

A stylized world map in yellow and white, showing the continents. It is positioned on the left side of the cover, partially overlapping the title box.

Fault Lines

Foreign and Security Policy
in an Age of Friction

An illustration of two white hands with yellow cuffs clapping together. Above the hands are several yellow lines radiating outwards, suggesting motion or impact.

**GUEST CONTRIBUTION BY
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The Arctic as a Climate-Driven Security Frontier

The Arctic is no longer a remote periphery. Sonja Grünbauer argues that climate change is transforming the region into a strategic frontier where environmental disruption, military planning, and great-power competition increasingly intersect. Moving beyond alarmism and simple “resource rush” narratives, the article shows how new operational realities, infrastructure pressures, and deterrence concerns are reshaping security thinking in the High North

On Exile And Expertise

Reconstruction fails when institutions are rebuilt without trust, legitimacy, or local knowledge. Stefan Noël Hageman explores how Syrian diaspora expertise could contribute to reconstruction efforts and what political and institutional conditions determine whether that potential can actually be mobilised. Rather than treating diaspora engagement as a slogan, the article examines the practical and political obstacles that shape its real-world impact.

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On Exile And Expertise

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Team-Centric Leadership: True leadership is rooted in organizational culture. Success relies on utilizing the collective intelligence of a team rather than solitary decision-making. **Whole-of-Society Resilience:** Security is no longer purely military. It requires integrating the Bundeswehr with civilian sectors, private financing, and a resilient, unified society.

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Europe faces many threats: American aggrandisement, Chinese competition, Russian revanchism. Europe's young leaders currently emerging from Generation Z — those born roughly between 1995 and 2010, aged between 16 and 30 today — have the qualities that can Make Europe Great Again. To do that, they should embrace the ambition of 360° resilience, for themselves and for their Europe.

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Fault Lines: Foreign and Security Policy in an Age of Friction

For much of the post–Cold War era, foreign and security policy was often framed through the language of liberalism. Economic integration, institutional cooperation, and technological connectivity were expected to gradually soften geopolitical divides and lead to democratic convergence. Traditional fault lines had been overcome. These lines have reappeared and forced states to rethink security and influence. This issue of the EPIS Magazine, titled “Fault Lines – Foreign and Security Policy in an Age of Friction,” examines how contemporary geopolitics is increasingly defined by such fault lines.

In this issue, Sonja Grünbauer zooms in on an important, underexplored region and examines how climate change is transforming the Arctic from a remote periphery into a strategic frontier where environmental disruption increasingly intersects with military planning and geopolitical competition. It asks the question how new operational realities and infrastructure pressures are reshaping security thinking in the High North. Gidi Brandes argues that the Eastern Mediterranean should be understood as a single geopolitical system rather than a series of isolated crises. By analysing the interaction between energy politics, migration, maritime disputes, and regional wars, Brandes offers a framework for understanding why developments in the region carry growing strategic relevance for Europe. Mariami Modbadze traces the evolution of EU–China relations over the past five decades, from diplomatic opening and economic engagement to growing rivalry and strategic distrust. By combining historical perspective with contemporary policy debates, she shows how Europe’s China policy is being recalibrated. Julian Stöckle explores how the European Parliament has sought to shape the European Union’s response to Russia’s war against Ukraine. The article demonstrates how parliamentary actors can influence political priorities and public legitimacy even in policy areas traditionally dominated by member states. Krisztina Galos investigates how sanctions pressure interacts with industrial fragility and wartime production through the case of Russia’s United Aircraft Corporation. Stefan Noël Hageman examines the potential role of the Syrian diaspora in post-war reconstruction efforts. The article highlights both the expertise that diaspora communities can offer and the political and institutional barriers that determine whether such potential can be effectively mobilised.

This issue is further enriched by crucial insights from industry and security sector experts. Retired four-star general Markus Laubenthal Badia talks about the development of strategic thinking throughout a long military career. In a frank and senior representative of Thales reflects on the growing importance of technological innovation in European defence, highlighting the role of industry in strengthening cyber capabilities, and supporting Europe’s ambition for greater strategic autonomy. Finally, Nicholas Dungan, Fellow of the EPIS Advisory Board, contributes an essay on “360° Resilience, and suggests that Europe’s next generation can strengthen societal preparedness, reinforce democratic values, and assume greater responsibility for the continent’s future security.

Geopolitical fault lines rarely emerge in isolation. They develop gradually, intersect across domains, and reshape how states and institutions perceive risk and opportunity. Understanding them therefore requires analytical approaches that move beyond short-term crises and toward the deeper structures that define today’s international environment. In an age of growing geopolitical friction, the task of foreign and security policy is no longer simply to manage conflict—but to navigate the fault lines that make it increasingly likely.

Alvin Karl Bürck & Carl Johan Steninge-Otto
Editors of EPIS Magazine

Sonja Gruenbauer



The Arctic as a Climate Driven Security Frontier

Environmental Change and the Reconfiguration of Defence Geopolitics

About the Article

The Arctic is no longer a remote periphery. Sonja Grünbauer argues that climate change is transforming the region into a strategic frontier where environmental disruption, military planning, and great-power competition increasingly intersect. Moving beyond alarmism and simple “resource rush” narratives, the article shows how new operational realities, infrastructure pressures, and deterrence concerns are reshaping security thinking in the High North

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Sonja Grünbauer is a motivated young professional with a background in International Relations and Management. She studied abroad in Spain and the Netherlands, shaping her interest in international crisis response. Her focus is on Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) and Disaster Management in Germany. At CCOE, she supports research and events. She aims to work in national crisis management and grow as a consultant in CIMIC to help build a more resilient society.

1. Introduction: Climate Change and Strategic Reordering in the Arctic

The Arctic is undergoing rapid environmental transformation, warming at a rate significantly above the global average. Rising temperatures, declining sea ice extent, and thawing permafrost are reshaping the physical characteristics of the region (NOAA National Center for Environmental Information, 2025). These changes are not merely ecological. They are strategic. As sea ice retreats and seasonal accessibility increases, the Arctic is shifting from a peripheral buffer zone to an emerging operating domain within great-power competition. Climate change does not directly cause conflict in the High North. Rather, it functions as a structural driver that alters accessibility, infrastructure reliability, and the capacity to conduct operations. Maritime corridors such as the Northern Sea Route and the Northwest Passage are becoming more navigable for longer periods of the year. At the same time, thawing permafrost undermines existing military infrastructure, early warning systems, and logistical networks. Environmental transformation simultaneously opens space and destabilizes the material foundations of presence and deterrence. The Arctic is therefore no longer insulated from broader geopolitical rivalry; it is increasingly embedded within it. This article argues that climate change is transforming the Arctic from a peripheral buffer into a contested operating

domain. As ice retreat expands seasonal access while permafrost degradation and weather volatility undermine fixed installations, deterrence in the High North becomes increasingly dependent on resilient basing, mobility, and alliance coordination. For NATO and European actors, the strategic challenge is therefore not primarily resource competition or symbolic presence, but the integration of climate-driven environmental change into force posture and long-term defence planning in a region that is becoming at once more open and more unstable.

2. From Geographic Periphery to Strategic Domain

From a security perspective, the Arctic increasingly operates as a maritime and aerospace domain encompassing sea lines of communication, undersea infrastructure, airspace, and early-warning systems (Vidhammer Berge & Bergmann, 2024). Environmental constraints historically limited sustained military and commercial activity in the Arctic, reinforcing its peripheral status. Climate change weakens these constraints. As ice conditions become more predictable on a seasonal basis and infrastructure viability increases (Cotta, 2024), the Arctic's role within national and alliance-level defence planning expands. This shift reflects a reordering of strategic geography rather than a sudden militarization driven by political intent alone.

Polar Shipping Routes

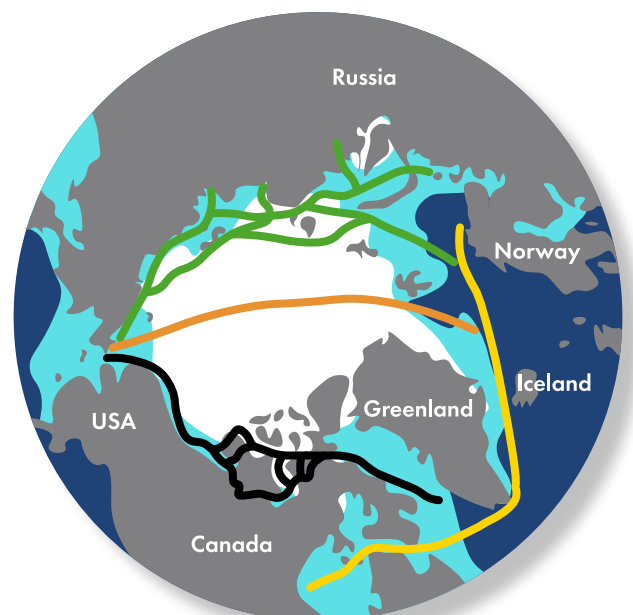
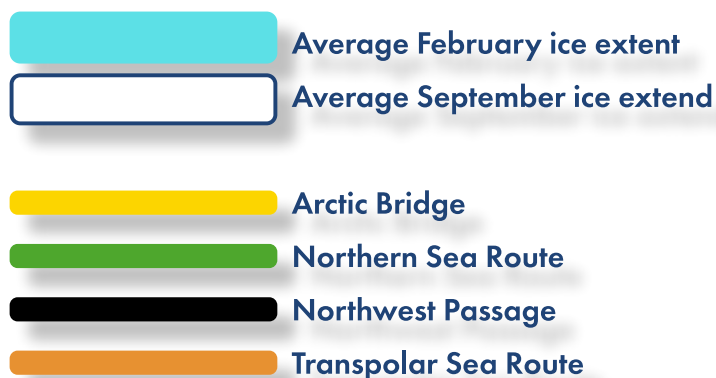


Figure 1: Polar Shipping Route, Source: <https://transportgeography.org/wp-content/uploads/Map-Polar-Routes-Simplified-1.pdf>

3. Climate Change as a Structural Driver of Securitization

The Arctic's environmental transformation is well-documented. Satellite observations show a long-term decline in summer sea ice extent exceeding forty percent since the late 1970s, alongside rising ocean temperatures and accelerating permafrost degradation (Arctic Monitoring and Assessment Programme). These changes first affect accessibility. Reduced ice cover extends seasonal navigation along routes such as the Northern Sea Route (Figure 1), lowering physical barriers to maritime transit and expanding windows for commercial and naval activity. Thawing permafrost undermines runways, roads, radar installations, and fixed basing infrastructure. Ocean temperature shifts influence sonar performance and undersea navigation, while increased weather volatility complicates planning and logistics.

The environment becomes not only more open, but less predictable (Trochim & Schuur). As accessibility and operational density increase, vulnerability exposure grows. Dual-use ports, satellite ground stations, energy infrastructure, and communication cables become more central to regional connectivity and more susceptible to disruption. Greater traffic and sustained presence raise the probability of accidents, congestion, and strategic interference. Environmental change thus simultaneously expands opportunity and amplifies fragility. These material shifts contribute to securitisation by transforming environmental change into strategic exposure. What was once a remote and insulated region becomes a space where activity, vulnerability, and strategic interaction intensify, prompting adjustments in threat perception and defence planning.

4. The Erosion of Arctic Exceptionalism

For much of the post-Cold War period, the Arctic was conceptualised through the framework of Arctic exception-

alism, portraying the region as distinct from broader geopolitical competition. This model emphasised functional cooperation, particularly through institutions such as the Arctic Council, which focused on scientific research and environmental governance while deliberately excluding military security from its mandate (Heininen, 2022). Limited activity, persistent environmental barriers, and shared interest in low tension kept the region stable (Corell, et al., 2019). Since 2014, this exceptionalism has eroded. Russia has expanded Arctic military infrastructure, while NATO has increased exercises, surveillance, and integration (2024 Arctic Strategy, 2024). Accessibility changes have made the region strategically significant, forcing the Arctic back into deterrence planning. The rupture accelerated after 2022. Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Arctic Council cooperation with Moscow was suspended. The Council's technocratic work had depended

on routine interaction and political trust, both now weakened. An institutional architecture designed for a depoliticised Arctic is operating under sustained strategic confrontation, visible in heightened threat perceptions

(Figure 2) and worst-case planning along NATO's northern (Leclerc, 2024). Simultaneously, the material environment that once constrained activity is transforming. Longer navigation seasons, expanding maritime traffic, and dual-use infrastructure reduce the Arctic's insulation from global competition. Environmental barriers that previously dampened military and commercial incentives are receding. As accessibility increases, so does the density of strategic interaction. These developments do not represent an abrupt breakdown of cooperation but rather a growing mismatch between environmental change and institutional adaptation. Arctic exceptionalism is therefore eroding on three interconnected levels: materially, as climate change lowers barriers to access; institutionally, as cross-bloc cooperation narrows; and strategically, as the region is reintegrated into deterrence logic. The Arctic is no longer buffered by ice, distance, or diplomatic

1951 Defence of Greenland Agreement: a pact between U.S. and Denmark, letting the U.S. keep and operate military bases in Greenland for mutual defence while respecting Danish sovereignty.



compartmentalisation. It is emerging as a contested operating domain within Euro-Atlantic security.

