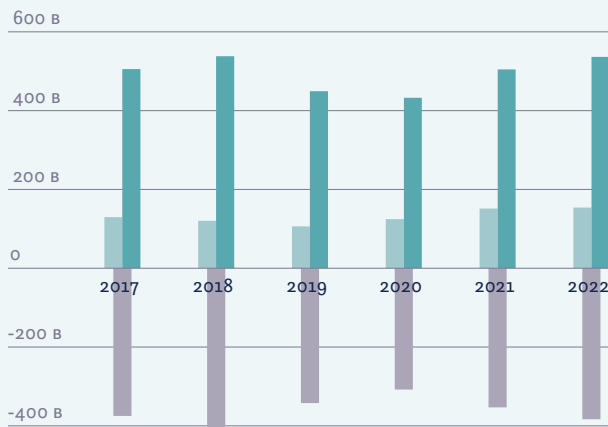
source u.s. Department of Commerce

European Union (€)

source Eurostat

■ Exports ■ Imports ■ Balance

a perfect area for CEE countries to **show their potential for more creative cooperation with the Western partners** in the subjects that burden not only the region. To participate in creation of a common EU policy on China, the CEE region has to: (1) obtain the ability to impact EU policies by navigating back to the European mainstream and eliminating democratic backsliding tendencies; (2) create better strategic understanding of Chinese role in supporting Russia's agression against Ukraine; (3) create more internal cohesion within the EU on the perception of China; (4) create stronger US-Europe ties and shape Europe's strategic autonomy that is aligned with coordinated transatlantic interests.

China's true colours

When the Chinese government announced the One Belt, One Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013, the hopes in the CEE region were high. New trade initiatives were expected to help recover from the global financial crisis. It seemed a win-win: while encouraging the construction of new railroad, road, and maritime connections, Beijing would have co-financed them to eliminate infrastructural and trading bottlenecks. China

saw the region as a 'cluster hub' with mutually complementing modules: cargo terminals, ports, and logistical centres. Because of that, new cooperation formats like 16+1 emerged to break the mould of CEE being an interzone between the great powers. Some Chinese officials openly declared the region as a future European powerhouse and a potential advocate of China's cause in Western capitals. It was only the **economic slowdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the rising global rivalry of recent years that helped see Chinese BRI investments from a different perspective.** The BRI was flagged as creating fiscal problems worldwide by burdening the participating countries with managing new levels of debt stemming from large-scale infrastructural projects, while China's image as a power hostile to the Western world became more obvious.

China's malign influence in CEE

Already around 2020, most governments in the region began excluding Chinese companies from sensitive projects, such as constructing the 5G infrastructure. The tensions culminated when Lithuania called the persecution of Uyghurs a genocide and agreed for the Taipei

representation office to use the name 'Taiwanese'.[4] The furious reaction of Beijing proved that countering rudimentary Chinese interests triggers a decisive response. It also severely weakened the 16+1 cooperation format, with the Baltic States leaving and Czechia calling itself an inactive member after many reports warning of China's influence on Czech domestic politics.[5] The case of 16+1 has shown clearly the **malign aspect of China's involvement in CEE**, and its willingness to impact decision-making processes in pluralist democratic societies.

China-Russia rapprochement

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine **unveiled the potential for Russian-Chinese partnership against the Western liberal model**. Beijing did not condemn Moscow's war of aggression. Instead, it kept ostensible neutrality while increasing cooperation with the Kremlin. Russia-Chinese trade reached a record high of USD 190 billion in 2022 and USD 94 billion in the first five months of 2023. That constitutes a 29 and 41 percent year-to-year increase.[6] Beijing is also aware that for the US, Russia's invasion of Ukraine created **an additional burden distracting Washington from its long-term strategic goal**; **namely taming the growing ambition of China.**

The negative impact of Beijing on the security of the Western community, hostile political activity impacting democratic processes within the EU & the US, and economic dependence, make it clear that the **Chinese challenge will largely define the strategic path of the collective West.**

Roadmap for attaining the goal

SHORT TERM

1. Gaining the ability to significantly impact EU policies

CEE countries are often perceived as actors that become creative on the European stage only when security and defence issues are discussed. Indeed, as proven by the current developments in Ukraine, the security-oriented realm of politics has always been the priority for CEE countries when asking for more coordinated pan-European policies. China policy, although it is rooted in the growing global rivalry that fuels the atmosphere of fear for the security of the transatlantic world, is in fact much broader. On one hand, it should protect the core values of a rules-based order and prevent disruptions to international peace and trade. It should however also create space for furthering the prosperity of Europe and strengthening its impact on global affairs, such as regulation of cross-cutting technologies, or climate change. CEE governments, in particular Poland or Hungary, with a track record of democratic backsliding, unresolved conflicts with the European Commission, and tense relations with the EU's most influential countries, might find it especially hard to become more impactful in the discussions recognised as the most important for the future of the Union. Only by proving that they can **act as team players that are capable of coordinating policies with non-regional partners**, and by **showing attachment to the European mainstream understanding of policy priorities**, CEE governments can successfully impact the common EU China policy.

2. Understanding and Containing Russia-China rapprochement

Russia's aggression against Ukraine remains the most serious security challenge to Europe, including the CEE region. Hitherto the behaviour of China has shown that Beijing is willing to take an ambiguous yet Russia-leaning stance to achieve several goals: (1) cementing the asymmetrical nature of relations with Russia by making the latter more dependent economically (Chinese imports of raw materials) and politically (diplomatic support at international forums); (2) gaining time to respond to U.S.'s

strategic shift to Asia and the Pacific; and (3) expanding the Chinese zone of influence in areas traditionally perceived as being of vital interests to Russia (Central Asia and the Middle Corridor). Chinese decision-makers also seek to weaken the West by taking over the initiative in the Global South. They are interested in a peace solution that would not bring Russia to its knees. A feeble stability between Kyiv and Moscow would keep the West busy for more years to come. Europe should counter such actions decisively by **voicing to Chinese partners a clear commitment to Ukraine's future within the EU and NATO**. At the same time, the EU should **engage China** in the process of finding a peaceful solution to the conflict by gaining its support in areas such as **the containment of an aggressive nuclear posture of Russia.**

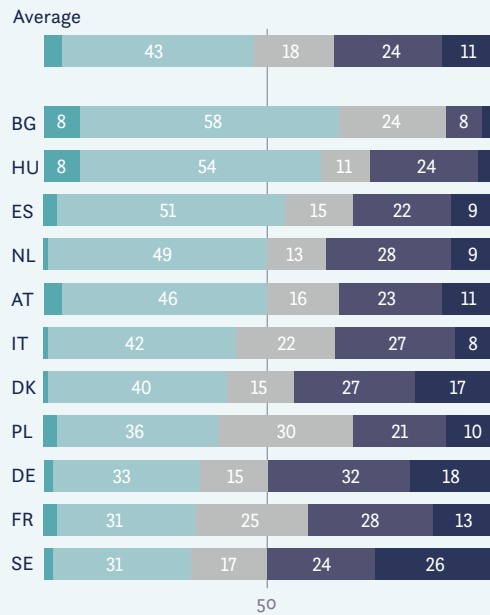### 1. More internal cohesion in the EU's perception of China

Teamplay is important also in economic policies. For now, it seems that some EU Member States would prefer to maintain their double-track approach and develop trade with China despite growing geopolitical tensions. Sino-Franco and Sino-German consultations in mid-June 2023 gave such an impression about the intentions in Paris and Berlin.[7]

The French and German approaches might turn out harmful to the interest of the whole EU. Instead of acting unilaterally for a vague promise of gaining or widening access to the Chinese market, decision-makers in EU capitals should rather think about pursuing **value-oriented selective engagement**. They should also seek ways to **maintain the shrinking technological advantages of European economies**, which is unlikely to be achieved without closer cooperation within the EU.

An EU policy on China should also include a response to the security interests voiced by the CEE states, resulting from Chinese economic impact on some European governments. It shall also **support the EU Member States against malign actions of China** targeted at their internal politics, as was the case in Lithuania and Czechia.