4. Strategic Actors and Defence Responses

States respond differently to the same structural transformation. Expanded accessibility creates opportunities, while infrastructure fragility and exposure create constraints. Russia has heavily militarised its Arctic coastline, investing in air bases, missile systems, and ice-capable naval assets (Bender, 2015). Climate change enhances the operational utility of these capabilities further by extending navigable periods and improving logistical reach. For Russia, environmental transformation reinforces territorial depth and control, particularly along the Northern Sea Route and the Kola Peninsula. Yet this advantage is offset by infrastructure vulnerability. Moscow is therefore both exploiting increased accessibility and confronting

the fragility of its fixed basing model. The United States occupies a different structural position. As an Arctic state through Alaska and as NATO's principal military power, its Arctic engagement centres on homeland defence, early warning, and deterrence credibility. Unlike Russia, Washington is not consolidating territorial control along a continuous Arctic coastline. Its priority is maintaining strategic mobility and cross-domain integration. Climate change is treated primarily as an operational constraint that affects basing resilience, sustainment, and domain awareness rather than as an opportunity for expansion. U.S. adaptation thus focuses on capability reliability in a volatile environment (2024 Arctic Strategy, 2024). NATO's adaptation reflects the final stage of the mechanism: as vulnerability exposure increases, alliance coordination and posture adjustment become central. The accession of Finland (2023) and Sweden (2024) integrates the High North more directly into collective defence planning, while emphasizing readiness, surveillance, and protection of

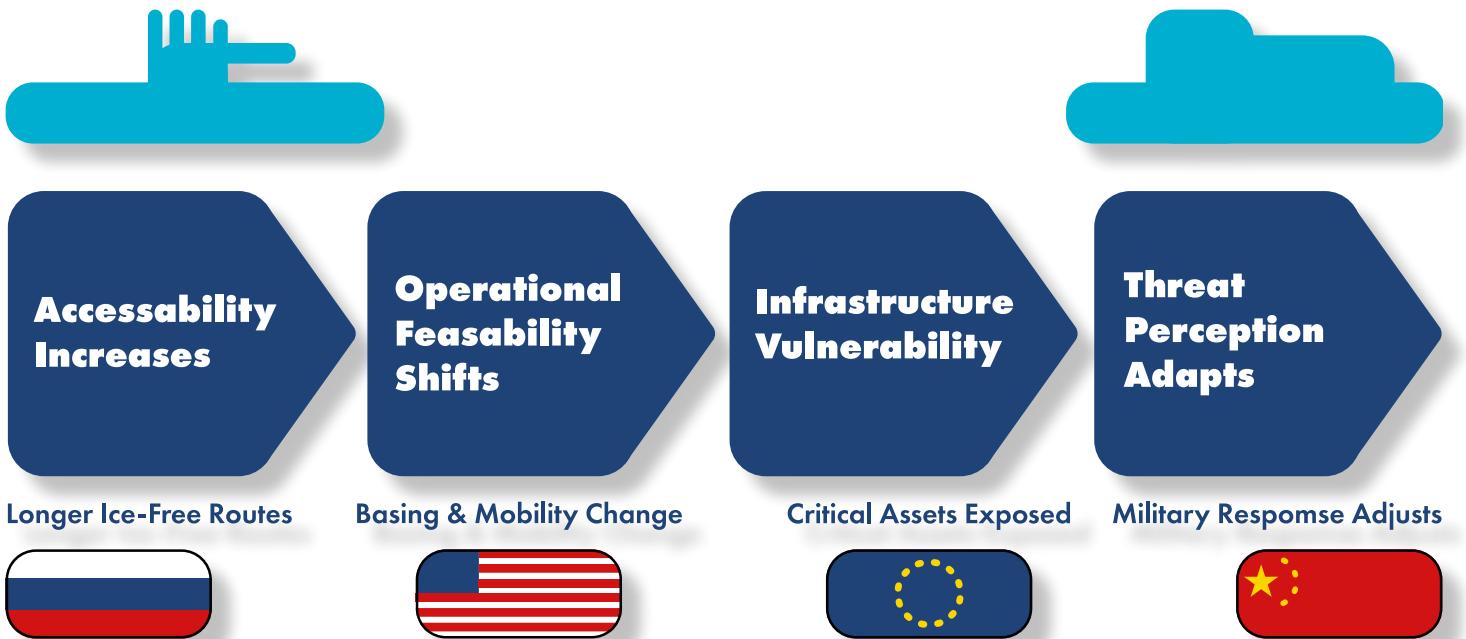


Figure 2 Arctic Security Dynamics

critical infrastructure (Regional Perspectives Report on the Arctic, 2023). Climate considerations are incorporated insofar as they affect operational reliability, basing, and sustainment (NATO HQ, 2023). As another key player, the European Union has also identified the Arctic as a zone of growing strategic competition. Parliamentary assessments highlight the intersection of climate change, militarization, and geopolitical rivalry, calling for closer

alignment between security, environmental, and foreign policy instruments (Kobešćak Smodiš & Almqvist, 2025). China's Arctic engagement adds further complexity. While framed primarily around scientific research and commercial shipping, China's sustained presence reflects long-term strategic interest enabled by environmental accessibility (Devyatkin, 2025).

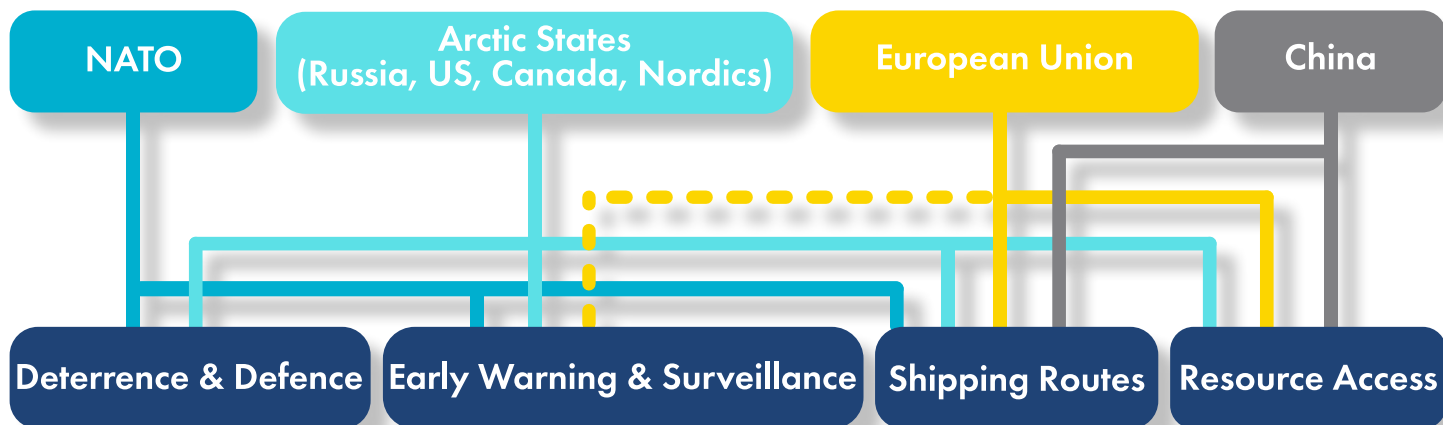


Figure 3 Actors-Interest-Mapping (Author's own illustration)

Together, these responses illustrate how climate-driven structural change reshapes strategic calculation without producing uniform militarisation (Figure 3).

5. Implications for European and Trans-Atlantic Security

Climate-driven changes in the Arctic affect Europe far beyond the High North. Accessibility is increasing: longer ice-free periods along the Northern Sea Route enable more frequent shipping and naval transit. This new accessibility allows commercial and military traffic to operate for extended periods (Thompson, 2025). At the same time, it exposes vulnerabilities: undersea cables, pipelines, and critical infrastructure face higher risks from congestion, accidents, or strategic disruption. These physical and operational shifts are reshaping defence posture. Ice-capable vessels, climate-resilient infrastructure, and adaptive logistics have moved from niche Arctic assets to core enablers of deterrence, situational awareness, and crisis management. Denmark's expanded defence investment in Greenland and surrounding maritime areas illustrates this adaptation (France 24, 2025). NATO and European planners now treat environmental volatility as a persistent operational condition, adjusting basing, mobility, and readiness accordingly. Alliance-level cooperation reflects the same causal logic. Industrial and operational partnerships enhance feasibility and reduce vulnerabilities. Finland's agreement to construct icebreakers for the U.S. Coast Guard (delivery 2028) increases operational reach and patrol reliability in Arctic waters (Jeppesen, 2025). Bilateral and minilateral collaborations - such as

UK-Norway exercises and Royal Marines deployments - embed Arctic security into NATO's collective posture and improve operational predictability in a more accessible but riskier environment (Ministry of Defence, 2025). At the same time, increased Arctic exposure places new strains on alliance cohesion. Greenland's renewed strategic significance raises questions of sovereignty, access, and governance. The U.S. military presence, governed by the 1951 Defence of Greenland Agreement, allows operations while preserving Danish sovereignty (Department of State Publication, 2008). Recent U.S. statements questioning Greenland's strategic status have prompted coordinated diplomatic responses, with France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom reaffirming support for Denmark (Élysée Palace, 2026). Here, environmental change amplifies strategic stakes, forcing allies to adapt posture, policy, and governance in tandem.

6. Policy Adaptation in a Climate-Driven Security Environment

Effective policy adaptation in the Arctic security environment requires a shift from reactive adjustment toward structurally informed security planning. As environmental change alters accessibility, infrastructure viability, and operational conditions, defence institutions can no longer treat climate effects as exogenous shocks. Instead, climate projections must be integrated into long-term strategic assessments, shaping basing decisions, procurement cycles, and force posture planning. This is particularly relevant in regions where infrastructure longevity, logistical reliability, and readiness are directly conditioned by

thawing permafrost, changing ice regimes, and increasing weather volatility. From a defence planning perspective, adaptation increasingly hinges on investment strategies that prioritise dual-use and climate-resilient infrastructure. Assets capable of supporting both civilian and military activity - such as ports, airfields, and communication systems - enhance deterrence and crisis response while mitigating escalation risks associated with rising Arctic activity. By embedding resilience into infrastructure development, states can reduce vulnerability without framing the Arctic exclusively as a military theatre. Such an approach aligns security objectives with broader governance and sustainability considerations, reinforcing stability rather than competition. Governance mechanisms must evolve in parallel with capability development. As maritime traffic and operational density increase, the absence of robust incident-prevention frameworks becomes a security liability rather than a regulatory gap. Confidence-building measures, transparency arrangements, and shared operational norms complement deterrence by reducing uncertainty and the risk of misperception. In this sense, governance functions not as an alternative to security policy but as an enabling condition for effective deterrence and crisis management in a more accessible and contested Arctic. Hybrid threats further complicate this environment by blurring the boundaries between military, economic, and civil security. The protection of critical infrastructure, including undersea cables, satellite systems, and data transmission nodes, cannot be addressed through national measures alone, given the transnational nature of both vulnerabilities and dependencies. Cooperative approaches that emphasise shared exposure and collective resilience are therefore essential, particularly within alliance frameworks such as NATO and through coordination with civilian authorities and private operators. For non-Arctic states, adaptation does not require territorial presence but strategic awareness. Developing Arctic-informed security strategies enables these states to anticipate indirect exposure through trade, energy, and communication networks, and to con-

tribute meaningfully to alliance-level planning. Taken together, these policy adaptations illustrate that the Arctic's emergence as a climate-driven security frontier does not demand entirely new security paradigms. Rather, it requires the systematic integration of environmental change into existing security frameworks, ensuring that strategic planning remains aligned with the evolving physical and geopolitical realities of the High North.

7. Conclusion

The Arctic is no longer a peripheral theatre defined by symbolic presence or resource competition. It has become a structural testing ground where climate change reshapes the very logic of deterrence. Retreating sea ice, thawing permafrost, and rising environmental volatility are not just background conditions—they directly condition operational feasibility, infrastructure resilience, and strategic planning. In this context, military power alone does not determine influence. Russia leverages accessibility while managing infrastructure fragility; the U.S. and NATO prioritize mobility, resilience, and alliance coordination; the EU emphasizes adaptive governance; and China asserts a strategic presence without territorial claims. Across all actors, climate-driven transformation alters both opportunity and vulnerability, creating a security environment defined less by confrontation than by the capacity to operate effectively under accelerating ecological change. The Arctic thus illustrates a broader strategic lesson: environmental change can recalibrate the conditions under which states define and pursue security. Success depends not on dominance alone, but on the ability to integrate climate realities into planning, infrastructure, and multilateral cooperation. The region does not foreshadow an imminent great-power war; it signals a subtler, more consequential transformation in how states conceive defence. The question is no longer whether the Arctic will militarize, but whether defence institutions can adapt quickly enough to prevent climate-driven instability from hardening into strategic fragility

“ Environmental change amplifies strategic stakes, forcing allies to adapt posture, policy, and governance in tandem. ”

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The Eastern Mediterranean as Transmission Belt

Energy, migration and maritime security linking Europe, MENA and beyond

About the Article

The Eastern Mediterranean cannot be understood one crisis at a time. Gidi Brandes makes the case for treating the region as a single geopolitical system in which energy politics, migration, maritime disputes, regional wars, and external power projection are deeply interconnected. The article offers a framework for seeing the region not as a collection of isolated flashpoints, but as a strategic space whose dynamics increasingly matter for Europe and beyond.

About the Author

Gidi Brandes completed his BSc in Political Science (2025) and is currently pursuing an MSc in Intelligence & National Security and International Politics at Leiden University. He is interested in the dynamics between regional security orders and global politics. He mainly focuses on cases related to Europe, the US, and the Middle East. Furthermore, he is interested in exploring the use and application of data science to International Relations, policy analysis, risk assessment, and strategic foresight.

1. Introduction

The Eastern Mediterranean functions as a strategic transmission belt where energy, migration, and maritime security link Europe, the Middle East, North Africa, the Black Sea, and the Red Sea, making analytical neglect a persistent source of strategic surprise.. Post-2023 Middle East war dynamics, persistent instability in Libya and Syria, and intensified external power projection by the United States, Russia, China, the UAE, and European actors have elevated the region's strategic relevance (IISS, 2024). Despite this, it is often treated as a sub-case of Middle Eastern conflict or an appendix of EU security policy (Florensa, 2018). Rather than a peripheral arena or a mere spillover zone, the Eastern Mediterranean operates as a connective interface through which regional crises are transmitted across multiple geopolitical systems. Its geopolitical significance lies in this multi-domain connectivity, where energy infrastructure, maritime space, security competition, and migration routes intersect, enabling both power projection and cross-sectoral vulnerability (Tziarras, 2019a; Ehteshami & Mohammadi, 2017). Neglecting this connective function obscures how localized crises acquire systemic effects far beyond the basin. This article asks why a region that structurally links multiple geopolitical systems remains persistently underdiscussed, and what strategic risks arise from this neglect. It argues that the Eastern Mediterranean's role as a transmission belt can only be captured through a systemic geopolitical analysis inspired by Mazis, followed by a strategic reflection on spillover dynamics. The central claim is that the region's risks do not stem from dominance by any single actor, but from the interaction of partially stabilized sub-systems embedded in wider geopolitical architectures. As later sections show, this systemic role is consistently overlooked by dominant theoretical frameworks, fragmented policy ownership, and media narratives ill-suited to slow-moving, multi-domain power configurations.

2. Geopolitical-Strategic Analysis of the Eastern Mediterranean

Why Mazis' Framework Fits the Eastern Mediterranean

For the purposes of this analysis, the Eastern Mediterranean refers to the maritime basin and adjoining coastal states encompassing Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, and the Levantine coast (Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian Territories), together with the maritime corridors linking the Black Sea and the Red Sea. This definition emphasizes functional connectivity rather than cultural or historical boundaries. Mazis' systemic geopolitical framework is particularly suited to the Eastern Mediterranean because the region functions as a nexus of overlapping systems where reductionist or state-centric approaches fail to capture interdependencies. The framework enables a structured analysis of power across sub-systemic, systemic, and supra-systemic levels, revealing dynamics that conventional bilateral or state-centric approaches miss, most notably how actions in one basin (e.g. Libya or Syria) reshape energy, migration, and security balances across others. In doing so, it reframes the Eastern Mediterranean not as a theatre of isolated disputes, but as a system whose coherence derives from interaction rather than proximity. The Eastern Mediterranean operates simultaneously at multiple scales: at the sub-systemic level, localized clusters such as Greece–Cyprus–Israel or Turkey–Libya structure specific rivalries and alignments; at the system level, overlapping EEZs, energy corridors, and naval presence bind coastal states into a single maritime arena; and at the supra-systemic level, EU security policy, Black Sea dynamics, and Red Sea shipping routes embed the region in wider geopolitical architectures (IISS, 2024; Proedrou, 2023). This layered system reflects the region's hybrid character, where maritime energy spaces intersect with terrestrial conflicts and external power projection, requiring an analytical model capable of accommodating such multiplicity (Tziarras, 2019a). Mazis' strict

separation between analysis and prescription is particularly valuable in a region influenced by normative agendas. By prioritizing objective power mapping, the framework avoids policy bias and ideological framing (Ehteshami & Mohammadi, 2017). Power functions as the unifying variable, allowing energy, migration, conflict, and economic dynamics to be analysed as interconnected expressions of geopolitical influence rather than isolated security issues (Stergiou, 2019; IISS, 2024).