Opinion polls of citizens of Selected EU countries on the relationship with China

- ■ An ally – that shares our interests and values
- ■ A necessary partner – with which we must strategically cooperate
- ■ Don't know
- ■ A rival – with which we need to compete
- ■ An adversary – with which we are in conflict

Average

	An ally	A necessary partner	Don't know	A rival	An adversary
Average		43	18	24	11
BG	8	58	24	8	
HU	8	54	11	24	
ES		51	15	22	9
NL		49	13	28	9
AT		46	16	23	11
IT		42	22	27	8
DK		40	15	27	17
PL		36	30	21	10
DE		33	15	32	18
FR		31	25	28	13
SE		31	17	24	26

50

source ECFR, June 2023

2. Creating stronger transatlantic ties

The EU leaders need to **coordinate efforts with their Transatlantic partners.** In times of growing geopolitical tensions, a coherent narrative of what the West's interests are and the ability to pursue them cannot be underestimated.[8] In comparison to China's authoritarian ability to operationalise its objectives swiftly, the West is significantly slower as it needs to take into account the peculiarities of democratic decision-making processes and the need for discussing any changes in policies in a large group of countries. Streamlining efforts and agreeing on adhering to them to a greater extent than now will provide a visible, long-term boost in shaping relations with China. On the level of identifying strategic security interests the **EU shall seek synergy with the US**, creating a response that would not envisage the future of the Union as the balancing power between the US and China, but the one capable of acting within the **strategic autonomy that is aligned with coordinated transatlantic interests**. Noteworthy, from the CEE perspective, this process also needs the inclusion of partners such as the United Kingdom.

3. Advancing the Open Strategic Autonomy

The EU is already involved in reducing the dependency on foreign, mostly non-Western, technologies. The so-called Open Strategic Autonomy involves several long-distance goals and areas: resilience of supply chains, national security, defence of values, sustainability, and technological competitiveness.[9] The Spanish Presidency in the EU Council has made OSA one of its priorities, which strengthens the conviction that decision-makers in many EU capitals are aware of the need for greater IT security and Europe's own technological capabilities. The EU needs more determination in working on these topics, which shall include creating economic ties with Beijing in a way that **prevents the EU's strategic dependency on the production and technological capabilities of China.** The European Union shall also engage in creating **partnerships for shaping worldwide regulations** in cross-cutting technologies.

LONG TERM

1. Creating a values-based democratic counternarrative

China's advantage in the great geopolitical game has not only been its allegedly business-only-oriented readiness to invest in infrastructure and other branches of local economies. Beijing presents itself as a country without a history of colonial exploitation of other nations. By applying this rhetoric, it can pursue its tangible economic interest more efficiently.

The EU needs to address this rhetoric not by deserting from a commitment to promoting the Western market economy model or its democratic values, but by **underlining the negative economic effects of aligning to the Chinese offer.** Those certainly include less quality, a selective approach to legal commitments, and resource capture. The European Union shall also promote the more **sustainable approach of its**

non-transatlantic partners to economic engagement with China, which includes building **resilient supply chains** or a more **climate-sustainable economy.** In the world of growing ruptures and increasingly visible clashes of visions of international relations, the European take must become even more coherent and convincing if the continent wants to remain a strong and **attractive alternative to the models offered by China or Russia** worldwide.

The EU needs to present itself as a viable alternative to the Chinese cooperation model in Africa or South and Central Asia. Such a narrative can be built on the shortcomings of BRI. The abovementioned regions have realised that the **Chinese presence means ruthless exploitation** of their natural resources. The EU should underline the **win-win aspect of the value-based cooperation** that will bear fruit over decades to come.

Possible obstacles to the roadmap implementation

Misconstrued strategic autonomy

The emergence of a more strategically autonomous Europe has been advocated for a long time already. Observed as the necessity by both Washington and many European capitals, if well shaped it will certainly strengthen the security capabilities of the transatlantic alliance by making Europe more self-dependent. China's growing pressure on the US leadership worldwide added another argument to speed up the process, as the strategic autonomy gained new areas of focus: more economy and technology oriented. Donald Trump's presidency (2017–2021), which sparked fears about NATO's future and the US's rising isolation tendencies, inspired many European politicians to think about strategic autonomy as an opportunity to decouple not only from China but also to loosen some of the security dependencies from the US. It has also inspired thinking about the possibility of the EU using the era of global rivalry to pursue its independent interests from both the US and China and to place itself in a balancing position between these two dominant powers. Strategic autonomy defined that way is particularly harmful for CEE.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has shown clearly that **European security without the US security umbrella and technological advantage is incomplete**, to say the least. In fact, the non-EU allies of CEE: Washington and London, were capable of showing decisive leadership in the first period of the war, as compared to more hesitant Paris or Berlin. The enormous changes that are taking place in the global economy, both as the result of the emerging impact of cross-cutting technologies and the rise of the green economy, are also the source of tensions in the transatlantic alliance. In all of the above-mentioned areas, the **misconstrued strategic autonomy creates incoherence in the transatlantic alliance that undermines CEE security by discouraging the US from engaging with the EU partners** and providing security to the region.

Incapability to address China's influence in CEE

The European Union's policy on China – if created only by the big players, such as France and Germany – will be detrimental to EU's interest as a whole. The fear in the CEE region is that instead of being informed by both security and value-based considerations, the EU policy will be based on a narrow economic interest of gaining or widening access to the Chinese market. Such a policy will exert external pressure on CEE to abandon altogether a value-based approach to China. This in turn will surely make the region more prone to Chinese economic and political influence. CEE countries such as Lithuania and Czechia have already paid the price for opposing Beijing's actions to exploit their democracies. In the longer term, with the EU policy on China built solely on economic interests, such a chain of actions might deprive Vilnius and Prague of tangible interest to continue their principled stance.

Conclusion

There should be no doubt that Central and Eastern Europe can successfully pursue its interests if it acts as a **group of responsible and proactive countries**. This requires however more **internal cohesion** which is a precondition for making the region's voice heard at the EU and NATO level. CEE governments need to abandon their oftentimes populist rhetoric towards Germany and Brussels, come up with **constructive ideas,** and remember that its post-1989 success has depended on **solidarity connected with deep structural reforms**. Today many countries of the region need to embark on two tasks at the same time: renew their democratic institutions and advocate for even more ambitious reforms in the wider region, including in Ukraine and Moldova.

While the war in Ukraine itself poses an immediate and tangible threat to the well-being of the European Union and the Transatlantic community, it has also revealed long-term challenges. One of them is **redefining Europe's relations with China.** This exercise is crucial for both the well-being and coherence of the collective West and its long-term security. The liberal democratic model once again needs to **show its robustness to compete** against the seemingly no-strings-attached foreign policy pursued by Beijing. It requires more internal cohesion, courage to stand up for core values, and readiness to go off the beaten path in areas where the systemic competition is already becoming fierce. Central and Eastern Europe **needs to become part of this rivalry** should it want to strengthen and secure its position for years to come. In this light, countries such as Poland are capable of using the positive relationship with both Washington and London to create convergence between all the transatlantic players. The goal is to shape the future of the EU not as the balancing power between the US and China, but as the one capable of acting within the **strategic autonomy that is aligned with coordinated transatlantic interests**.

3 Improving Energy Security of CEE region

Introduction

The European energy sector has been subject to significant transformation following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia in the winter of 2022. The decades-long belief in Western Europe's ability to build a competitive advantage based on a reliable supply of cheap Russian raw materials has ended. The war has undermined confidence in the certainty of energy supplies and, by extension, in the sustainability of the basic comfort of life that residents of most developed countries have become accustomed to for several generations. Europeans have seen with their own eyes the materialization of the risks of supply interruptions, widespread failures and damage to transmission and distribution networks. This contributes to the understanding that energy – or more precisely, the lack of it – can be used against societies and countries in the same aggressive way as bombs and tanks.

Given these considerations, the energy experts contributing to this report argue that the new European energy order – including in the region of CEE – should be built on the basis of broader, deeper and more advanced transatlantic cooperation. A regulatory, market and technological environment conducive to synchronized energy security building on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean should be built. Ukraine will play a key role in the new CEE energy security arrangement. Its integration into the region and the European Union will accelerate the country's reconstruction processes, while opening up promising new development opportunities for partners on the continent.

Strengthening transatlantic cooperation for energy security and supplies resilience
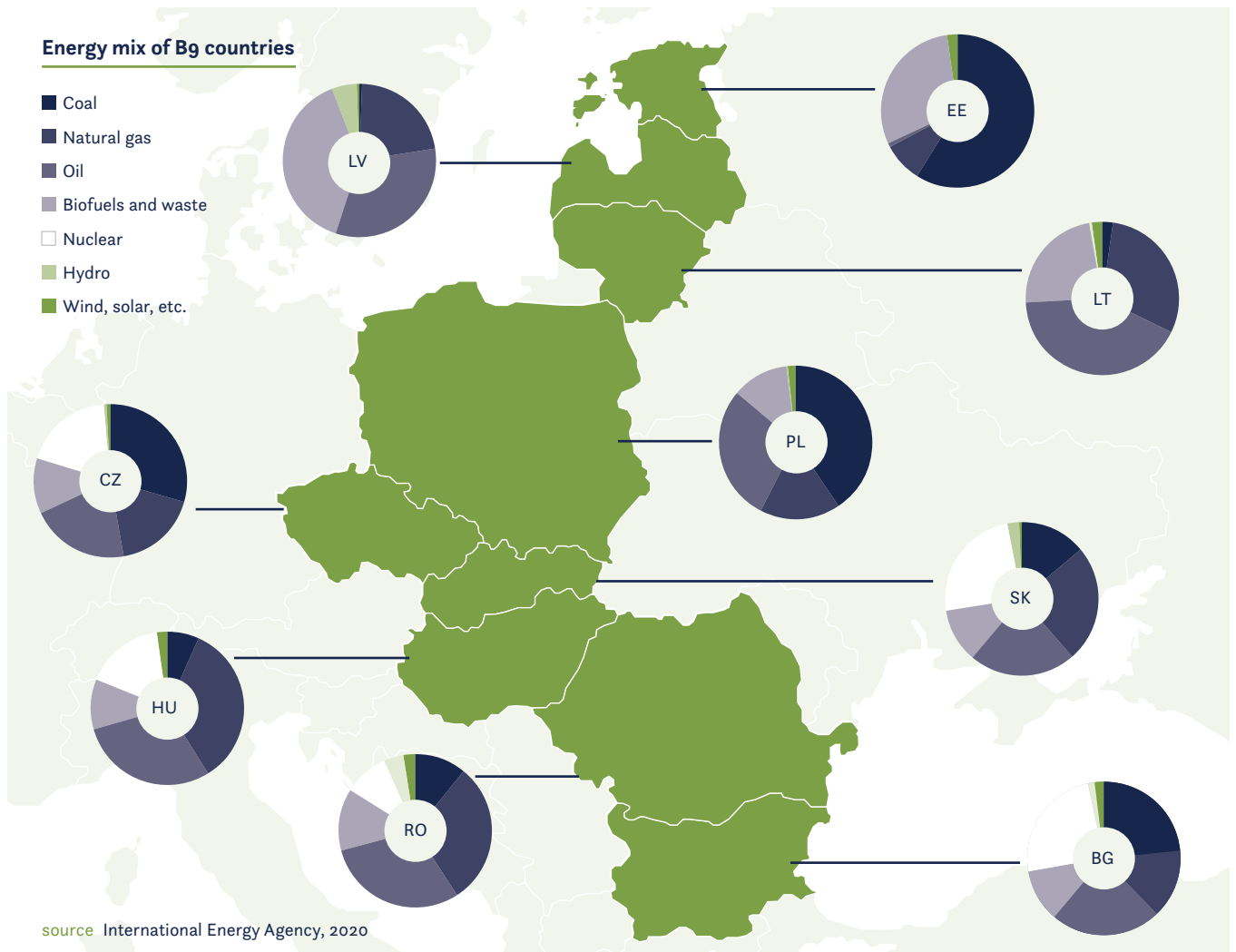
In the face of evolving global energy dynamics, the imperative for transatlantic cooperation between the European Union and the United States of America has gained unprecedented significance. The multifaceted challenges posed by recent geopolitical events, including the war in Ukraine and the disruption of gas supplies from Russia uncover the vital role of collaboration in ensuring energy security and supplies resilience. Moreover, it recognises the urgent need to align efforts in combating climate change and advancing sustainable energy initiatives. The energy security and environmental initiatives must be addressed in conjugation rather than separate areas of interest as one cannot be achieved without the other. Additionally, by leveraging their shared values, technological expertise, and political influence, the EU and USA can forge a robust partnership that strengthens energy security, safeguards critical infrastructure, and paves the way for a more stable and sustainable energy future.

The benefits of the transatlantic cooperation

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has exposed the vulnerability of Europe's energy landscape, as it highlighted the risks associated with heavy dependence on Russian gas supplies. Gazprom's manipulation of energy resources for political leverage has underscored the urgent need to diversify sources and routes for energy imports. This includes not only the new routes of supplies but also the new green alternatives to traditional energy sources. Concurrently, the imperatives of climate change mitigation and the transition towards clean energy necessitate a comprehensive reassessment of energy strategies in Europe. This context demands immediate and strategic transatlantic collaboration, founded on mutual trust and shared goals, to overcome the challenges posed by geopolitical instabilities.

Transatlantic cooperation presents a unique opportunity to enhance energy security through diversification and resilience-building measures. The EU and the U. S. should jointly prioritize the development and interconnection of new energy infrastructure, such as liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals, pipelines, and electricity grids. Increased investment in renewable energy projects, including offshore wind farms and solar installations, can facilitate the reduction of reliance on fossil fuels and promote energy independence. Cooperation on nuclear projects especially in CEE should also remain a priority. Collaboration on research and development of emerging technologies, such as

Energy mix of B9 countries

- Coal
- Natural gas
- Oil
- Biofuels and waste
- Nuclear
- Hydro
- Wind, solar, etc.

source International Energy Agency, 2020

energy storage and smart grid systems, will further bolster energy security by ensuring the availability and stability of supplies. To address the vulnerabilities exposed by the Ukrainian conflict, the EU and the U. S. should foster closer cooperation in developing crisis response mechanisms and contingency plans. Enhancing information sharing, intelligence cooperation, and cyber resilience which will be essential in safeguarding critical energy infrastructure from potential disruptions or cyberattacks. Coordinated efforts in promoting energy efficiency and demand-side management will contribute

to reducing energy consumption and enhancing overall system resilience. By jointly implementing rigorous regulatory frameworks and promoting best practices, the EU and the U. S. can effectively respond to and mitigate global risks to the energy sector.

What is important to highlight is the fact that all climate initiatives should be a derivative of countries' energy security policy rather than the cause of environmental policies resulting from shaping and implementing the defence and energy security of the member states.

Roadmap for attaining the goal

1. Establish a Joint Transatlantic Energy Security Task Force

Initiate high-level political dialogue and establish a task force consisting of key representatives from the EU and the U. S. to identify immediate priorities and formulate a comprehensive action plan. High-level political leaders from the EU and the U. S. should reaffirm their commitment to transatlantic energy cooperation, highlighting the shared objectives of energy security, climate action, and sustainable development.

2. Enhance Information Sharing and Intelligence Cooperation

Develop mechanisms for sharing critical energy infrastructure information, threat intelligence, and best practices in cybersecurity to strengthen resilience against potential disruptions.

3. Establish Common Energy Security Strategy

Coordinated development of key infrastructure in the U. S. and EU should also be considered as the investment efforts need to bring value in also mid and long term. It would be important to ascertain that the built infrastructure on the European side will also be effectively and efficiently used in 10–20 years. Therefore, to remove uncertainties in future investments and infrastructure development a common strategy between the U. S. (the exporter of energy) and the EU (the importer of energy) must be established.

4. Establish Attainable Energy Transformation Goals

Both types of energy sources, fossil fuel and clean energy sources, cannot be considered a zero-sum proposition, as the non-intermittent energy sources are and still will be essential for the energy security of the continent. The pace of the energy transition and development of the new technology relates directly to energy security. Reducing the share of fossils fuels must take into account the different specificities of the member states, their current mix and the ability to ensure energy supply. This includes taking into account the varied characteristics of the operation of sources. In addition, nuclear power should not be top-down excluded from EU funding. As a zero-carbon technology, nuclear energy can be an important milestone in achieving climate neutrality.

5. Reconsider Conventional Energy Sources in The Energy Mix

Gas and nuclear energy sources in Central and Eastern Europe should not be excluded as energy security providers (at least in the short to medium term). Extensive gas storage systems in Ukraine should be higher on the European Commission (EC) agenda and not leave this important issue to bilateral relations. Based on its mandate the EC should take initiative, coordinate better at the member-state level, and propose more robust solutions across the union. The gas storage system in Ukraine if integrated with the rest of Europe can provide additional security and stability.

6. Accelerate LNG Infrastructure Development

Promote investment and streamline regulatory processes to expedite the construction of LNG terminals, including the necessary pipelines and associated infrastructure, to diversify gas supplies and enhance energy security. Building up necessary gas infrastructure and continuing LNG supplies across the Atlantic will keep the gas security and resilience of the energy systems in Europe.

7. Foster Research and Development of New Technologies

Launch joint research and development programmes on emerging technologies, such as energy storage, smart grids, and carbon capture, utilisation, and storage (CCUS), to drive innovation and ensure long-term energy resilience.