Definition of the Subject Matter

The core of the region includes Greece, Cyprus, Turkey, Israel, Egypt, and the Levantine coast (Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian Territories). Taken together, this is an area characterized by overlapping exclusive economic zones (EEZs), naval chokepoints, and hybrid security environments involving both state and non-state actors (IISS, 2024; Proedrou, 2023). The internal area of the region consists of maritime spaces, coastal states, and offshore energy fields which structure intra-regional competition and cooperation (Stergiou, 2019). The external area extends beyond the basin to include the EU's security architecture, Gulf states' geo-economic outreach, the Black Sea system shaped by Turkey–NATO dynamics, and the Red Sea system linked via the Suez Canal and conflicts in Yemen (Dalay & Zoubir, 2025; Ghanem, 2025).

This does not imply energy determinism. In acute crisis moments, such as the Gaza war, Syrian escalation, or major naval confrontations, ideological drivers, regime survival, and military calculations can temporarily override energy considerations. These moments, however, tend to reconfigure rather than dissolve the underlying energy–maritime structure. Over the medium to long term, it is the maritime–energy interface that structures alignments, constrains escalation, and channels spillover across systems. Secondary dynamics such as military deployments, migration flows, and external power projection derive from this nexus, which simultaneously enables cooperative arrangements, such as Israel–Egypt energy interdependence, and fuels disputes, including Turkey's challenges to Cypriot EEZs (IISS, 2024; Tziarras, 2019b). The following section identifies what holds the Eastern Mediterranean system together and how power is organized across its constituent levels.

Systemic Delimitation and Power Architecture

Sub-systems within the Eastern Mediterranean emerge as localized clusters of power interactions. The Israel–Egypt–Gaza sub-system revolves around energy–security interdependence: Israeli gas exports to Egypt help stabilize bilateral ties despite ongoing tensions in Gaza (IISS, 2024). The Greece–Cyprus–Israel maritime sub-system features

Country	Discovery Date	Field Name	Estimated reserves (bcm)	Production Status
Cyprus	2011	Aphrodite	140	Awaiting development
	2018	Calypso-1	170-230	Further evaluation needed
	2019	Claucus-1	142-227	Further evaluation needed
Israel	1999	Noa	1.2	Nearly depleted
	2000	Mari-B	30	Nearly depleted
	2009	Tamar	317	In production
	2010	Laviathan	605	Awaiting development
	2012	Tanin	34	Awaiting development
	2013	Karish	50	Awaiting development
Egypt	2015	Zohr	850	In production
World proven reserves in total	201.729 bcm			

Figure 1: OFF Shore Natural Gas Discoveries in the Eastern Mediterranean. Source: İşeri, E., & Bartan, A. Ç. (2019). Turkey's geostrategic vision and energy concerns in the Eastern Mediterranean security architecture: A view from Ankara. In Z. Tziarras (Ed.), *The new geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean: Trilateral partnerships and regional security* (PRIO Report No. 3/2019, p. 117). Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.

formalized cooperation through trilateral mechanisms, focusing on EEZ alignments, joint naval exercises, and energy infrastructure coordination (Tsardanidis, 2019; Tziarras, 2019c). In contrast, the Turkey–Libya sub-system highlights assertive linkages, such as the 2019 maritime agreement, which enables Turkish interventions and counters rival claims (IISS, 2024). These sub-systems reveal how power is organized locally and mediated through energy and security interactions. At the system level, the Eastern Mediterranean emerges as a maritime-centric geopolitical system structured around EEZs, energy corridors, and naval presence. EEZs allow states to assert resource claims but also produce overlapping disputes, as seen in Turkey’s assertions against Greece and Cyprus (Proedrou, 2023). Energy routes underscore the region’s connectivity and strategic leverage. Naval deployments, such as Russian bases in Syria, extend external power projection into the system (Kortunov, 2025). This system-level view captures the aggregate effect of sub-system interactions and highlights structural tensions. It also explains why incremental confidence-building measures rarely translate into lasting regional stabilization. At the supra-system

level, the Eastern Mediterranean is embedded in broader architectures. The EU security system externalizes its borders through migration and energy agreements (Megerisi, 2025). The Middle Eastern security system transmits conflicts arising from Iran–Saudi rivalries, shaping local alignments and crises (Ehteshami & Mohammadi, 2017). The global energy and maritime trade system links the Eastern Mediterranean to international markets, where disruptions in the Suez Canal have worldwide consequences (Ghanem, 2025). These supra-systemic connections amplify both vulnerability and strategic relevance. The structuring factor of this analysis is the maritime–energy interface. It exists materially through offshore fields and transit routes, generates behaviours such as brinkmanship and alliance formation, and structures competitive interactions within and across sub-systems (Stergiou, 2023). Without this interface, the Eastern Mediterranean cannot be coherently treated as a system; it dissolves analytically into disparate sub-regions and episodic events. By anchoring analysis in this element, one can trace how localized, systemic, and supra-systemic dynamics interconnect in shaping regional power structures.

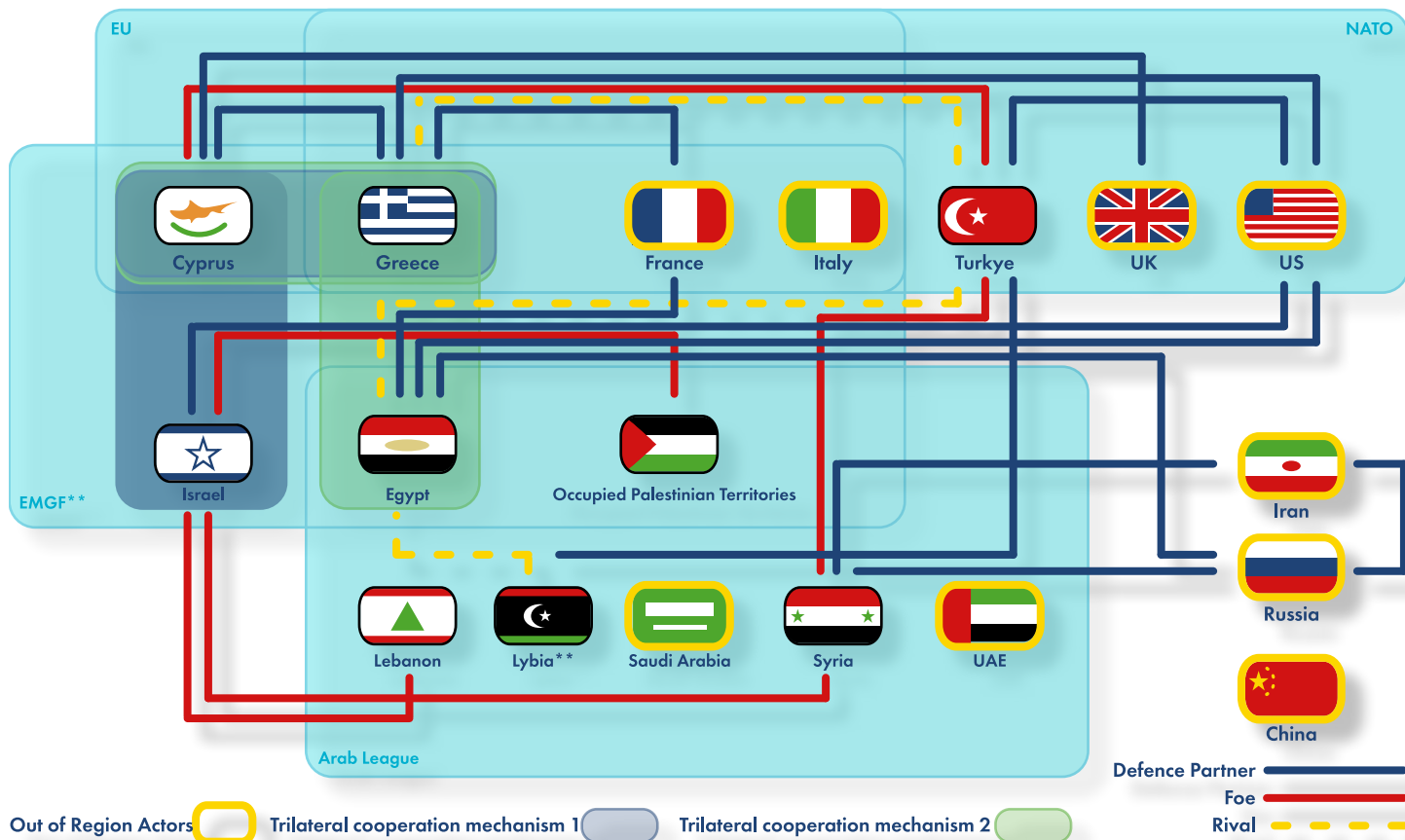


Figure 2: ALLIANCES, ALIGNMENTS AND COMPETITION IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN. Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies. (2024). Turbulence in the Eastern Mediterranean: Geopolitical, security and energy challenges [Strategic dossier]. Pp. 15. <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/strategic-dossier-preview-turbulence-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/>

Sub-Systemic Power Trends

Positive sub-systemic trends refer to alignments that produce durable coordination mechanisms with independent momentum beyond crisis-driven alignment and measurably stabilize interactions at the system level, creating resilience beyond ad hoc cooperation. In the Greece–Cyprus–Israel sub-system, institutionalized cooperation through summits, joint military exercises, and energy agreements strengthens mutual security, fosters trilateral coordination, and counters revisionist maritime ambitions by Turkey (Tsardanidis, 2019; IISS, 2024). Energy pacts, particularly in natural gas development and export, further consolidate these alliances, creating sustainable mechanisms for crisis management. Similarly, the Israel–Egypt sub-system benefits from deep energy interdependence, exemplified by agreements such as the 2022 maritime gas deal, which stabilizes bilateral relations despite ongoing challenges arising from Gaza spillovers and regional unrest (IISS, 2024; Stergiou, 2019). These arrangements constitute positive sub-systemic component trends, as they actively shape systemic dynamics and provide resilience within their respective sub-systems. Zero or neutral trends refer to sustained activity that absorbs pressure or manages symptoms without altering the underlying configuration of power at the system level. The EU maintains a largely normative presence through mechanisms such as energy diversification policies, migration frameworks, and the Green Deal’s renewable energy initiatives. Yet, weak operational coherence limits its influence to reactive, absorptive measures rather than systemic change (Florensa, 2018; Stergiou, 2023). Similarly, migration governance acts as a shock absorber, responding to pressures from conflicts in Syria and Libya while frequently externalizing responsibilities to neighbouring states, without fundamentally changing regional power structures (Megerisi, 2025; IISS, 2024). Distinguishing internal versus external power effects clarifies the scope and locus of influence. Internal

Systemic geopolitics (Mazis framework):

An analytical approach that maps power across sub-systemic, systemic, and supra-systemic levels, emphasizing and connectivity over isolated state actions



trends, such as Turkey’s assertive, hybrid interventions in Libya and Syria, materially alter the system by linking disparate disputes, escalating maritime tensions, and creating structural dependencies that affect other sub-systems (İşeri & Bartan, 2019; IISS, 2024). Conversely, external trends such as China’s Belt and Road Initiative investments or Russia’s limited military footholds, remain largely contained: they enhance connectivity and provide leverage

without establishing dominance over the Eastern Mediterranean system (Jin, 2025; Ghanem, 2025; Kortunov, 2025). Similarly, Gulf investments in infrastructure or energy sectors penetrate sub-systems opportunistically, offering in-

fluence but not hegemonizing regional dynamics (Ehteshami & Mohammadi, 2017). Collectively, this mapping of positive, zero, internal, and external trends demonstrates how the Eastern Mediterranean exhibits pockets of stabilization, absorptive mechanisms, and external leverage. It highlights the nuanced, systemic interactions that shape the region. Understanding these sub-systemic dynamics is critical for assessing both the resilience of alliances and the vulnerabilities created by actors whose influence is partial, external, or conditional.

Synthesis

This multi-layered structure explains why actions that appear tactical at one level often generate strategic consequences at another. At the system level, the synthesis of sub-systemic trends points to fragmented stabilization. While regional actors such as Greece, Cyprus, Israel, and Egypt consolidate localized cooperation, external powers exert significant influence, preventing any single actor, including Turkey, from fully achieving strategic objectives amid political and military pushback (IISS, 2024). No internal hegemon dominates the Eastern Mediterranean system, resulting in a delicate balance where regional initiatives coexist with structural constraints. At the supra-system level, the region functions as a transmission belt,

linking multiple geopolitical spheres. External shocks, from the Ukraine conflict to tensions in Gaza, can propagate through energy, migration, and security networks, magnifying systemic vulnerabilities (Dalay & Zoubir, 2025). This structural assessment underscores the region's limited autonomy: it is neither fully independent nor entirely resilient, but highly responsive to broader regional and global dynamics. The Eastern Mediterranean thus exhibits stability without order and connectivity without integration.

Having established the system's structure, the analysis now turns to where and how instability spills beyond the basin.

3. Strategic Reflection

Spillover Potential of the Eastern Mediterranean

The Eastern Mediterranean's systemic characteristics generate spillover potential across both geographical and sectoral domains. Spillover is not an anomaly in this system but a structural feature. Geographically, spillover is most direct toward the EU through migration and energy channels. Protracted conflicts in Syria, Libya, and the Levant continue to generate refugee flows that disproportionately affect southern EU member states. Migration governance is frequently externalized through transactional arrangements, exposing Europe to political leverage. Most notably is Turkey's instrumentalization of migration in periods of bilateral tension (IISS, 2024; Mejerisi, 2025). Energy interdependence reinforces this exposure. Although Eastern Mediterranean gas volumes are modest in global terms, they contribute to producer-state stability and offer partial diversification away from Russian supplies. Disruptions reverberate through European markets via price volatility, investor uncertainty, and stalled infrastructure development (Stergiou, 2019; Mason, 2025). Libya's persistent instability further increases these risks: foreign involvement by Turkey, Russia, and Egypt intensifies migration flows and energy insecurity, while

allowing external actors to exploit governance vacuums along NATO's southern flank (Atlantic Council, 2025). Spillover toward the Red Sea operates through shipping and maritime security linkages. The Eastern Mediterranean's energy–security nexus connects directly with critical chokepoints such as the Suez Canal. Since late 2023, Houthi attacks, have disrupted global shipping routes, forcing costly rerouting and raising insurance and transport costs (Ghanem, 2025). This connectivity enables tensions originating in the Eastern Mediterranean, including Iranian proxy activity in Lebanon and Syria, to translate into wider maritime insecurity. As a result, ambitions for alternative trade corridors, such as IMEC, and Egypt's canal revenues are placed at risk, with significant economic consequences for Europe–Asia trade (Ghanem, 2025). The region thus functions as a transmission belt for Middle Eastern shocks into the Red Sea system. Spillover into the Black Sea occurs primarily through Turkey's role as a pivotal actor bridging maritime basins. Turkish assertiveness in the Eastern Mediterranean, illustrated by the Libya maritime agreement and military involvement in Syria, intersects with NATO dynamics in the Black Sea, where Russia's posture and the effects of the Ukraine war generate mutual vulnerabilities (IISS, 2024; Dalay & Zoubir, 2025).

Control of the Turkish Straits and revisionist maritime claims amplify these linkages: Eastern Mediterranean disputes influence naval postures

in the Black Sea, while energy competition, including Turkey's ambition to become a regional hub, intersects with EU diversification strategies amid Russian isolation (Proedrou, 2023). Recent EU strategic assessments explicitly recognize the danger of spillovers from Ukraine into the Black Sea and beyond (European Commission, 2025). Sectoral spillovers reinforce these geographical dynamics. Energy competition exacerbates migration pressures as exclusionary energy arrangements and contested infrastructure heighten instability in fragile states such as Libya and Lebanon, producing displacement that Europe absorbs without systemic resolution (IISS, 2024;

“ Neglecting this connective function obscures how localized crises acquire systemic effects far beyond the basin. ”

Megerisi, 2025). Conflict spillover into shipping and economic domains is evident in the implications of the Gaza war, which disrupted normalization trajectories, delayed energy projects, and undermined investor confidence. Simultaneously, security trends foster radicalization through Iranian networks and non-state actors, intensifying the region's external sensitivities (Mason, 2025; IISS, 2024). Together, these dynamics confirm that the Eastern Mediterranean's fragmented power trends and exposure to external forces make it a high-risk node in an increasingly multipolar geopolitical environment.

Why the Eastern Mediterranean is underdiscussed

The Eastern Mediterranean remains analytically underdiscussed despite its growing strategic centrality. This neglect is not accidental but stems from a combination of theoretical, policy, and media logics that struggle to accommodate the region's hybrid and multi-domain character. Firstly, the Eastern Mediterranean fits poorly within dominant state-centric international relations paradigms. These frameworks privilege unitary actors and discrete conflicts, whereas the region is shaped by overlapping

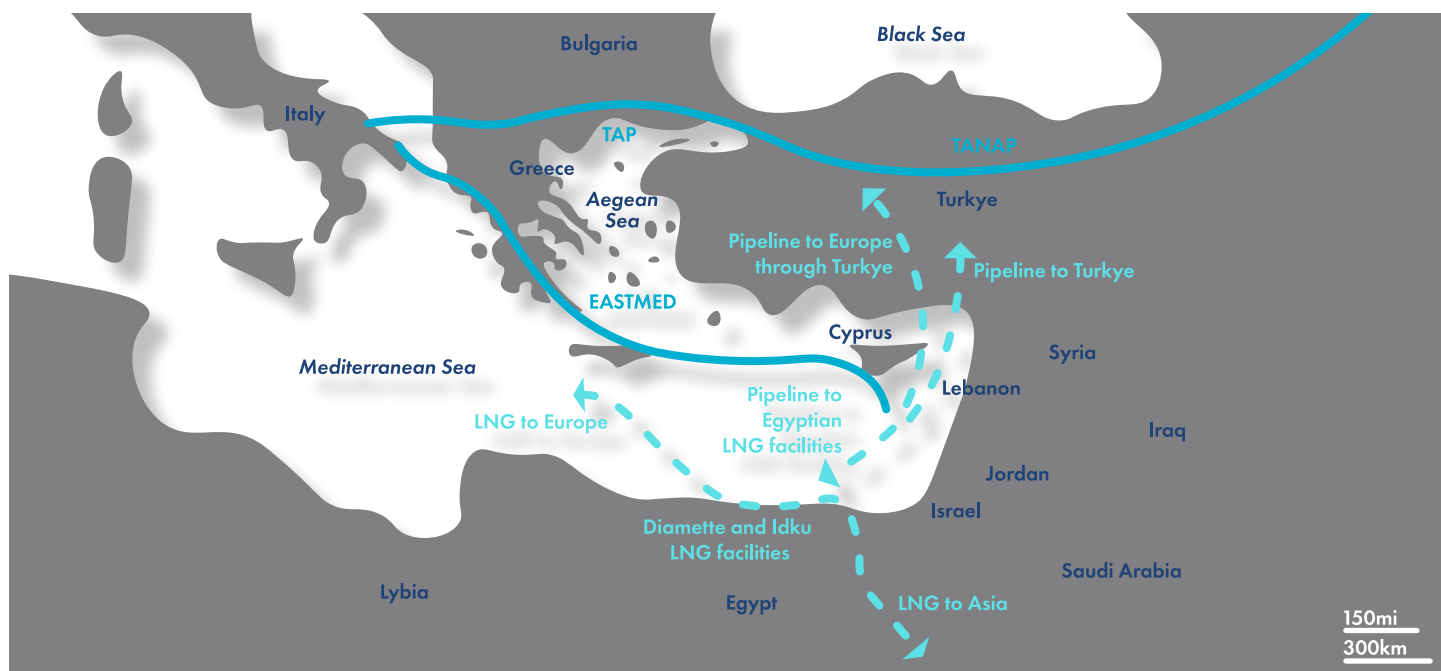


Figure 3: Potential Export Routes for Eastern Mediterranean Gas. Stergiou, A. (2019). Geopolitics and energy security in the Eastern Mediterranean: The formation of new “energy alliances.” In Z. Tziarras (Ed.), *The new geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean: Trilateral partnerships and regional security* (PRIO Report No. 3/2019, pp. 11–30). Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-dossiers/strategic-dossier-preview-turbulence-in-the-eastern-mediterranean/>

systems, transnational flows, and maritime-centric dynamics (Tziarras, 2019d; Florensa, 2018). Its geopolitics is structured around an energy–security nexus, hybrid threats, and fluid interactions between state and non-state actors operating across internal and external arenas. As a result, the region is rarely conceptualized as a distinct geopolitical system, instead being subsumed under broader Middle Eastern conflict narratives or treated as a peripheral extension of EU maritime security (Proedrou, 2023; IISS, 2024). Secondly, the Eastern Mediterranean is consistently overshadowed by higher-visibility crises, including the wars in the Middle East since 2023, the Black Sea theatre of the Ukraine war, and intensifying

great-power competition, which absorb diplomatic attention and analytical resources (Dalay & Zoubir, 2025; Mason, 2025). Institutional fragmentation further dilutes focus: the EU emphasizes migration management and energy securitization without strategic integration; NATO prioritizes deconfliction over regional ownership; and MENA actors adopt predominantly bilateral, survival-driven approaches rather than systemic perspectives (Megerisi, 2025; IISS, 2024). No single actor or framework claims sustained responsibility for the region as a whole. Thirdly, the absence of clear binaries, dominant hegemonies, or decisive outcomes makes the Eastern Mediterranean difficult to narrate. The region lacks the narrative clarity

found in Ukraine or Gaza, reducing sustained coverage and public visibility (Ehteshami & Mohammadi, 2017; IISS, 2024). Together, these factors sustain underdiscussion, increasing the risk of strategic surprise as the region's systemic importance grows in an increasingly multipolar and interconnected international environment.

4. Conclusion

This article has argued that the Eastern Mediterranean should be understood not as a peripheral or derivative arena, but as a systemic geopolitical region whose dynamics are shaped by the interaction of maritime space, energy infrastructures, security competition, and external power penetration. The study has demonstrated that the region operates across different levels, producing patterns of fragmented stabilization rather than hegemonic dominance. Localized cooperation coexists with persistent contestation and external leverage, preventing the emergence of a fully autonomous regional order. The synthesis of power trends reveals an Eastern

Mediterranean that functions as a strategic transmission belt, highly sensitive to shocks from the Middle East, the Black Sea, and global energy and maritime systems. Energy, migration, and security dynamics do not remain confined within the basin; instead, they generate significant geographical and sectoral spillovers that affect European security, global trade routes, and broader regional stability. This systemic exposure underscores why analytical neglect carries tangible risks. The article further showed that the Eastern Mediterranean's underdiscussion is rooted in theoretical blind spots, fragmented policy ownership, and media narratives ill-suited to complex, slow-moving power configurations. As multipolar competition intensifies and connectivity becomes a central vector of influence, overlooking regions that link systems rather than dominate them increases the likelihood of strategic surprise. For policymakers and analysts alike, treating the Eastern Mediterranean as a system rather than a collection of crises is essential to anticipating, rather than reacting to, future instability.

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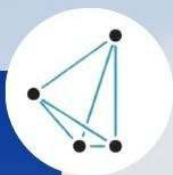


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in EU Foreign Policy

About the Article

How has the European Parliament (EP) used own-initiative (INI) reports to shape the EU's support to Ukraine whilst advocating more EU influence? The EP urged stronger support to Ukraine via informal agenda shaping, arguing that this crisis and its values necessitate a stronger role on foreign policy for the EU and, in particular, the EP. While primarily focused on strengthening Ukraine, the EP also sought to leverage the crisis for deeper European integration and more parliamentary influence.

About the Author

Julian Stöckle studies for a Double Master's Degree in European Affairs at Sciences Po & LSE, focusing on Europe's role in the world. Previously, he worked as a project assistant at the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) on a project aimed at shaping Germany's security policy transformation following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. His research interests include European security and defence, political economy, and capital market reforms.

1. Introduction

Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine in 2022 has been a watershed moment for the European Union's (EU) foreign and security policy (Genini, 2025, 1-3), sparking a discussion about deeper integration, and the best way of supporting Ukraine. Jean Monnet, one of the EU's founding fathers, famously said that Europe "is forged in crisis, and will be the sum of the solutions adopted for those crises" (Monnet, 1976). In this spirit, this essay argues that the European Parliament (EP) attempted to shape and increase the EU's support to Ukraine whilst also making the case for stronger European integration and greater parliamentary involvement on foreign policy. While its formal powers in powers in foreign and security policy are limited to approval and consultation, the EP has contributed to the discussion around support to Ukraine extensively. It has done so most obviously by dealing with over 40 legislative files, such as approving and scrutinizing the implementation of the €50 billion Ukraine facility to aid reconstruction (European Parliament, DG for Parliamentary Research Services, 2024, 20). Beyond this direct albeit limited legislative impact, the EP also attempted to shape the EU's agenda by adopting over 30 non-legislative resolutions that relate to EU support of Ukraine (ibid., 19). These include eight non-binding own initiative (INI) reports handled by the Committee on Foreign Affairs (see Table 1).

So far, little academic attention has been devoted to how the EP itself drives an increase in its powers (Wiesner, 2018, 375), and more specifically, to how the EP has utilized INI reports in relation to Ukraine's war effort in the past three years. Using the latter as a case study of the former, this article investigates how the EP used INI reports to shape the EU's support to Ukraine whilst reasoning an increase in EU-level and EP influence. It demonstrates how the EP used non-binding own initiative (INI) reports to shape the EU's long-term agenda beyond direct legislative impact, arguing for increased support to Ukraine's defence. This necessity and EU values in turn necessitate more EU-level actions in foreign policy and parliamentary inclusion, the EP has argued. The essay first draws on literature on interinstitutional micropolitics and agenda shaping, to then analyse the EP's efforts to shape the EU's agenda through INI reports adopted since the start of the full-scale invasion until the end of the 2024 legislative term. This includes four interrelated aspects (see Graph 1): Firstly, heightened support to Ukraine; secondly, increased EU-level actions; thirdly, advanced engagement of the EP; and lastly, normative reasoning.

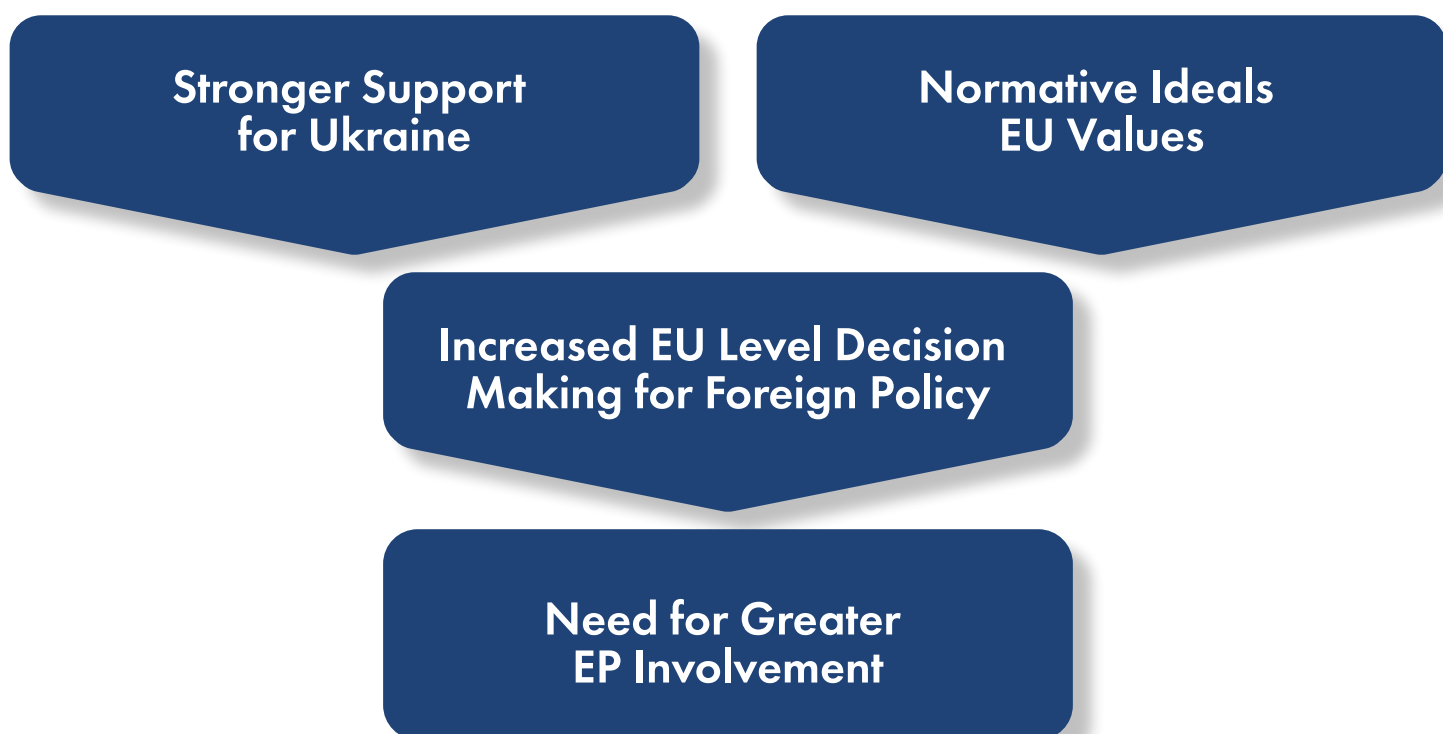


Figure 1: The European Parliament's Reasoning Chain, Agenda Shaping through INI Reports on Foreign & Security Policy

2. Interinstitutional Micropolitics as a Lens to Analyse the European Parliament's Quest for Increased Powers

Given that major conventional theories of European integration cannot systematically explain the EP's increasing influence (Costa and Brack, 2013, 47), this essay draws on recent literature on interinstitutional micropolitics. Accordingly, institutions and their members act politically and shape the EU's system from within, which provides a more nuanced lens compared with a mere focus on treaty changes and intergovernmental agreements (Wiesner, 2018). The EP's scope for increasing its power and shaping the EU system, and the success thereof, is contingent on four factors (Wiesner, 2018, 380-381): First, its existing powers enshrined in treaties and other rules; second, interparliamentary politics, with increased negotiating power the more united the EP stands; third, the political context that may open "windows of opportunity"; and fourth, the symbolic powers of the EP, including legitimization and scrutiny of the Commission.