Distribution of LNG supply to the EU (m³)

■ America   ■ Africa   ■ Middle East   ■ Russia   ■ Other
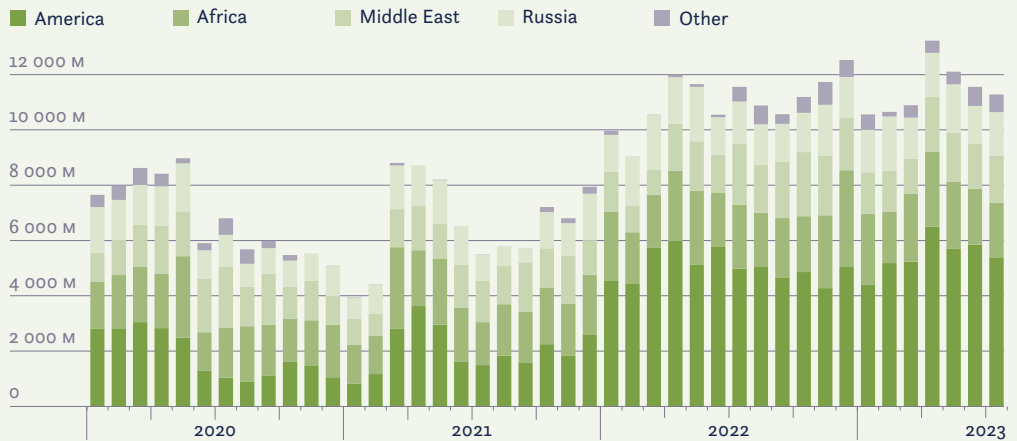
Source Bruegel based on Bloomberg
Note America represents the sum of the United States of America and Trinidad & Tobago. Africa is the aggregate of Algeria, Angola, Nigeria, Egypt, Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. The Middle East displays the sum of Qatar, Oman and United Arab Emirates. The Other category is the sum of LNG from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, China, Indonesia, Jamaica, Malaysia, Norway, Peru, Singapore, South Korea and the United Kingdom.

The exchange of technologies should be a priority since decarbonisation will not occur without adequate technological advancement and without the application of new technology, innovation and development of local capabilities that are built around EU member states (and Ukraine). The latest technologies must be able to penetrate the regions without structural and cultural obstacles. The regions must be moving along with the development of such technologies, and manufacturing facilities to boost energy transition.

MEDIUM TERM

1. Strengthen Energy Infrastructure Interconnections

Facilitate the development of interconnectors between the EU and USA, both for electricity and gas, to enable greater flexibility, improve market integration, and enhance energy diversification. Some imports of hydrogen (particularly from the US) and converting some gas infrastructure to transport green hydrogen in the mid-term future might help with the energy crisis in Europe. This could help establish a long path for decarbonisation. Certain parts of the gas infrastructure could be converted for hydrogen utilisation as per the European Hydrogen Backbone project.

2. Promote Renewable Energy Investments and Mobilise Financial Resources

Encourage public and private investments, including multilateral funding mechanisms, to support infrastructure development, energy projects (including fossil fuel projects, and technology innovation. Encourage joint investments and technology transfer in renewable energy projects, particularly offshore wind farms, solar installations, and advanced biofuels, to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and support sustainable energy transitions.

3. Implement Crisis Response Mechanisms

Establish coordinated crisis response mechanisms, including early warning systems and contingency plans, to mitigate potential disruptions to energy supplies and ensure swift and effective responses to emergencies.

4. Foster Regulatory Alignment

Work towards harmonising energy regulations, standards, and procedures between the EU and the U. S. to reduce market barriers and facilitate cross-border energy trade. This way European regulations should not hinder the access of American technologies to the European markets.

LONG TERM

1. Expand Clean Energy Cooperation

Strengthen collaboration on clean energy technologies, such as hydrogen, advanced nuclear, and sustainable aviation fuels, to achieve deep decarbonisation across sectors and drive the transition to a low-carbon economy. European hydrogen could be the most effective when combined with new-generation nuclear capabilities. Pink hydrogen could be reconsidered by EC when the European Hydrogen Backbone project is implemented.

It must be noted though that at the same time creating dependency on China's critical raw material (CRMs) resources used for the generation of renewable energy sources and China's dominance within the global renewable supply chain must be mitigated or avoided if possible.

2. Set Common Climate Goals

Align climate targets and emission reduction commitments between the EU and the U. S., setting a global benchmark for climate leadership and reinforcing joint efforts to combat climate change. It must be remembered however that climate change targets should be derived from the required energy security domain rather than being the main driver on its own. This way

mainstreaming of the EU climate goals must go hand in hand with establishing energy security. Achieving the climate goals should not be done at the cost of energy security but with it as a core policy driver.

3. Establish a Transatlantic Energy Resilience Forum

Institutionalise an analytical center for ongoing dialogue and cooperation between the EU and the U. S., involving government agencies, industry stakeholders, and research institutions, to facilitate knowledge exchange, policy coordination, and joint initiatives.

4. Establish a common energy market

Regulatory harmonisation and alignment are crucial, along with the development of cross-border infrastructure and the promotion of market liberalisation. Bilateral or multilateral trade agreements should be formed to facilitate cross-border energy trade, and enhanced institutional cooperation and data transparency are needed. Continuous policy dialogue, stakeholder engagement, and a commitment to regulatory convergence will be key to achieving a common energy market and reaping the benefits of increased integration and competition.

Possible obstacles to the roadmap implementation

Energy Mix and Transition Pathways

The U. S. and Europe have different energy mixes and transition pathways. While the U. S. relies heavily on fossil fuels, particularly natural gas and oil, Europe has made greater strides in renewable energy adoption. These differences can create challenges in aligning objectives, strategies, and regulatory frameworks for achieving common energy and climate goals.

Regulatory and Policy Frameworks

The regulatory and policy frameworks governing the energy sector differ between the U. S. and Europe. Variances in energy market structures, pricing mechanisms, subsidy schemes, and regulatory standards can hinder harmonisation efforts and create obstacles to seamless energy integration and cross-border trade.

Infrastructure Interconnectivity

The development of energy infrastructure interconnections between the USA and Europe faces challenges due to geographical and logistical factors. While Europe has a well-established and interconnected grid system, integrating the U. S. energy infrastructure with Europe's presents physical, technical, and regulatory complexities that need to be addressed.

Legal and Governance Systems

The legal and governance systems in the U. S. and Europe differ, which can affect the implementation and enforcement of joint energy initiatives. Differences in legal frameworks, jurisdictional responsibilities, and decision-making processes may require extensive coordination and negotiation to achieve mutual understanding and cooperation.

Institutional Frameworks and Decision-Making Processes

The institutional frameworks and decision-making processes within the U. S. and Europe vary, leading to different approaches in policy formulation, investment decisions, and project implementation. Aligning these frameworks and processes to streamline collaboration and facilitate joint initiatives can pose challenges.

Economic Interests and Priorities

Economic interests and priorities differ between the U. S. and Europe, influencing their energy strategies. These differences can include considerations such as job creation, economic competitiveness, industrial development, and energy affordability. Balancing these interests and finding common ground can require diplomatic efforts and compromises.

Climate Policies and Ambitions

Although both the U. S. and Europe are committed to addressing climate change, differences in climate policies, ambitions, and approaches may pose challenges to aligning efforts. Variances in emission reduction targets, carbon pricing mechanisms, and approaches to sectoral decarbonisation may require negotiation and finding common ground to enhance cooperation.
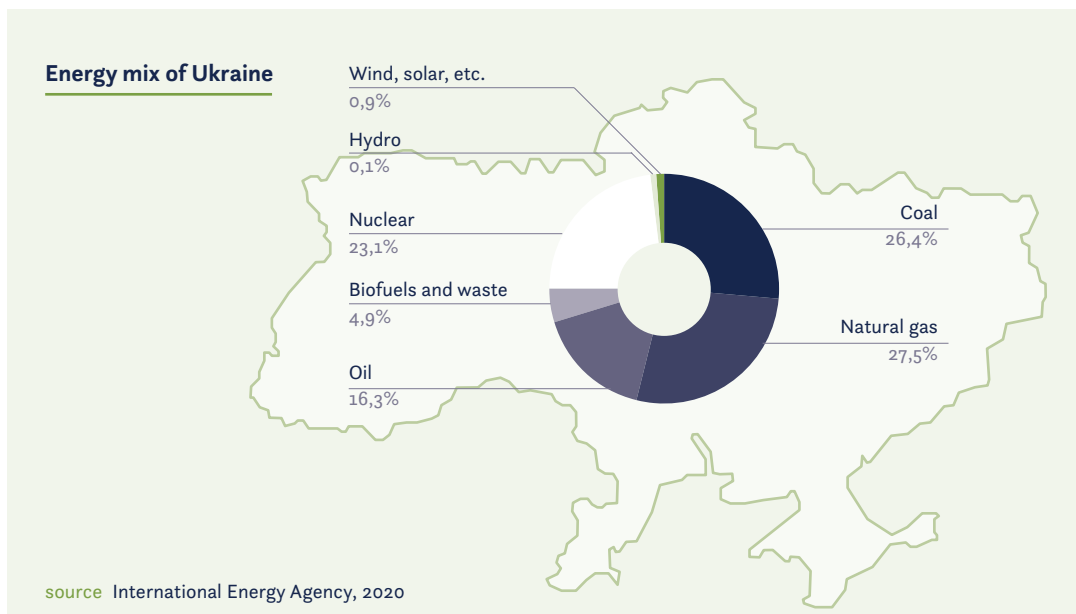
Public Perception and Cultural Factors

Public perception and cultural factors related to energy and the environment can differ between the U. S. and Europe. Public attitudes towards energy sources, acceptance of specific technologies, and concerns about environmental impact may influence the adoption and acceptance of joint initiatives. Building public support and addressing cultural differences is essential for successful collaboration.

Driving Ukraine's Integration with Europe

The integration of Ukraine with Europe holds substantial benefits, not only in terms of energy security but also through the alignment of standards, the fight against corruption, the stimulation of private investments in the biggest European country and rebuilding from the war destruction. Embracing European norms, including the EU's Green Deal, would not only bolster green initiatives within Ukraine's energy sector but also facilitate the financing and attraction of private sector involvement. For the EU, the benefits of this integration process are also visible. The neighbouring countries, such as Poland, Romania, and Slovakia, stand to gain from large-scale electricity production, sector coupling, heating capacity, transport electrification, and the utilization of Ukraine's vast power generation capabilities. By integrating Ukraine into Europe, the EU can leverage enhanced energy security, expanded market opportunities, alignment of standards, and green energy cooperation. This integration not only strengthens the EU's position but also contributes to regional stability, economic growth, and the advancement of sustainable energy objectives.

Energy mix of Ukraine

Wind, solar, etc.
0,9%

Hydro
0,1%

Nuclear
23,1%

Biofuels and waste
4,9%

Oil
16,3%

Coal
26,4%

Natural gas
27,5%

source International Energy Agency, 2020

The benefits of driving Ukraine's Integration with Europe (for Ukraine)

Ukraine's closer integration with Europe presents an exceptional opportunity for the country to enhance energy security, align with international standards, and attract much-needed private investments. This process will also increase the country's preparedness for EU accession in the future. With a history of dependence on Russian energy supplies and vulnerabilities exposed by geopolitical tensions, the integration process would provide Ukraine with more diversified energy sources and greater resilience against supply disruptions. However, the advantages extend beyond energy security, encompassing broader socio-economic benefits that stem from harmonising standards, combating corruption, and attracting private sector engagement. The adoption of European standards, including the EU's ambitious Green Deal, would drive the modernisation and sustainability of Ukraine's energy sector. Implementing these standards would accelerate the country's transition towards a lower-carbon economy, supporting renewable energy deployment, energy efficiency measures, and clean technologies. By aligning with European norms, Ukraine would unlock financing opportunities and attract private sector involvement, particularly in the redevelopment of infrastructure and rebuilding from the war destruction.

The benefits of driving Ukraine's Integration with Europe (for EU)

The integration of Ukraine with the European Union (EU) also offers a range of benefits for the EU. Firstly, it enhances energy security by diversifying energy sources and routes, reducing dependence on a single supplier and ensuring a more resilient and stable energy supply. Secondly, it opens new market opportunities for EU companies, granting access to Ukraine's vast energy resources, gas storage facilities, infrastructure projects, and emerging energy markets, fostering economic growth and facilitating energy trade and investments. Thirdly, the integration process enables the alignment of standards and regulations, promoting smoother trade and cooperation, eliminating barriers, and ensuring fair competition and market efficiency for EU companies in Ukraine. Fourthly, it facilitates enhanced green energy cooperation, allowing collaboration on renewable energy deployment, energy efficiency measures, and clean technologies, thereby contributing to the EU's broader green energy objectives.

Closer integration with Ukraine strengthens the regional energy security of neighbouring EU member states, such as Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. By leveraging Ukraine's vast power generation capabilities, including its renewable energy potential, these countries can tap into large-scale electricity production opportunities and diversify energy sources. Sector coupling, heating capacity expansion, and electrification of transportation across borders would enhance energy cooperation and foster regional energy security. Moreover, joint ventures and investment partnerships would drive economic growth, cross-border trade, and cooperation on energy projects of strategic importance.

Furthermore, the integration supports geopolitical stabilisation in the region by providing economic opportunities, supporting reforms, and fostering closer ties, thereby contributing to regional security and stability. Ultimately, the integration of Ukraine showcases the EU's commitment to its neighbourhood, demonstrates its leadership in advancing energy security, sustainability, and cooperation, and reinforces its position as a reliable partner and a global driving force in shaping the energy landscape.

Roadmap for attaining the goal

1. Establish a Joint EU-Ukraine Energy Integration Task Force

Initiate a task force consisting of representatives from the EU and Ukraine to identify immediate priorities, develop an action plan, common energy strategy and coordinate efforts.

2. Political Commitment

Demonstrate strong political commitment from both the EU and Ukraine by reaffirming the shared vision of integration, energy cooperation, and mutual benefits.

3. Timing and Sequencing

The timeline for integration needs to be carefully considered, taking into account the readiness of Ukraine, the war efforts, the pace of reforms, and the capacity to absorb changes. Overly ambitious timelines or inadequate sequencing of steps could lead to inefficiencies, setbacks, or resistance to implementation. Adhering to a realistic timeline for implementing the roadmap, with regular monitoring and evaluation to track progress and make necessary adjustments is critical.

4. Energy Sector Reforms and Rebuilding

Collaboratively work towards implementing energy sector reforms in Ukraine, focusing on market liberalisation, regulatory harmonisation, and the alignment of standards with EU norms. The post-war energy recovery should be aligned with the EU Green Deal, to provide a smoother and more timely transformation. Certain projects could be potentially planned and delivered during wartime if located in safer regions such as the Trans-Carpathian region and near L'viv in Western Ukraine. Ukraine could also try to implement certain aspects of the "green deal" in other branches of its industry (e.g., metallurgy sector attempting to produce greener steel in Azov).

5. Infrastructure Development and Integration

Support the development of cross-border infrastructure projects, including interconnectors, to enhance physical connectivity and facilitate energy trade between the EU and Ukraine.

As such Ukraine could play a significant role in establishing European energy security if its 2nd biggest European gas deposits will be safely accessible and developed. Securing access to the gas deposits in the Black Sea could be of Europe's interest. Because of the gas sector's importance for Poland and Ukraine, using storage capacity in Ukraine should be explored. This should include storing gas from Poland (and the EU) on Ukraine's territory even if done with a higher risk for Poland and the EU.

From the technical point of view, the full integration and synchronisation process of the energy systems, Moldova should be included in this process as well since part of the transition lines from Ukraine cross this country. Ukraine uses Moldova's system for balancing purposes and this country should be included in the integration process as well. This will further help Ukraine to develop capacity and increase the security of the flows from both sides of the border.

6. Investment Promotion and Capacity

Create mechanisms to attract private investments into Ukraine's energy sector, including renewable energy projects, energy efficiency initiatives, and modernisation of infrastructure.

The estimated $145 billion required for infrastructure rebuilding also necessitates a discussion on Ukraine's absorption capacity and the strategic utilisation of public funds to catalyse private investments.

7. Engage Stakeholders and Private Sector

Foster engagement with industry representatives, civil society organizations, and academia to gather diverse perspectives, leverage expertise, and foster public-private partnerships. Attracting the private sector needs to be strengthened and improved as this is vital for energy security in the larger sense. Businesses should be encouraged to increase their investments and introduce the innovation and boldness that the private sector possesses. This should be achieved by creating an adequate investment environment.

MEDIUM TERM

1. Regulatory Alignment

Strengthen regulatory alignment between Ukraine and the EU by harmonising energy market rules, standards, and procedures, facilitating smoother trade and cooperation. Ukraine should start the adjustment to the EU regulations now. EU accession is a complicated process, harmonisation of standards takes time, and some technical assistance should be provided by the member states. At the same time, other member states should offer some assistance as without it the process will be lengthy and more cumbersome. Regulatory frameworks, market rules, and standards between the EU and Ukraine must be continuously monitored and aligned addressing discrepancies and barriers to integration.

2. Green Energy Collaboration

Foster collaboration on green energy initiatives, encouraging joint research and development projects, technology transfer, and investment partnerships to drive the deployment of European renewable energy technology and energy efficiency measures. Ukraine's alignment with the EU's climate goals (such as the Green Deal) will be important from the country's future economic perspective.

3. Energy Security Enhancements

Develop mechanisms to enhance energy security in Ukraine and the EU, such as diversification of energy sources, implementation of emergency response measures, and cybersecurity cooperation. This particularly will be important with the current war operations and the vicinity of hostile Russia and implementing hybrid war measures.