3. The European Parliament as an Agenda Shaper on the EU's Response to the Ukraine War

In the absence of powers to initiate legislation, the EP attempts to impact policy outcomes through discursive agenda setting via own initiative reports, increasing the salience of issues through normatively convincing proposals (Deters and Falkner, 2020, 292-294). This constitutes an informal form of the broadly conceived agenda setting (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993), which can be further distil-

led into the reactive part of "shaping" an existing agenda, and the proactive part of "setting" the agenda (Kreppel and Webb, 2019, 388). Research has shown that such resolutions at own initiative – both binding (INL) and non-binding (INI) – are more likely to influence legislative outcomes when discussions on the respective topics are already ongoing so that the EP shapes the agenda, rather than setting the agenda by initiating discussions (Kreppel and Webb, 2019, 396). They particularly signal the EP's commitment to outlined views and proposals, as repeated reforms increased the obstacles for INI reports' adoption

INI reports are resolutions without binding legislative impact that the European Parliament proactively tables to influence EU policy or raise specific issues.



(Maurer and Wolf, 2020, 67). In foreign policy, primary agenda drivers are typically crisis events, opening "windows of opportunity" for informal agenda setting or shaping (King-

don, 1995). Russia's war on Ukraine has provided the EP with such a "window of opportunity". As overall salience was high even though somewhat reduced towards the end of the 2019-24 parliamentary cycle, there has been more need to shape rather than set the agenda. The Parliament's over 30 non-legislative resolutions were mostly in response to statements by representatives of other EU bodies in line with rule 136 (2) of the EP's rules of procedures (Bqcal and Drachenberg, 2024, 3; European Parliament i, 2024). Though, among them are also eight INI reports the Foreign Affairs Committee initiated that do not primarily focus on but explicitly relate to EU support of Ukraine, linking the Ukraine war with the need for increased foreign policy powers (see Table 1). Compared to ad-hoc resolutions reacting to statements, INI reports typically lay out a more structural, longer-term vision. Thus, this essay looks only at INI reports to investigate the link between the EU's engagement in the Ukraine war and its powers.

File: Topic (In-Text Citation)	Adoption Date (m/d/y)	Plenary Votes (yes vs. no)	Key Elements on Ukraine Support, EU Integration, EP Competencies, and EU Norms
2021/2199(INI): Security in the Eastern Partnership area and the role of the common security and defence policy (European Parliament a, 2022)	06/08/22	490 vs. 59	Calls on allies to step up military support to Ukraine (Art. 2), increase ambition for Ukraine's integration agenda (Art. 14), and provide further weapons (Art. 25)
2022/2048(INI): Implementation of the common foreign and security policy – annual report (European Parliament b, 2022)	01/18/23	438 vs. 75	Advocates creation of mechanisms for credible values-based foreign policy role (Art. 1), including a European Security Council (Art. 13-27); calls for an EU initiative to deliver modern battle tanks, including Leopard 2s (Art. 37)
2021/2065(INI): Functioning of the EEAS and a stronger EU in the world (European Parliament c, 2022)	03/15/23	451 vs. 133	Demands the development of defence instruments by the European External Action Service (Art. 1t), converting EU delegations into genuine EU embassies (Art. 1af), and to boost the EU Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC; Art. 1az)
2022/2145(INI): EU Rapid Deployment Capacity EU Battlegroups and Article 44 TEU: the way forward (European Parliament d, 2022)	04/19/23	444 vs. 96	Emphasizes the importance of an EU rapid deployment capability (RDC) to protect EU values (Art. 2) and EP scrutiny rights in regard to the MPCC (Art. 16)
2022/2078(INI): Strategic Compass and EU space-based defence capabilities (European Parliament e, 2022)	11/23/23	500 vs. 43	Calls for swift implementation of EU space strategy (Art. 1) and for operationalizing the mutual assistance clause under Art. 42.7 TEU in the space domain (Art. 24), given the decisiveness of Starlink on the battlefield in Ukraine (k)
2023/2105(INI): Role of the European Parliament and its parliamentary diplomacy in the EU's foreign and security policy (European Parliament f, 2022)	01/16/24	492 vs. 73	Highlights unique value of EP diplomacy in reinforcing visibility and impact of EU foreign and security policy (Art. 2), outlines EP tools such as subcommittees and parliamentary missions (Art. 6-17), and encourages initiatives such as the EP-Rada of Ukraine cooperation (Art. 31)
2023/2117(INI): Implementation of the common foreign and security policy – annual report 2023 (European Parliament g, 2022)	02/28/24	338 vs. 86	Underscores EP resolutions as key CSFP means, calls for EU-level foreign policy instruments (Art. 1), emphasizes European values (Art. 3) that Ukraine defends (Art. 8), requests that the RDC and other CSFP tools are made permanent (Art. 14, 23), urges ammunition production to boost Ukraine's army (Art. 22), underlines value of EP-Rada of Ukraine cooperation at political and technical level (Art. 28)
2023/2119(INI): Deepening EU integration in view of future enlargement (European Parliament h, 2022)	02/29/24	305 vs. 157	Portrays enlargement as key geopolitical tool to invest in peace, democracy, and security (Art. 2), whilst stressing that there can be no short-cuts on EU values (Art. 6) and that frozen Russian assets should be used to fund Ukraine (Art. 44)

Figure 2: INI Reports Referring to the EU's Security Policy and Russia's War on Ukraine, Tabled by the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (Feb 24, 2022 – June 30, 2024)

4. Demands for Stronger Ukraine Support

The EP's strong push to support Ukraine in response to Russia's full-scale war in 2022 motivated political leaders of EU institutions to take a more ambitious stance, contributing to the EU's unified positioning (Zheltovsyy, 2023, 674). Given the prevalence of the war in 2022, the need and capacity for the EP to initiate INI reports on related matters was limited, leading to only one relevant report in 2022 compared with four in 2023 and three in the first half of 2024 (European Parliament, 2024, 1419). In its INI report on security in the Eastern Partnership region from June 2022, the EP called on member states to "step up their military support to Ukraine and provisions of weapons" (Art. 2), including by providing anti-ship, anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons (European Parliament a, 2022, Art. 25), and for the Council to increase the European Peace Facility (EPF) budget used to finance increased weapons supplies to Ukraine (Art. 22). It also pushed the EU institutions to "provide a more ambitious integration agenda for Ukraine" through quick gradual integration steps (Art. 14), as this is inevitably linked to not only Ukraine's but also the EU's security (Anghel and Džankić, 2023, 487-489). In a 2024 INI report on enlargement, it reaffirmed this link as "a geostrategic investment in long-term peace, democracy, stability, security [...] in the face of Russia's war" (European Parliament h, 2024, Art. 2), whilst stressing the need to "fund support to Ukraine from frozen Russian assets" (Art. 44). In its annual foreign policy implementation INI reports for 2022 and 2023, the EP increased pressure for further Ukraine support. In the former report adopted on January 18, 2023, it had several provisions on support for Ukraine (European Parliament b, 2023, e.g., Art. 13, 36). Notably, it reinforced its call on member states for their "delivery of modern main battle tanks, including Leopard 2s [most commonly used tank in Europe]" (Art. 37), which contributed to collective pressure on Germany to follow suit as it announced it would on January 25 (McAllister, 2023). In the second annual report adopted on February 28, 2024, it still urged member states to "produce ammunition and provi-

de it to Ukraine's armed forces" (European Parliament g, 2024, Art. 22), but overall, it toned down its demands for stronger Ukraine support. This may reflect growing "war fatigue" among the EU public (Goldhammer, 2024, 232-233) and frictions in the EP, as less than twice as many MEPs supported the resolution compared with those who voted against it, in contrast to the overwhelming 5:1 ratio for the resolution a year earlier. These examples illustrate how the success of the EP's agenda-setting power is contingent on its unity.

5. Advocacy for Increased EU-Level Decision-Making in Foreign Policy

Whilst the EP has selectively pointed to the need for greater EU-level engagement and EP powers in security-related decision-making in 2022 (European Parliament a, 2022, Art. 15, 21, 41), it increased emphasis and precision of these demands in following resolutions. For example, in its annual report 2022 it hosted a whole chapter with proposals for institutional changes (European Parliament b, 2023, Art. 13-27), including old proposals like Qualified Majority Voting (Art. 14a, b, 15) but also new ones like a European Security Council (Art. 14f). It also suggested a "coordinated EU initiative through the EU Military Staff" to organize the joint delivery of Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine (Art. 37). To "adapt the structure of the EEAS [European External Action Service]" so that it could "lead on EU action" in a new geopolitical environment, the EP introduced a specific INI report in March 2023 (European Parliament c, 2023, Art. 1t). The report focused on further operationalizations of both military and diplomatic means which have been increasingly specified in EU strategic thinking over the past 20 years (Koukakis, 2024, 6). For example, it suggests to "convert the EU delegations into genuine EU embassies" (Art. 1af) and to bolster and centralize military command and control structures and capabilities, especially for operations for the EU rapid deployment capability (Art. 1az) – the EU's defacto first step towards some kind of European army. Similarly, the EP pushed for expanding EU space capabilities and readying the mutual assistance clause under Art. 42(7) TEU (European

Parliament, 2024 e, Art. 24), and transforming the rapid deployment force into a permanent structure (European Parliament g, 2024, Art. 14). Remarkably, in its INI annual report 2023 it prioritized the ends over the means favourable to its influence, by calling for the development of new intergovernmental legal instruments to circumvent Hungary's vetoes on tools like the EPF (Genini, 2025, 27). By embedding all these demands within current geopolitical contexts at times of political momentum, generating significant simple majorities on the aforementioned resolutions (5:1, 11:1, 3:1, and 2:1 respectively; see Table 1), and both backing and pushing ahead existing EU actions, the EP developed significant negotiating power to shape the EU's agenda beyond direct legislative impact, despite limited formal competencies (Wiesner, 2018, 380-381).

6. Push for Increased Parliamentary Involvement

In conjunction with fostering EU-level powers, the EP aimed to increase its role. It did so by proposing a role for the EP in decisions on security missions (European Parliament b, 2023, Art. 14i) and demanding oversight powers to supervise the EU's military command and control structures (European Parliament d, 2023, Art. 16), among others. Aiming to strengthen its role as an own diplomatic actor (Bajtay, 2015, 10), the EP used INI

reports to underline the "distinct role and value of EU parliamentary diplomacy in complementing and reinforcing the visibility and impact of EU foreign and security policy" (European Parliament f, 2024, Art. 2). The EP has since Lisbon, beyond influencing the EU Executive, advanced its curation of own initiatives and diplomatic channels to impact foreign policy (Goinard, 2020, 109). A prime example the EP repeatedly highlights are the "innovative approaches such as the committee-to-committee cooperation [with Ukraine's Parliament]" (Art. 31), which it deemed as "valuable cooperation at political and technical level" in support of Ukraine (European Parliament g,

2024, Art. 28). In its annual report 2023, the EP moved from outlining general policy shifts and ad-hoc responses previously to providing an elaborate list of means and tools to impact EU foreign policy (Art. 6-17).

7. Normative Reasoning

As the EP is the only EU body directly elected by citizens, it carries substantive normative weight to discursively shape the EU's agenda (Deters and Falkner, 2020, 293-294). Throughout the INI reports, the EP visibly attempted to emphasize how support to Ukraine's war effort, European integration – especially the increase of EU-level powers and EP engagement, and EU values interrelate. Ukraine support and its values necessitate a stronger role for the EU and EP, the EP argues. The following five sections exemplify how the EP reasoned increased EU foreign policy powers, and Ukraine support normatively, beyond speeches and other texts, in its INI reports. First, it premised the need for structural changes to enhance EU and EP powers (e.g., European Parliament b, 2023, Art. 13-27) on the overarching vision of enhancing the EU's "role as a credible values-based foreign policy player" (Art. 1).

Second, connecting the development of a military force under EU structures with the objective to "protect the Union's values" helped justify such a significant proposed step (European Parliament d, 2023, Art. 2). Third, the emphasis on the value centrality in the Treaties, the UN Charter, and other legal texts provided the basis for the aforementioned elaborate foreign policy toolbox for the EP and the need for increased EU powers (European Parliament g, 2024, Art. 3). Fourth, it reasoned continued and increased support to Ukraine by stating it "pays tribute to the brave people of Ukraine, who are [...] courageously defending [...] European values and security" (Art. 8). Fifth, it underscored that the one issue on which the EU will not sacrifice to speed up accession is the "EU values and fundamental principles (European Parliament h, 2024, Art. 6).

“Ukraine support and its values necessitate a stronger decision-making role for the EU and the EP on foreign policy, the EP argues.”

7. Conclusion

As this essay demonstrated, the European Parliament has not only sought to bolster support for Ukraine in the latter half of the 2019-24 parliamentary term, but also to strategically leverage this crisis to push for deeper European integration and a stronger parliamentary role in foreign policy. Its use of INI reports reveals a deliberate, normatively grounded effort to shape long-term EU action

beyond immediate legislative influence. Whether the EP can sustain this momentum throughout the 2024-29 cycle, will depend on its continued unity, political salience, and eventually, the translation into more formalized structures and rules (Wiesner, 2018, 380-381). Increased “war fatigue” and parliamentary frictions evident in the decreased majorities for relevant INI reports towards the end of the 2019-24 cycle pose challenges to the EU’s sustained agenda shaping ability.

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Sanctions and Fragility: The Case of UAC

Supply-chain dependence and financial stress
in Russia's defence industry

About the Article

Has UAC reduced foreign dependence and achieved financial sustainability after 2022? Despite sanctions and redomiciliation efforts, UAC remains structurally dependent on foreign technological inputs while its financial indicators deteriorate. UAC's continued operation reflects state-engineered survival rather than market-based resilience, suggesting limited long-term sanction circumvention success.

About the Author

Krisztina Galos is pursuing an MSc degree at Lauder Business School in Vienna. Her strongest suits are banking, business analytics, statistics, and project management. She has acquired extensive international experience, which has enhanced her interest in cross-cultural management, politics, and international affairs. Traveling, therefore, is both a passion and an opportunity to observe and become familiar with new things.

1. Introduction: Why UAC matters

Since 2022, Russia has rapidly shifted toward a war-oriented economy, marked by a sharp increase in defence spending both in absolute terms and as a share of GDP. Defence outlays rose from 3.6% of GDP in 2021 to an estimated 7.1% in 2024, crowding out civilian expenditure and re-orienting industrial capacity toward military production (Buklemishev, 2024).