LONG TERM

1. Market Consolidation

Facilitate the consolidation of energy markets between the EU and Ukraine, streamlining energy trading, market monitoring, and transparency mechanisms. Increasing transmission of electricity from Ukraine and selling it on the European market would be economically beneficial for Ukraine and would help balance its budget.

2. Full Integration into the EU Energy Market

Work towards Ukraine's full integration into the EU energy market, ensuring compliance with EU energy policies, regulations, and market mechanisms. That is why a common energy system for both the EU and Ukraine should be built which will be governed as a whole.

3. Strengthened Cross-Border Cooperation

Deepen cross-border cooperation in energy projects, including joint ventures, infrastructure development, and technology collaboration, to enhance regional energy security and economic integration. The current Ukrainian energy system can generate 109 TWh (a terawatt-hour), however, by 2050 the country aims to reach an outstanding 700 TWh. This increase will significantly boost the CEE electricity market capacity and will come in handy for neighbouring countries.

4. Institutional Framework

Establish a robust institutional framework for ongoing cooperation, coordination, and dispute resolution between the EU and Ukraine (if Ukraine is not yet an EU member within this time frame), ensuring efficient and effective implementation of joint initiatives.

Possible obstacles to the roadmap implementation

Geopolitical Challenges

The ongoing war in Ukraine and geopolitical tensions in the region can pose significant obstacles to the integration process. Conflicting interests, territorial disputes, and strained diplomatic relations may hinder progress and require diplomatic efforts to find common ground.

Security Concerns

The security situation in Ukraine, particularly in conflict-affected regions, can hamper infrastructure development, investment attractiveness, and the overall stability required for successful integration. Addressing security concerns, ensuring the safety of energy infrastructure, and fostering a conducive environment for business and investment are critical.

Regulatory and Legal Reforms

Implementing necessary regulatory and legal reforms to align with EU standards and market mechanisms may face resistance or challenges due to institutional inertia, vested interests, and legal complexities. Overcoming these barriers requires comprehensive reform efforts, capacity building, effective enforcement mechanisms and assistance from other countries.

Corruption and Governance

The issue of corruption in Ukraine remains a significant challenge. Eradicating corruption, enhancing transparency, and strengthening governance are essential for attracting private investments, building trust, and ensuring the effective implementation of energy sector reforms.

Financial Constraints

Ukraine's economic challenges and limited financial resources can impede the implementation of infrastructure projects and the necessary investments for integration. Securing adequate funding, mobilising international support, and ensuring efficient use of resources are crucial aspects that need to be addressed.

Technical and Infrastructural Barriers

Developing the necessary energy infrastructure, including interconnectors, pipelines, and grid systems, can be a complex and time-consuming process. Technical challenges, environmental considerations, land acquisition issues, and coordination among multiple stakeholders may pose obstacles that require careful planning and execution.

Public Perception and Societal Challenges

Public perception, resistance to change, and societal challenges can impact the integration process. Ensuring public support, addressing concerns, and engaging local communities in the decision-making process are crucial for successful implementation.

Conclusions

Transatlantic cooperation between the EU and the U. S. holds immense potential in addressing the challenges of energy security and supplies resilience. By jointly diversifying energy sources, investing in renewable energy, strengthening critical infrastructure, and aligning climate initiatives, both parties can establish a robust partnership that not only ensures the availability and reliability of energy supplies but also advances the global transition to a sustainable and low-carbon future. Embracing this imperative will reinforce the bond between the EU and the U. S. while setting a powerful example for international collaboration in addressing pressing energy and climate challenges.

Driving Ukraine's integration with Europe represents a significant opportunity to enhance energy security, align with international standards, combat corruption, and stimulate private investments. The integration process would enable Ukraine to diversify its energy sources, bolster resilience against supply disruptions, and pave the way for a sustainable and low-carbon energy future. The implementation of European standards, particularly the EU's Green Deal, would catalyse green initiatives within the Ukrainian energy sector and attract much-needed financing for infrastructure redevelopment. Simultaneously, regional collaboration and synergies would strengthen energy cooperation across the entire continent, boost economic growth, and facilitate cross-border trade. By embracing this strategic direction, Ukraine and its neighbouring countries can foster mutual benefits, contribute to regional energy security, and advance their collective energy objectives.

4 Living with Cyber Threats. Enhancing Cyber Resilience of CEE for the Benefit of the Entire NATO Alliance

Introduction

The Russian state-sponsored hostile operations, both online and offline, aimed at Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries in 2022 and 2023 only confirmed that building resilience against these threats is more important than ever. National Computer Emergency and Response Teams (CERTs) and cybersecurity companies indicated a growing number of cyberattacks against Ukraine and CEE countries. The initial attack against Viasat satellite communication on February 24, 2022, just hours before the Russian largescale invasion of Ukraine, spilled over to the CEE countries.[10] The cyberattack caused a local disruption among European customers and proved no country in Europe is fully secure in cyberspace, especially while Russia is fighting an existential war in Ukraine in all military domains. The threat in cyberspace to CEE has significantly increased also because most CEE countries have provided military, logistical, and humanitarian aid for Ukraine. The Russian government views these activities as hostile, which makes the CEE countries a target of Russian influence operations. These operations include cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, support for protests and far-right movements, and even attempted assassinations of business and political leaders.[11] The Kremlin employs these tools against CEE and other NATO countries to avoid risking major escalation.

Despite the prevalence and effectiveness of these activities, there is lack of information sharing about Russian state-sponsored cyber operations, especially against Ukrainian infrastructure which results in an incomplete picture of the rapidly evolving cyber threat landscape. Furthermore, there is insufficient awareness and data collection on the range of Russian influence operations, extending beyond cyberattacks. Although Russia's hostile activities against CEE are arguably posing the most imminent danger to the region, other nations such as China and Iran, are known to have used similar playbooks. Therefore, any policy solutions to tackle these problems should expand to threats posed by Russia and other state-level adversaries. CEE countries must address these challenges by creating a roadmap to strengthen resilience in the region, specifically against hostile state-sponsored cyber operations. Furthermore, there is an acute and urgent need to raise awareness, monitor, and collect information on the full spectrum of Russian and other state-sponsored influence operations, which can serve as a foundation for common standards for the capabilities CEE countries should develop to address the entire range of influence operations.

Analysing influence operations of adversarial states against CEE and creating common standard capabilities for the region

The benefits of analysing influence operations used by adversarial states and establishing a common standard of capabilities
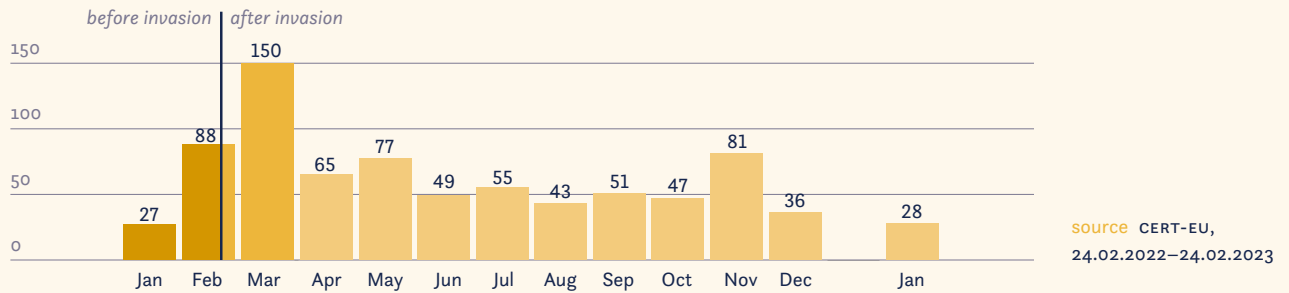
The effective way of fighting hostile influence operations conducted by Russia and other adversarial states requires a clear, comprehensive landscape of possible threats to establish a standard of capabilities the CEE countries should possess to address these operations. Most of the agencies and institutions focused on these threats examine them only partially, in analytic silos. Specifically, some organisations either only focus on cybersecurity or on other influence operations such as disinformation. Only very few agencies, for example, the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency, examine these threats and the connections between them in a comprehensive manner. It is paramount that NATO and individual government agencies start to analyse these threats together because nation-level adversaries use them in combination to amplify their objectives.