This shift has occurred under unprecedented Western sanctions targeting high-technology (e.g. semiconductors, flight sensors, etc.) and dual-use imports (European Commission, 2025). The central question is whether Russia's defence industry can sustain production under these constraints—or whether it survives primarily through state intervention rather than market viability (Dabrowska, 2024).

	2021	2022	2023	2024 (estimated)
In absolute terms (trillion RUB)	4,9	7,2	9,3	12,58
Real growth	-5,8%	27,0%	24,0%	29,0%
Share of budget expenditure	10,3%	12,9%	16,1%	18,6%
Share of GDP	3,6%	4,7%	5,9%	7,1%

Figure 1: Russian defence expenditure, Source: Buklemishev, 2024.

In large part, this is due to Chinese suppliers, operating under the supervision communist party (Popova, 2023) and by practicing parallel importing through other third countries (Feldstein & Brauer, 2024), such as Turkey for instance. Macroeconomic data provides insight into the development of the Russian economy, but detailed and reliable microeconomic statistics are not accessible (Interfax, 2022). This information gap is addressed by the present article by examining the United Aircraft Corporation (UAC), which is the largest Russian defence company. The research scope consist of two dimensions: supply-chain exposure and financial sustainability alongside the following research questions:

- How has UAC's supply-chain exposure—particularly its reliance on foreign suppliers—evolved over the past five years?

- How did Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine affect UAC's key financial indicators, and what do these changes imply about the firm's ability to operate without sustained external (state) support?

Together, these questions assess whether observed supply-chain configurations and financial outcomes indicate a viable, self-sustaining operation or a firm whose survival is increasingly state-engineered rather than market-driven (Suhaimi & Mokhtar, 2023).

2. The significance of imports

As far as the domestic economy landscape is concerned, Figure 1 shows the import dependency of the Russian economy in the second quarter of 2022. Usually, countries that specializes in natural resources extraction or

agricultural production tend to be the relatively more import-dependent. This is true of Russia as well as showcased by the figure.

According to the survey of the Gaidar Institute (2019), approximately one in four Russian companies made serious efforts to reduce their dependency on foreign products.

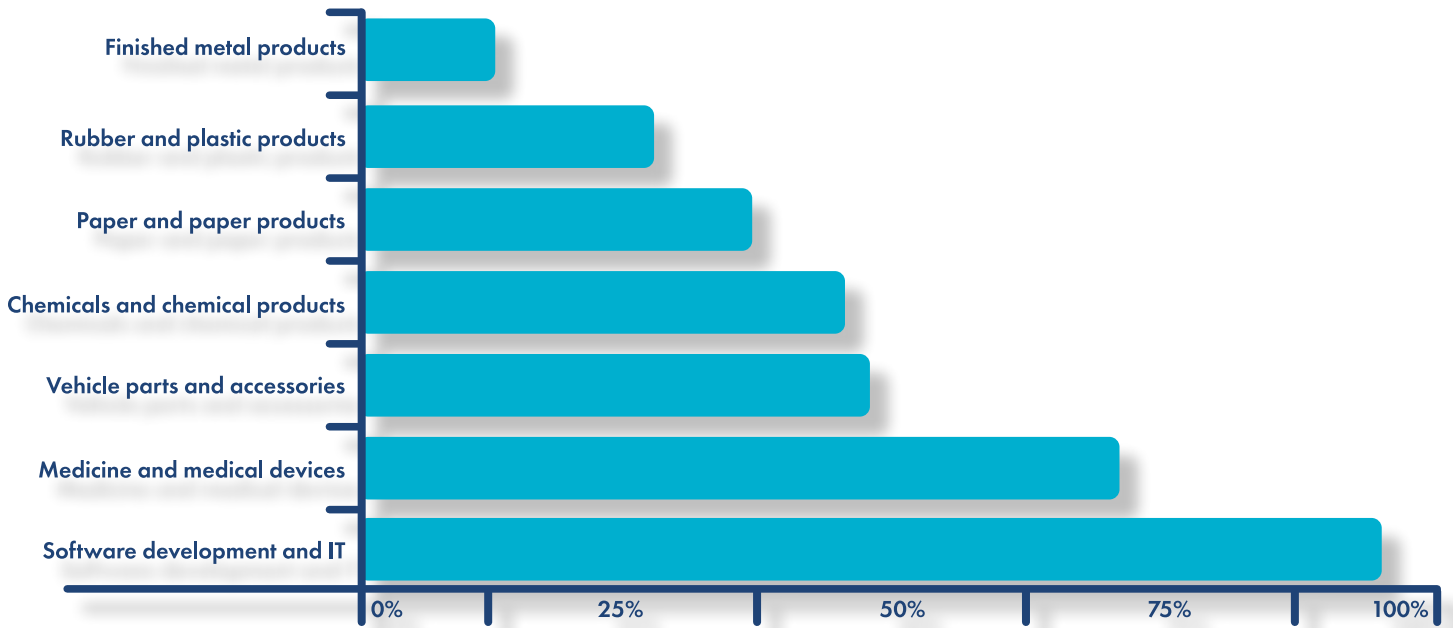


Figure 2: Import dependency of selected Russian industries in Q2 2022 Source: Trefilov, 2022, own editing.

Import substitution was also promoted by the state (e.g. Resolution No. 102/2015). Certain heavy industries (armament, nuclear energy) are in domestic ownership

and under domestic control (Seremet, 2023). Although the supplier basis of the respective companies are already foreign firms as exemplified by Figure 3.

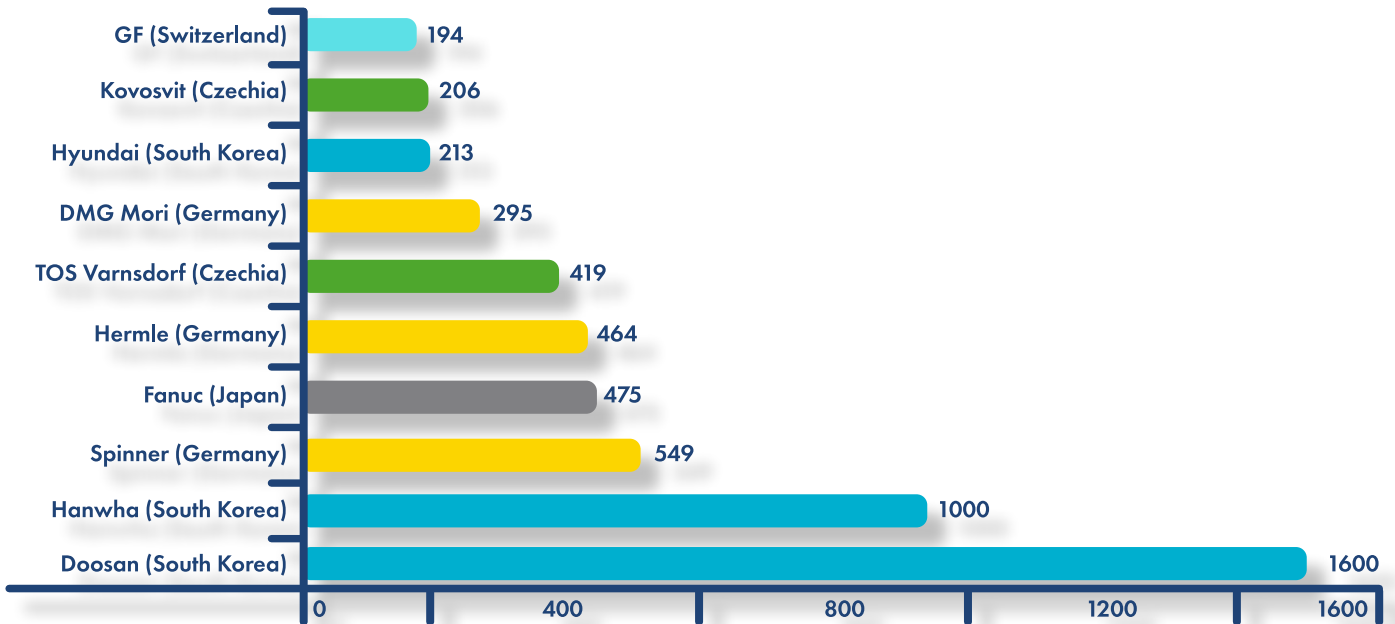


Figure 3: High tech military component suppliers to Russian missile manufacturing and their turnover in 2023 in millions of RUB, Source: Rhodus Intelligence, 2025, own editing.

Russia's critical dependency on Western digital infrastructure had been evident therefore, the withdrawal of Oracle, SAP, IBM, and Microsoft from the Russian market was a hard hit (Pravda.com, 2024). In response – and not as a preventive measure, - the Russian Presidency issued a

decree (No. 166/2022) excluding Western IT service providers from operating in critical infrastructure sectors such as railways, energy, communications, banking, mining, and servers storing classified information.

3. Thesis

This article argues that United Aircraft Corporation (UAC), remains structurally dependent on foreign inputs and financially fragile. Despite adaptation efforts, UAC's survival increasingly reflects state engineering rather than a self-sustaining response to sanctions. The analysis in the two sections below test this claim. Methodologically, UAC is an ideal case study: it is Russia's largest defence manufacturer, a core supplier to the military, and one of the few firms for which partial supply-chain and financial data remain accessible.

Evidence I:

Supply-chain exposure under sanctions

What "import dependence" means in this article? Import dependence here refers to foreign involvement in UAC's supplier base, measured using Bloomberg's supply-chain mapping. Specifically: the frequently cited "Western reliance" refers to the share of supplier facilities located in countries classified as Western or Western-aligned (EU member states, the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan). Classification is based on facility location, not ownership or nationality of shareholders. This distinction matters: firms may be legally domiciled in Russia while remaining technologically dependent on foreign production, too-

ling, or know-how. What Bloomberg supply-chain data captures—and what it misses? Bloomberg's supply-chain mapping (Figure 4) identifies known, formal relationships between firms (suppliers, customers, competitors) based on disclosures, customs data, and corporate reporting. As for interpreting inventory signals (colors of the companies' names), Bloomberg's supply-chain chart shows more suppliers increasing than decreasing inventories between April 2024 and April 2025. Rising inventories can reflect expectations of sustained demand, but in a sanctioned economy they may also indicate bottlenecks in downstream assembly; difficulties matching supply with volatile state orders; or overproduction driven by administrative targets rather than market signals. On the customer side, inventory declines—particularly among Chinese entities—suggest that demand is being absorbed faster than production can adjust, reinforcing inflationary pressures and dependence on state stockpiling. The takeaway is that UAC's supply chain has adapted tactically but not structurally; foreign inputs remain embedded, and state demand masks underlying fragility. It captures only tier-1 suppliers and customers, while does not consider parallel imports; informal intermediaries; state-to-state procurement; classified military transactions. As a result, Bloomberg data likely understates, rather than overstates, Russia's true foreign exposure.

“UAC's negative free cash flow signals structural fragility, indicating that operational continuity depends on state transfers rather than internally generated capital.”



Figure 4: Supply chain of United Aircraft Corporation, April 2025. Firms are Russian unless specified otherwise. Source: Bloomberg, own editing.

Figure 5 presents the geographical exposure of UAC from the supplier side and Figure 6 from the customers. What the data shows? Even after three years of sanctions, UAC's supplier base remains geographically diversified. In 2022–23, 37.5% of supplier facilities were located in Western or Western-aligned economies, with notable exposure to South Korea and Taiwan. One example is Drewloong Precision (Taiwan), which specializes in aircraft engine components—precisely the type of high-

precision manufacturing Russia struggles to substitute domestically. This persistence of foreign sourcing highlights a structural constraint: while Russia can reroute trade through intermediaries or encourage redomiciliation, it has not eliminated reliance on external production ecosystems (Simola, 2024, Vinokurova, 2024). Notable that the Russian state is not reported at all, which is quite unrealistic.

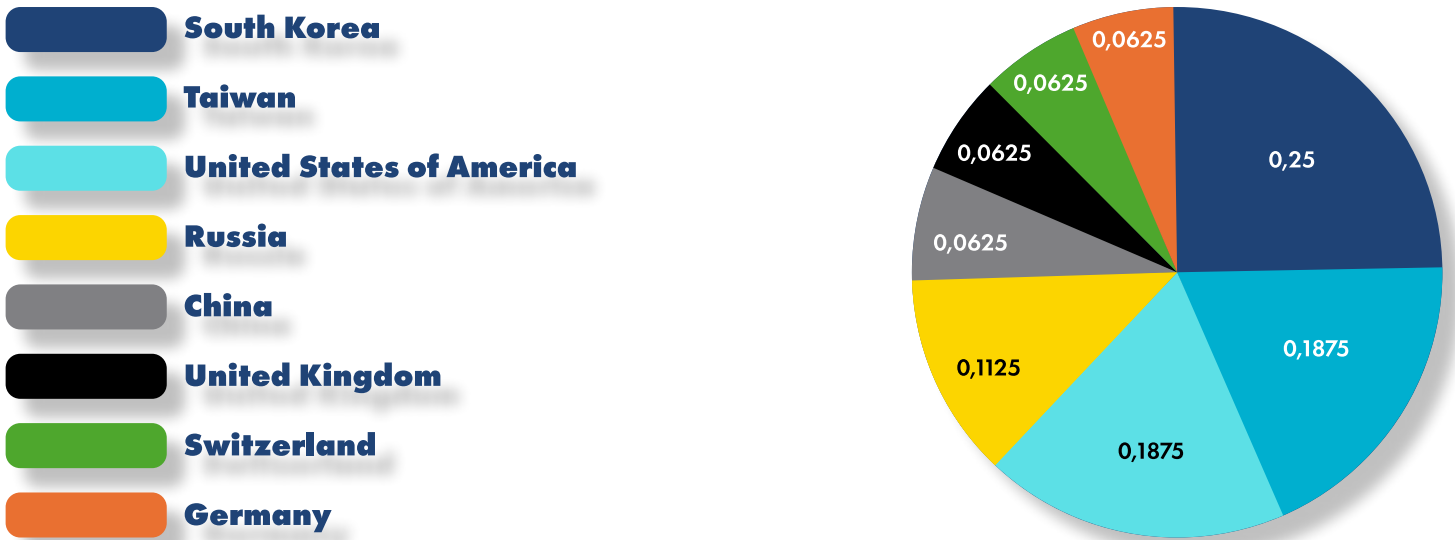


Figure 5: Geographic location of supplier facilities of United Aircraft Corporation, 2022/23, Source: Bloomberg, own editing.

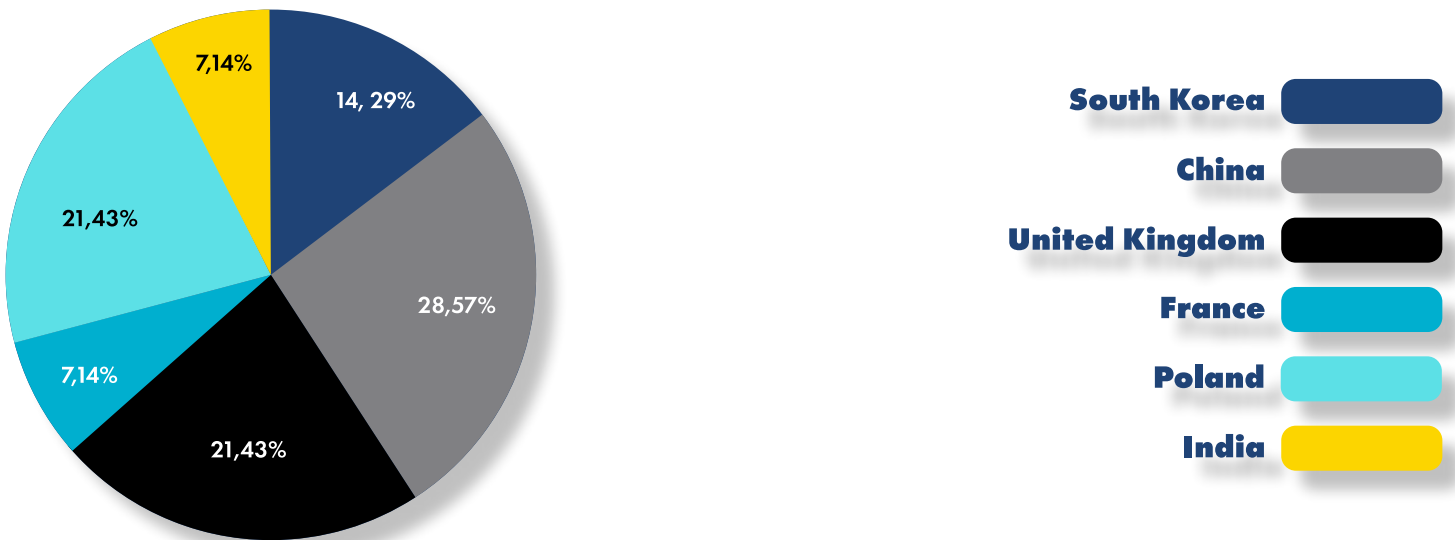


Figure 6: Geographic location of supplier facilities of United Aircraft Corporation, 2022/23, Source: Bloomberg, own editing.

Federal Law No. 290-FZ, aimed to encourage foreign firms to offshore their facilities to Russia. Subsequent amendments (e.g. Federal Law No. 18-FZ of February 2022) offered favourable tax conditions (Ponomareva, 2022). Despite the Kremlin's motivations for domiciliation, it is likely that UAC maintains business partnerships outside Russia.

Evidence II:

Financial fragility and state dependence

Financial transparency among Russian defence firms has sharply declined since 2022. Under Resolution No. 351, sanctioned or military-linked firms may withhold financial statements (Interfax, 2022). As a result, UAC's post-invasion data is incomplete and uneven. To address this, the

analysis combines: Bloomberg semi-annual income and cash-flow data (with documented gaps); moving-average estimates for missing periods; and Russian government expenditure trends as a proxy for demand. Figure 8 illustrates the quarter-to-quarter evolution of public spending on administration, defence, and social expen-

ses from 2019 through 2024. An upsurge in spending is noticeable following the launch of the war; however, this does not sustain for more than one year. Immense public resources were allocated to public functions, accompanied by a significant outflow of funds to society and administration, consistent with rising inflation in 2022.

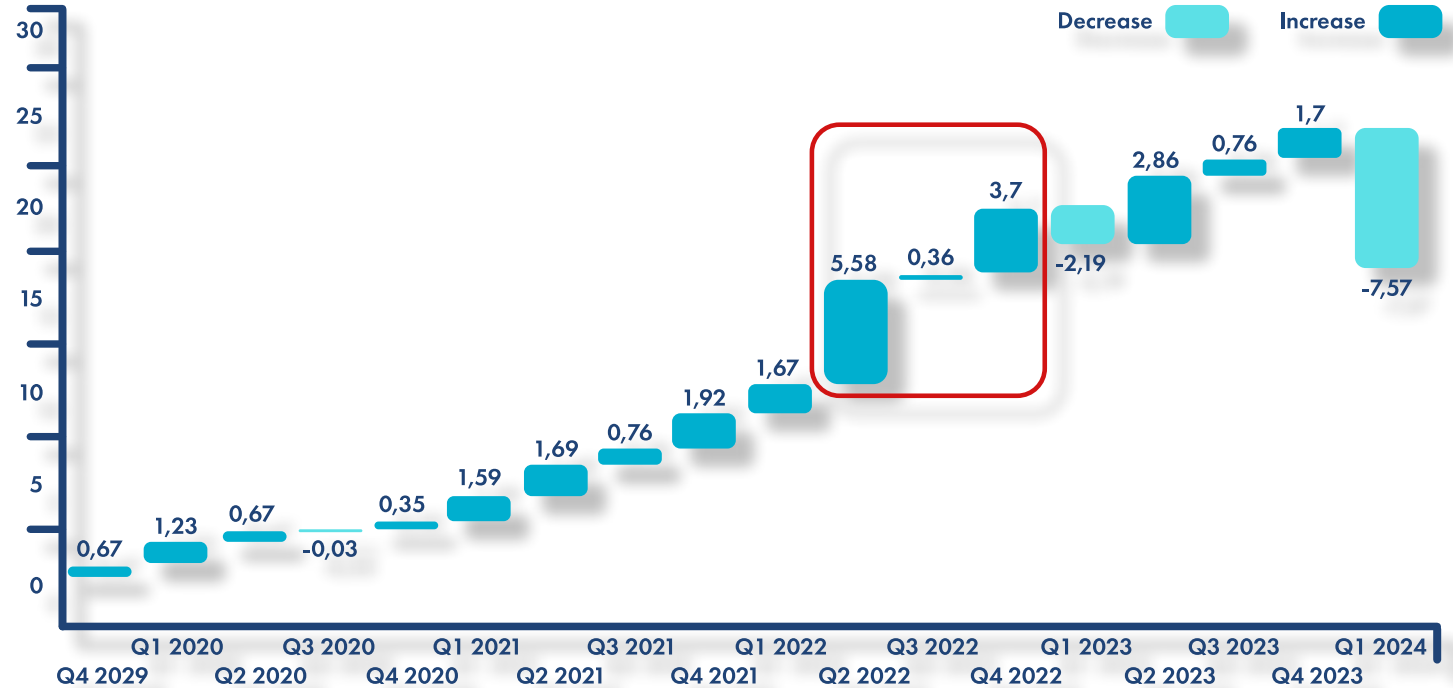


Figure 7: Public administration, defence, social security expenditures, QoQ%, Source: Bloomberg, own editing

Based on figure 8, profitability collapse after 2022 - UAC's financials show a clear break in 2022. Net income turned sharply negative in most post-invasion periods. Gross margins fell from over 30% in 2021 to low double- or single-digit levels by 2023-24. Only two

post-2021 half-years recorded positive net income. This pattern indicates that rising revenues—driven by defence orders—did not translate into sustainable profitability, likely due to higher input costs, inefficiencies, and sanctions-related frictions.

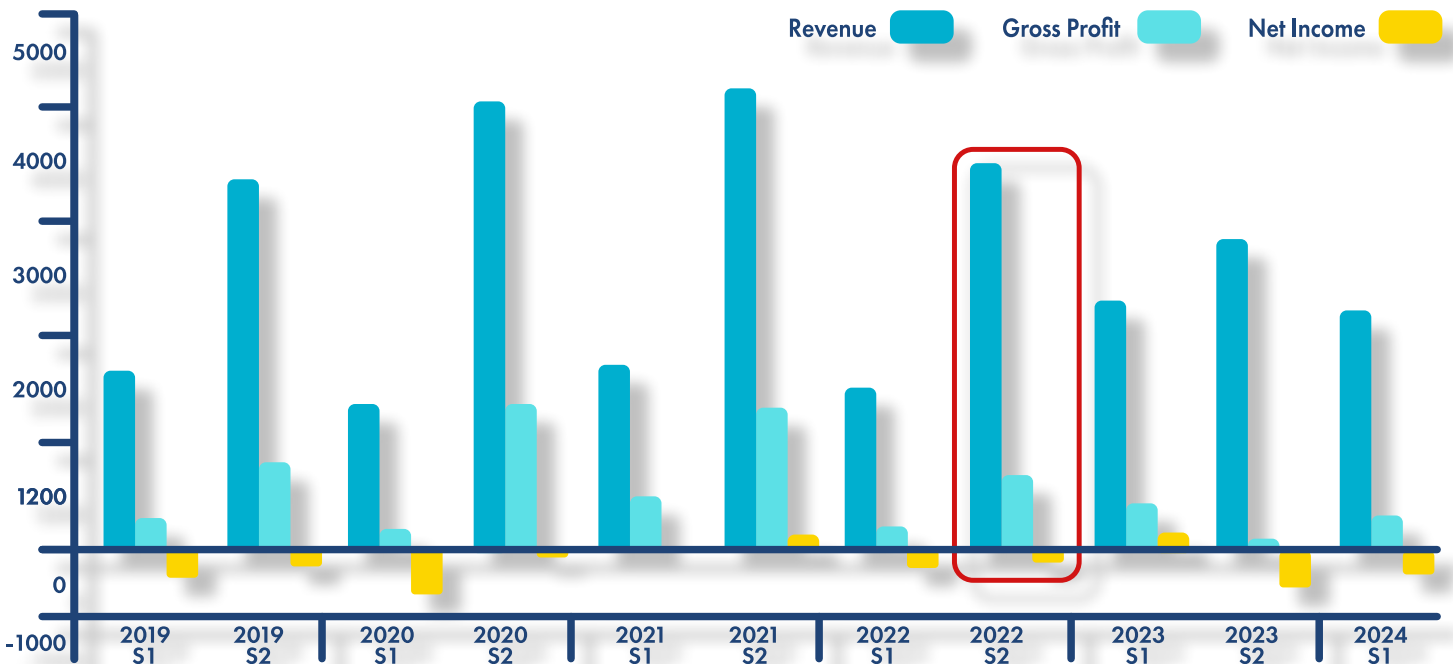


Figure 8: Income items, millions of USD, Source: Bloomberg, own editing

Concerning the cash flow and divestment (figure 9), operational cash flow has been volatile and frequently negative. More concerning is persistent negative capital expenditure, which indicates asset sales rather than investment. In practical terms, UAC has been: liquidating

assets to cover operating shortfalls; postponing long-term investment (Anankina, 2018); and relying on state transfers to remain solvent. Negative free cash flow across most periods reinforces this picture.

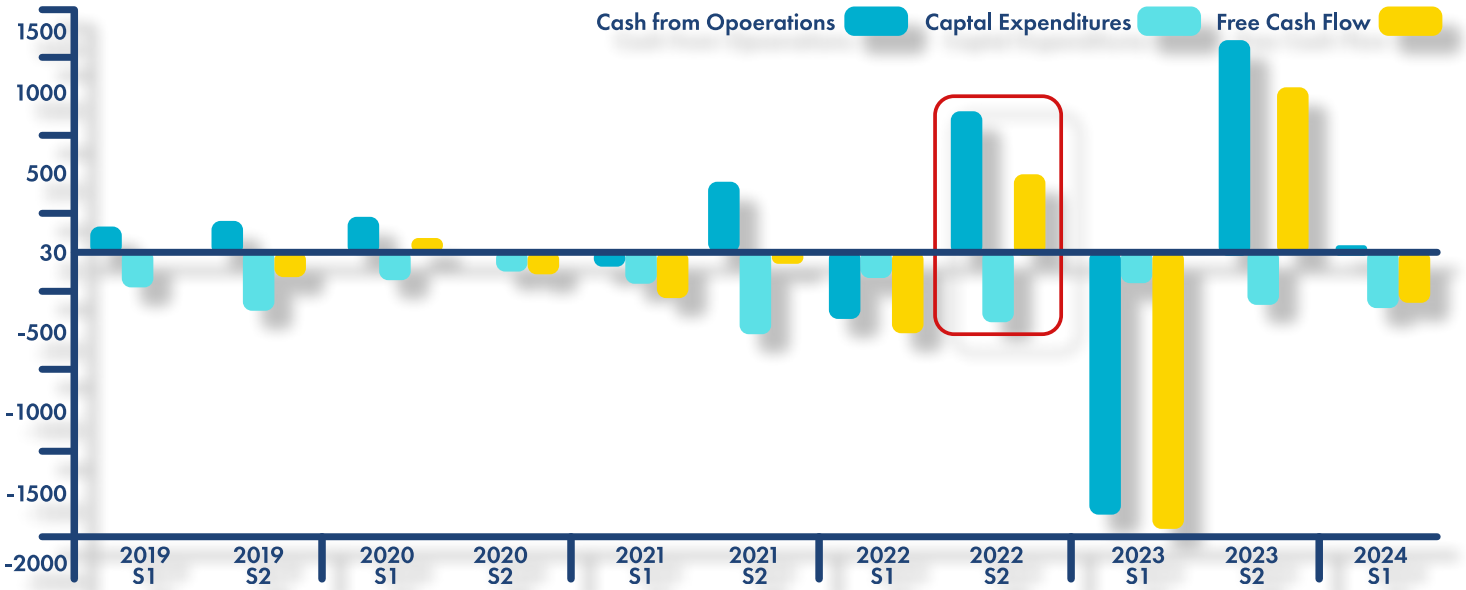


Figure 9: Cash Flow items, millions of USD, Source: Bloomberg, own editing

Why state support matters? - but is not enough. Historically, Russian state-owned enterprises invest and pay dividends only when operating cash flow allows. Since 2022, however, UAC's survival appears decoupled from its own financial performance and increasingly tied to defence spending cycles. Yet even state support has limits. Government expenditure data shows large post-2022 fluctuations and hints at future fiscal strain as inflation, social spending, and war costs compete for resources. The bottom line is that UAC is operating, but not on market terms; its financial position reflects state engineering rather than resilience.

Implications:

What this means for sanctions monitoring

The UAC case yields three broader implications: sanctions have not forced technological autonomy. Instead, they have shifted dependence toward intermediated and opaque channels. Firm-level survival is not proof of success. Continued production can coexist with financial erosion and long-term decline. Monitoring must move beyond macro indicators. Micro-level supply-chain and cash-flow analysis is essential to distinguish adaptation from

artificial support. Sanctions effectiveness should therefore be judged not by short-term output, but by whether firms remain investable, profitable, and technologically independent over time.

4. Conclusion

This article examined whether Russia's defence industry has overcome sanctions-induced vulnerabilities through a case study of United Aircraft Corporation. The evidence suggests it has not. UAC remains dependent on foreign technological inputs and financially fragile, with ongoing operations sustained primarily through state intervention rather than market viability. Answering the two research questions, the conclusions are as follows:

- UAC has not fully eliminated its dependence on foreign sources, despite the state's various forms of assistance and efforts to achieve that goal.
- UAC is divesting its asset base, which means it can no longer offset its cash flow problems—even with substantial state support.

Supply-chain exposure persists despite redomiciliation efforts, and financial indicators point to asset depletion rather than renewal. While Russia has avoided immediate industrial collapse, the UAC case indicates stagnation rather than recovery. In the absence of transparency, competition, and genuine technological substitution, the war economy appears durable only so long as the state can afford to hold it together.