In contrast to Western countries, Russia treats cyberattacks as only one tool within a broader toolbox of influence operations, which are key to waging and winning contemporary conflicts, according to Russian military doctrine and foreign policy. Russian conception of information warfare has two main components. The first is a technical component which reflects the Western conception of cyberspace. The second is a psychological or cognitive component, which is treated in the West rather separately from cyber operations. Russian information warfare is employed both during peace and during an armed conflict. Russia uses information warfare operations to achieve multiple objectives from more technical ones such as disabling critical infrastructure to more cognitive ones such as eroding social cohesion. China adopts a similar approach to information warfare.[12]

Some of Russia's most well-known information warfare operations have combined cyber and information tools during the 2016 U.S. presidential elections and the 2017 French presidential elections. In both cases hackers tried to undermine the political campaigns of the candidates unfavourable to Russia, respectively Democratic Party Candidate Hillary Clinton and French candidate Emmanuel Macron, by stealing sensitive

Timeline of Russia-linked cyber operations prior and after the 24th February 2022 Invasion, directed primarily against Ukraine and EU countries

before invasion | after invasion

150 | 100 | 50 | 0

Jan 27 | Feb 88 | Mar 150 | Apr 65 | May 77 | Jun 49 | Jul 55 | Aug 43 | Sep 51 | Oct 47 | Nov 81 | Dec 36 | Jan 28

source CERT-EU, 24.02.2022–24.02.2023

documents and publishing them. Both cases illustrate how Moscow applies the combination of cyber and other information activities and why it is difficult to effectively fight against them.[13]

Another notable example of combined information warfare activities is Operation Ghostwriter aimed against Poland, Baltic countries, and other NATO and EU members. In the case of Poland, hackers breached the email account of Michał Dworczyk, Chief of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister of Poland, and exfiltrated data. The stolen information, which disclosed sensitive data pertaining to the activities of the Polish government, was then published through Telegram and on a dedicated website. The aim of the operation likely was to discredit the Polish government, decrease public trust in its activities, and generally weaken the Polish state.[14]

Russian information operations are not limited only to the cyber domain. The Kremlin also uses offline operations. For example, the Russian government employed cyber and disinformation operations in combination with more aggressive activities, such as an attempted assassination of Montenegro's Prime Minister Milo Djukanovic in 2016, and two poisoning attempts of a Bulgarian arms dealer in 2015.[15] To conduct these activities, the Russian government collaborates with local radicalised groups or individuals, NGOs, and marketing agencies.

The Kremlin's connections with these entities are still a heavily unexplored topic for the CEE region, where Russian funds can flow more easily. Since spreading of stolen materials is taking place often through social media platforms this information space is particularly important in countering information operations.

The Russian largescale invasion of Ukraine increased the probability of harmful operations against CEE countries. Russia using influence operations both online and offline may try to affect CEE societies to diminish their support for Ukraine and exploit all possible divisions using a range of tools such as espionage, disruption of critical infrastructure, and cyber operations. Such activities might lead to decreased support for Ukraine but also to acts of violence between different social and ethnic groups in the CEE region. Finally, it is important to stress that such operations are not only reserved to Russia, but might be employed by other adversaries including China, Iran or North Korea. Especially, China might be considered as the most significant challenge besides Russia and analyses of the range of Chinese state-sponsored influence operations is on an even lower level.

Overview of 100 Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats incidents connected to the War in Ukraine detected between the 1st of October and 5th of December 2022

100 incidents

51 highest number of observables in an incident

37:16 h median incident duration

993 observables

72 unique techniques

30 languages covered

616 channels
40% attributed to state actors

Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) describes a mostly non-illegal pattern of behaviour that threatens or has the potential to negatively impact values, procedures and political processes.

"Techniques" are patterns of behaviour used by threat actors to manipulate the information environment with the intention to deceive.

"Incidents" are actions perpetrated by one or more threat actor(s) pursuing specific objectives and carried out with the intent to deceive.

"Observables" are concrete elements relevant to understanding how an incident unfolded – such as a tweet, a video on YouTube or an article on a website.

source EEAS

Roadmap for attaining the goal

SHORT TERM

1. Building up know-how about the range of state-sponsored influence operations

The first step in mitigating the threats posed by the various activities constituting influence operations is to build know-how about them through the systematic identification and analysis of these activities. Experts, journalists, and decision-makers need to understand cyber-enabled information warfare, information operations, and offline operations to focus their efforts on how to discuss and address the negative consequences of each aspect of these threats. Such identification and analysis can be conducted using a centralised platform. It might also play a role of an information hub facilitating the process of raising awareness about the influence operations.

2. Establishment of an effective system for the exchange of information between the private sector and governments

The establishment of an effective system for the exchange of information between the private sector and the government is a necessary step to ensure the comprehensive analysis of the range of influence operations and increase awareness. The critical infrastructure industry across CEE countries especially needs to create an effective system for sharing information with governments about current and potential cyber threats. Cooperation and information sharing are crucial in the timely identification and mitigation of cyber operations and related threats.

1. Creating legal standards to fight influence operations

Raising awareness is crucial to define the baseline standard for capabilities countries should possess to address the entire range of influence operations. CEE, EU, and NATO policymakers are key stakeholders in this process. Raising their awareness about the range of influence activities is critical because political leaders can initiate the formulation of legal language, legislative, and regulatory measures to limit the negative impact of influence operations and allow states to counteract them.

It is also important to set up national standards for free media but also consider tools to combat offline operations working on behalf of intelligence services such as NGOs and other entities. It will be particularly important to create a system of punitive measures to be imposed on domestic and external entities engaged in influence operations. The EU cyber diplomacy toolbox, which allows to sanction cyberattacks, might be expanded and cover influence operations.[16]

2. Setting up organised structure within the civil societies

Although CEE and other democratic states are aware of the problem and have increased coordination with non-government groups, there is more need for coordinating activities within civil societies. Coordination could be improved by establishing organised structures within civil societies. This network of civil society organisations should collect information about Russian, Chinese, Iranian and other state-level influence operations. Furthermore, this organisation might address exposure of adversarial operations and weigh in on attribution in cases where it has collected the required evidence to address this issue. The way of funding such an organisation by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) or similar body guarantees a high degree of independence from government decisions. The Stop Fake website developed by the U. S. government is an appropriate model that can be applied to collecting information

on influence operations.[17] It collects tools and resources on intellectual property rights (IPR) to educate and assists business, consumers, government officials, and the public. Such an initiative may be replicated in the case of Russian and other state-sponsored influence operations and can be managed by think tanks with funds from either the US or EU.

3. Creation of cooperative agreements and a code of conduct for social media platforms

The new organisation should establish a comprehensive partnership with the social media platforms, which are known to be used as channels for state-sponsored disinformation or as platforms to support cyber operations through disseminating information about malware or encouraging specific cyberattacks. The establishment of cooperation with them would allow to get better telemetry on disinformation and related activities but also will be beneficial to social media companies, which will be more effective in protecting their networks from being exploited by state adversaries in Ukraine and in the CEE region.

As a part of the cooperation with the media and social media entities, countries of the CEE region should consider the creation of a code of conduct. This framework would provide guidelines and direction for the media entities when they are exploited as channels for hostile state-sponsored campaigns. In particular, one of the issues addressed by this should be the approach to informational security. Since the start of the war social media channels have been a rampant threat to information security – publishing, distributing, and discussing sensitive information such as for example, the transportation of military equipment to Ukraine. Media entities should be required, or at the very least encouraged to censor such information, as it provides existing and potential adversaries with critical information, enabling intrusive and/or hostile actions. Such an undertaking should be approached with care and consideration for human rights.

1. **Setting up an organisation responsible for combating influence operations**

The last step might be the creation of government institutions within CEE countries responsible for fighting influence operations. An example for such agency is the Swedish Psychological Defence Agency which safeguards Sweden by identifying, analysing, and countering foreign malign influence operations.

Potential obstacles to this policy implementation

Lack of will to exchange information

The challenges in the exchange of information between the public and private are well documented and understood. They include a lack of sufficient trust between these two groups, divergent priorities, and different levels of risk tolerance.

Concerns over human rights

Creating effective laws to counter influence operations, especially conducted by NGOs and marketing agencies, is likely to raise issues about potential censorship and other democratic principles. Organisations, which conduct such operations might defend their actions by stressing the democratic principle of freedom of speech.

Bullying of social organisations engaged in examining influence operations

Civil society organisations might be targeted by Russian and other state adversaries attempting to prevent their operations through intimidation.

Strengthening CEE cyber resilience by establishing an organisation that uses telemetry on cyber operations against Ukrainian infrastructure

The benefits of creating an organisation

that uses telemetry on cyber operations against Ukrainian infrastructure to strengthen resilience for countries in CEE.

The 2022 Russian invasion has inspired many Western actors in cyberspace to support Ukraine. State actors, private companies, non-governmental organisations, and ordinary citizens answered the call to help Ukraine. The West has been united in a common effort. Unity of purpose, however, does not always mean unity of actions. Various actors operated independently without coordinating their activities and the West has been struggling to achieve a cohesive effort, which would not only benefit Ukraine but would allow the West to learn and prepare for similar crises in the future.
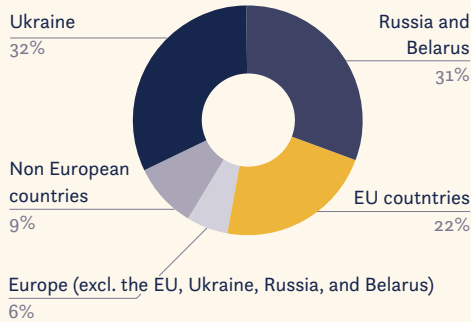
Currently, there are many stakeholders that provide partial telemetry on cyber operations against Ukrainian targets: ESET, Microsoft, Apple, Google, Amazon, and others. Their data may be shared with governments, clients, and other private companies, but there is no central point for this information transfer and therefore, there is no full picture of the cyber threat landscape in Ukraine. This reality makes taking concerted, timely mitigation activities extremely difficult.

Another issue stems from the fact that in many instances after various tools and measures have been provided and utilised in Ukraine, the providers have been unable to assess their effectiveness. This leads to inability in effectively prioritising further assistance to the areas that need it the most.

Information on the effectiveness of the provided aid will help to justify the efforts undertaken by the invested actors. Private companies for example, may benefit from obtaining confirmation on the efficacy of their actions to justify the provision and continuation of assistance.
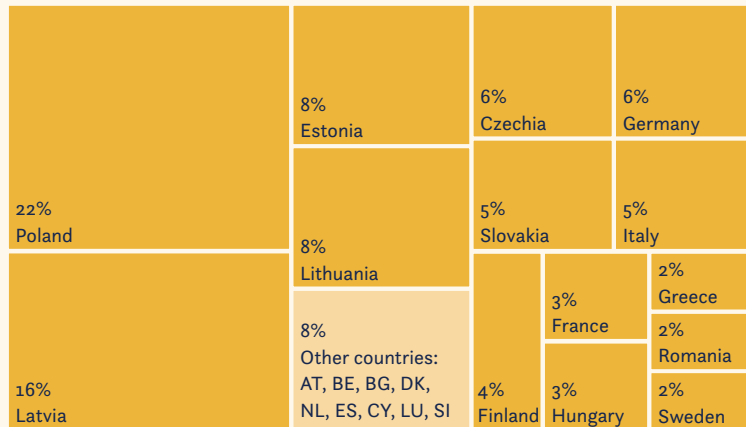
Furthermore, the organisation of efforts and overcoming the challenges of data transfers would allow the West to utilise the data to improve their own resilience. CEE countries can apply the lessons learned during the war to enhance their own digital resilience as they are geographically close to the ongoing conflict and susceptible to potential hostile actions. The resilience of countries in Central and Eastern Europe is currently mostly based on poorly coordinated state programmes. A united and cohesive effort would maintain a comprehensive defensive structure, informed by the experiences from Ukraine and capable of fending off potential threats. CEE states would also benefit from the already established communication and cooperation with private companies.

**Distribution of cyberattack targets
during the War in Ukraine**

Ukraine
32%

Russia and
Belarus
31%

Non European
countries
9%

EU coutntries
22%

Europe (excl. the EU, Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus)
6%

**Distribution of cyberattack targets
within the EU**

22%
Poland

16%
Latvia

8%
Estonia

8%
Lithuania

8%
Other countries:
AT, BE, BG, DK,
NL, ES, CY, LU, SI

6%
Czechia

5%
Slovakia

4%
Finland

3%
Hungary

6%
Germany

5%
Italy

3%
France

2%
Greece

2%
Romania

2%
Sweden

Roadmap for attaining the goal

SHORT TERM

1. Securing funding for the new organisation

The first step is to find financial sources for a new organisation. A potential financial source for such an organisation might be the European fund projects. These projects are easier to manage as they do not require the confirmation of all European states. There are several projects that might be used in this instance. They require cooperation with EU representatives that might clarify the level of funding directed to helping Ukraine and what can be achieved with the allocated resources.

2. Establishment of an organisation to enhance cyber resilience in CEE through standards informed by collecting telemetry on cyber operations in Ukraine

Ukraine currently lacks coordination of beneficial activities as well as a mechanism to wholistically track cyber operations against Ukrainian targets. No organisation has a full visibility of the ongoing cyber activities in Ukraine. Under the Cyber Defence Assistance Collaborative

(CDAC) for Ukraine initiative led by The U. S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation (CRDF) global platform there is a coordination of some efforts of mainly American IT companies, but it misses the activities of the European companies, or the collection of timely cyber intelligence from all involved stakeholders. Poland and Estonia for example, act separately from it and CDAC does not have visibility into their actions. The new organisation could utilise CDAC's model, while also incorporating European Union entities such as the European Cybersecurity Competence Centre and state actors – creating a more holistic level of cooperation.

The centralisation of efforts would also allow for a deeper cooperation between different actors and entities, which would in turn make them more effective in supporting Ukraine. Such an organisation, along with comprehensive data and information transfer, would also benefit the entities by allowing them to view the effectiveness of their actions. Thus, in turn allowing them to refine their capabilities to benefit both Ukraine and their own technologies. This would also provide empirically grounded justification

for their assistance, sustaining their operations in Ukraine. The key issue, however, is how to properly establish such an organisation, how to collect data, and make it accessible while coordinating actions of different actors. Here inspiration might be taken from the Cyber Threat Alliance (CTA) and its methods of collecting and analysing telemetry or platforms such as CRDF

Global, which provide flexible logistical support, programme design, and management in the area of cybersecurity. It is also important to encourage companies to share telemetry with the new organisation as such information sharing is vital for the organisation's success and is based on the good will of the involved stakeholders.

1. **Creating cooperation framework with Ukrainian and private sector partners**

Establishing cooperation and partnerships with various entities engaged in Ukraine – government agencies, private companies, and other independent actors is fundamental in ensuring the successful operation of the created organisation. The new organisation should cooperate with a partner organisation in Ukraine, which possesses a wide visibility of cyber operations against Ukrainian targets. The State Service of Special Communication and Information protection (SSSCIP) of Ukraine seems to be an appropriate partner in this effort. A point

of contact within the organisation should be established to communicate with a Ukrainian SSSCIP counterpart. This communication would allow for a centralisation of efforts within Ukraine, granting Western actors access to more information, including confirmation on the efficacy of Western activities to better understand and support Ukraine and inform cyber resilience frameworks and policies within CEE. This framework can also serve as an early warning system about new threats against CEE countries. This would also create support structures for the different actors, serving both as a database, support line, and coordination centre.

1. **Setting up the roadmap of policies and tools**

The established organisation, which will acquire necessary telemetry on cyber operations will lead to creation of a roadmap for Central and Eastern European countries describing the tools and policies that they need to implement to strengthen the resilience of the CEE region.

Such tools and policies will include:
- templates for nation-level incident response playbooks that include scenarios similar to the aggression in Ukraine,

- frameworks to assess cybersecurity defences maturity levels and identify country-specific areas for improvement,
- mechanisms to assess legal and political roadblocks to effective cybersecurity enhancements.

These resources would encourage the actors and entities from Central and Eastern Europe to become more involved in Ukraine, while establishing a cohesive structure and a coordinated CEE cyber resilience plan.

Potential obstacles to the roadmap implementation

Unwilling stakeholders

Sharing telemetry on cyber operations depends heavily on the good will of stakeholders. Private cybersecurity companies and government agencies might not be willing to share such information due to security and other concerns.

Data protection regulations

The EU introduced the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which sets a very high standard of protection and management of data. The GDPR and similar national regulations might hamper the flow of information and make information sharing more difficult.

Potential target of Russian and other state-sponsored hostile operations

Setting up an organisation which collects and hosts large amounts of sensitive information on state-sponsored cyber operations makes it a natural target for Russian and other state-sponsored cyber or other operations aimed to steal the valuable data or disrupt the operations of the organisation.

Conclusion

Setting up an organisation that uses telemetry on cyber operations against Ukrainian infrastructure to enhance the cyber resilience of the CEE region will contribute to an improved understanding of cyber threats in Ukraine as well as Europe. It will provide timely information about tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) of Russian cyber operations that might be employed against CEE countries. The organisation will create a roadmap of policies and tools to strengthen resilience against these threats.

In turn, the comprehensive analysis of the entire range of influence operations used by adversarial states will allow to establish a common standard of what capabilities the CEE countries should have to address these operations and be more effective in fighting them. Creating a system of exchanging information about these operations is crucial to building effective legal mechanisms and tools. These measures will increase the resiliency of CEE societies and authorities against hostile operations conducted by Russia and other adversaries.

Endnotes

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