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Mariami Modebadze

EU-China: Interdependence and Strategic Rivalry

50 Years of EU-China Ties: Crossroads Strategic Rivalry

About the Article

How have 50 years of EU-China relations evolved amid economic interdependence and strategic competition? While the EU and China remain economically interdependent, China's growing power and geopolitical ambitions have shifted the relationship toward rivalry, creating imbalances and risks. The EU must adopt a comprehensive de-risking strategy to safeguard economic security while maintaining channels for cooperation.

About the Author

Mariami Modebadze holds a Bachelor's in International Relations and Diplomacy and a Master's in European Integration with honours. Her research focuses on geopolitical issues and Europe's strategic role. She is an analyst at the Young Diplomats' Club of Georgia, writing on geopolitical and socio-political topics. Mariami aims to foster global collaboration through diplomacy, research, and youth engagement.

Research Question:

How have fifty years of diplomatic relations shaped the EU-China economic security and policy dynamics, and what are the defining challenges in their relationship currently and in the future.

1. Introduction

In 2025, the European Union (EU) and People's Republic of China (PRC, also hereinafter referred to as China) mark the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations as well as the 25th anniversary of the founding of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China. (South China Morning Post, 2025) The complex interaction of two powerful players in the global arena is highlighted by five decades of evolving ties. What began in 1975 has undergone significant trajectory changes, increasingly shaped by intensifying competition in foreign policy, economic security, and trade affairs. The EU-China ties have transformed into an interdependent multidimensional nature. The bilateral relations became unbalanced, and the competition less fair. China's economic power and political influence have grown with unprecedented scale and speed, reflecting its ambitions to become a leading global power, which resulted in the EU's stance on reducing its dependence on China. The EU's approach of de-risking and diversifying where necessary does not exclude pursuing cooperation with China on global issues. Albeit, according to the EU's "A strategic outlook" (2019), China is perceived through a triple lens: as a partner for cooperation, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival. The shift reflects the broader geopolitical realities, which make the once mutually perceived economic opportunity turn into a relationship fraught with imbalances.

2. Half a Century of Partnership and Tension

50 years ago, on May 6, 1975, the PRC and the European Economic Community (EEC) established diplomatic relations. The commencement of the EU-China relations has foreshadowed an overall upward trajectory, however the anniversary celebration takes place in a complex climate,

marked by occasional turbulence, growing trade frictions and differing strategic interests that at times fuel mutual distrust. A turning point has now been reached as the balance has fractured. Yet, at the outset of the partnership, the outlook appeared largely promising, as China became a lucrative new market. Moreover, China's "reform and opening-up policy" fostered deeper relations and broader development. Internally, the reforms upgraded the country from a low-income to an upper-middle-income bracket by raising labor productivity, accumulating capital, and maintaining consistency over time. (AMRO, 2019) The external impact of this policy was largely perceived in a positive light throughout the 1990s and 2000s, as EU institutions sought to consolidate ties with their economic partner, even if the relationship was tempered by intermittent strains. (Brinza, Bērziņa-Čerenkova, Le Corre, Seaman, Turcsányi, & Vladislavljev, 2024) The growing dissatisfaction over economic results has been expressed from both sides. China became increasingly dissatisfied with the EU's refusal to lift its 1989 military embargo (SIPRI, 2012) and to grant the country Market Economy Status (MES) when China joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. (IIEA, 2016) From the EU's perspective, there were expectations that China would open its market to European firms, as access to the European market for Chinese firms had become significantly easier. However, after Xi Jinping became China's leader in 2012, the economic and political policies shifted to a Sino-centric system. His initiative, the New Silk Road (later renamed the Belt and Road Initiative, BRI), was initially seen as an economic opportunity for European firms. However, in 2018, all but one EU ambassador to China (Hungary being the exception) signed a letter expressing criticism of the BRI for granting Chinese companies a competitive advantage while marginalising European interests.

EU's optimism had eroded which resulted in intensified realisation that China's global initiatives were not merely economic projects but also instruments of geopolitical influence. These dynamics reinforced the EU's gradual shift from viewing China primarily as a partner to recognising it simultaneously as a competitor and systemic rival. Europe's economic strategy vis-à-vis China has shifted toward coordinated and unified policy implementation, amid concerns over a diplomatic initiative between China and 16 Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries (11 of which are EU members), the '16+1' platform, which threatened to undermine EU unity. (CSIS, 2019) The fuelled previous dissatisfactions lead to "EU-China-A strategic outlook," which introduced the "partner, competitor, systematic rival."

(European Commission & High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 2019)

The framework underlines the approach of the EU to-

wards its economic competitor, China. The predominant view of a potential economic opportunity is no longer a driving point to deepen relations. The EU is reconsidering its strategic direction in response to emerging rivalry and competitive pressures.

3. Growing Ties, Persistent Imbalances

European businesses initially gained access to China's large consumer market and low-cost production capacity, meanwhile, China benefited from European technology, capital, and expertise. Over time, the interdependence has deepened and the bilateral interests of doing business, market access, and trade growth have been plagu-

ed with long-standing difficulties. And apparently symmetrical exchanges began to show the asymmetries. The EU is concerned about systematic distortions, overcapacity in the production of goods, and barriers to market access in key sectors. The challenges of doing business in China and regulatory barriers remain unchanged for the European business community for many years. Behind this issue lies China's unpredictable legislative environment as their primary regulatory challenge. (European Chamber, 2023) The ongoing lack of resolution fuels further unbalance. Brussels stands ready to engage in constructive dialogue and, in case of a progress stall, is prepared to take proportionate, legally compliant action to protect its interests. (European Council, 2025). In the last decade,

bilateral trade and investment have doubled, reflecting the deepening of economic interdependence. Between 2014 and 2024 (Figure 1), EU imports from China increased by over

102%, while its exports to China grew by almost 47%. China is the EU's third-largest trading partner for goods and services combined, while the EU is China's top trading partner. (European Council, 2025) According to the European Commission, in 2023, the total imports and exports reached €739 billion. In 2024, bilateral trade in goods was €732 billion, facing a slight decrease of 1.6%. The data suggest that, despite strong overall expansion, the EU-China trade relationship continues to experience imbalances, where European reliance on Chinese imports outpaces the Chinese demand for EU goods. At the same time, the slight decline in trade signals a shift in economic engagement with China.

Strategic rivalry refers to the EU-China relationship being simultaneously cooperative economically but competitive in trade, technology, and global influence.



EU trade with China, 2014-2024

(billion €)

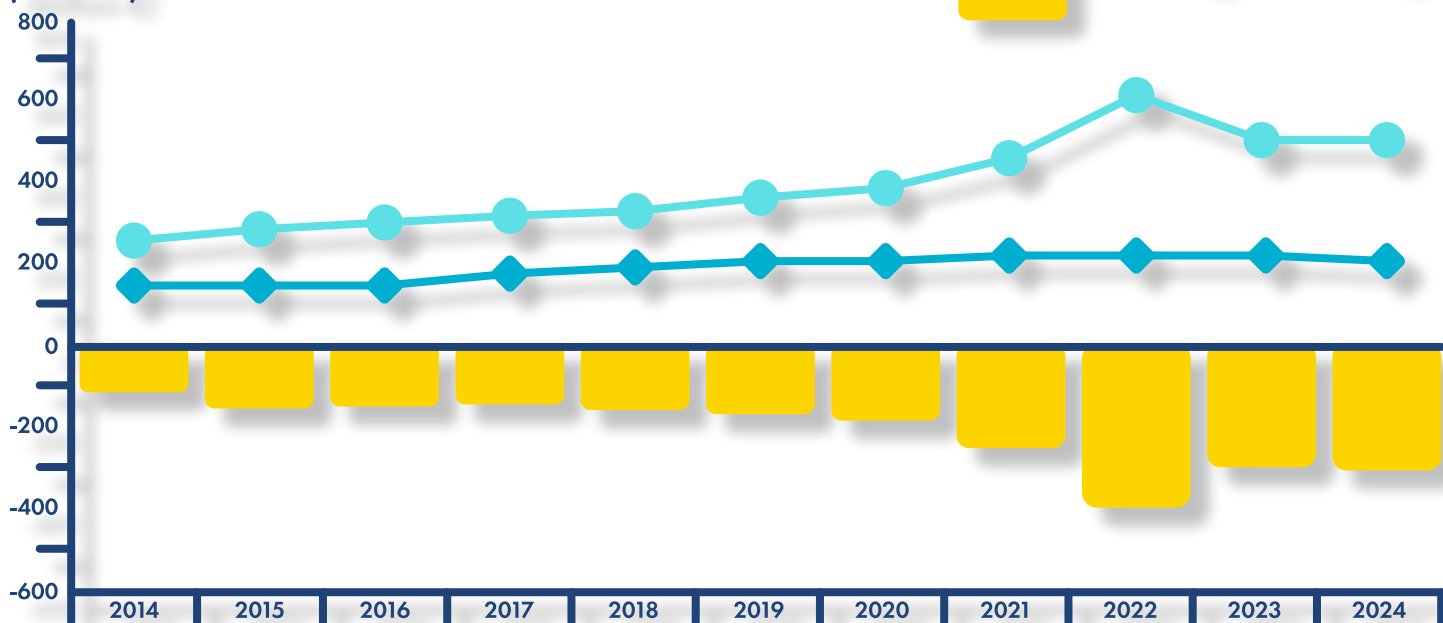


Figure 1: EU trade with China, 2014-2024, Source: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20250304-1>

The EU and China together account for almost 30% of global trade in goods and services. (European Council, 2025) However, in 2022, the trade deficit reached €397.4 billion (Figure 2). According to the EU's official statistics office, Eurostat (2024), reports that the trade deficit slid to €297 billion in 2023. Last year, the statistics show that the trade deficit with China reached €305.8

billion. (European Commission, 2024) The highlighted deficit shows the persistent imbalance in trade flows and explains the EU's concern about ongoing systematic distortions. The growing manufacturing overcapacity and longstanding market access issues affect the EU's interests, especially in key sectors such as meat, cosmetics, and pharmaceuticals.

Trade in Goods

(billion €)

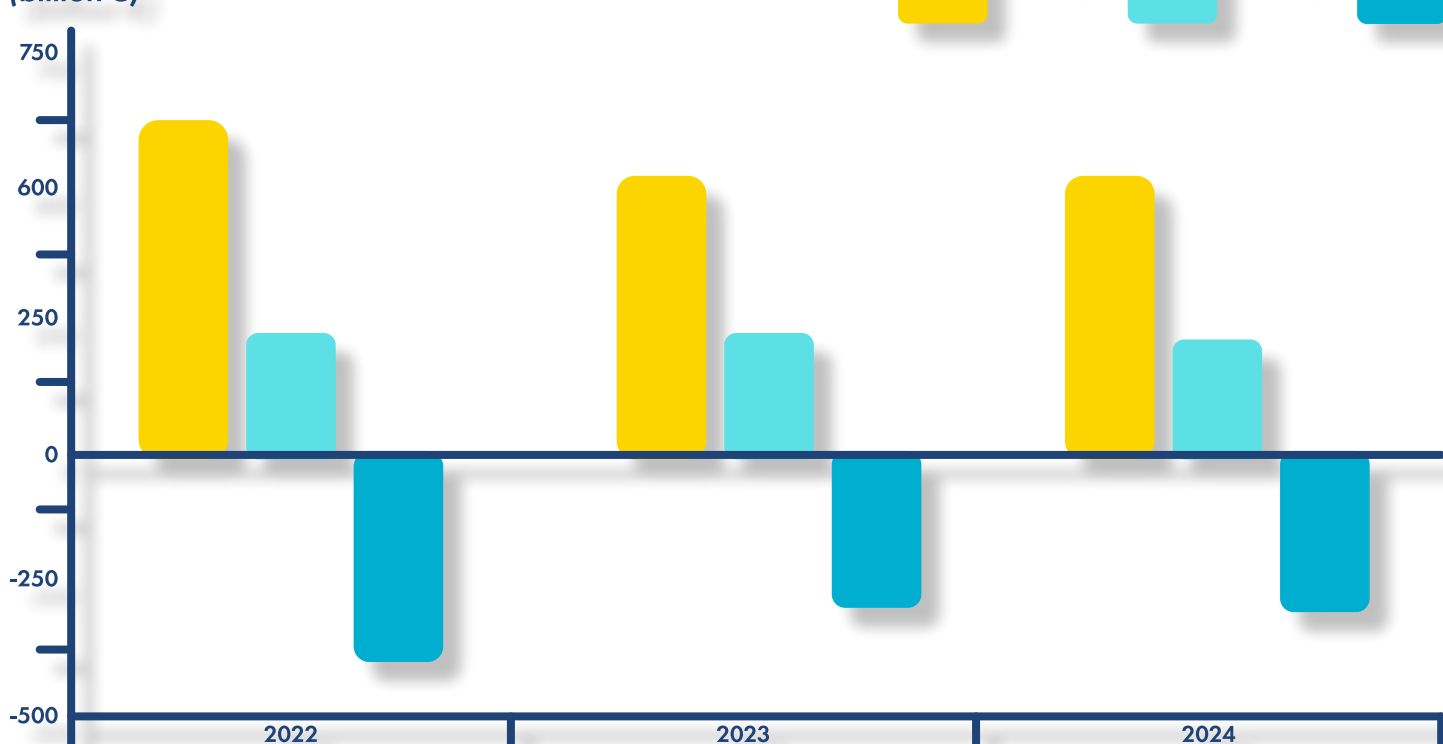


Figure 2: Trade in goods between the EU and China (EUR billion), 2022–2024, Source: European Commission, https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/china_en#:~:text=China%20is%20the%20EU's%20third%20largest%20partner%20for%20exports%20and,0.3%25%20and%204.6%25%20respectively.

4. De-Risking Europe's Ties with China

The European Union's relationship with China has shifted dramatically in recent years and is framed by a strategic attempt to adopt a coherent vision and a comprehensive long-term China strategy that will guide the EU's future actions. The EU's strategic response to China aims to reduce critical dependencies while preserving resilience without breaking ties. The strategy of "de-risking" represents a proposal as an alternative to full-scale decoupling. The balancing act seeks openness to cooperation, but with economic security and risk mitigation. Concerns about deepening European dependencies are exacerbated by supply chain sustainability risks and economic and technological competitiveness issues. In response, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen proposed a new strategic approach de-risking in 2023. (European Commission, 2023) Risk reduction is a part of a broader economic security strategy designed to find a balance between seizing opportunities and managing the risks. The economic security framework identifies four types of risks, including the resilience of supply chains, physical security and cybersecurity of critical infrastructure, technology security, and economic coercion and dependencies. (European Commission, 2023) The strategy includes a three-pronged approach to mitigate these risks. In order to promote the competitiveness of the EU, the Union has begun to take proactive measures to boost industrial development, diversify supply chains, and achieve strategic sovereignty in the technology areas. The second approach involves developing new and existing tools to protect economic security. Lastly, deepening relationships with "reliable partners" is a part of collaborative risk management, ensuring that negative externalities are minimised. The true test for the EU is striking a balance between boosting competitiveness, managing risks and inequalities, and avoiding a broader shift toward economic nationalism.

“Over time, bilateral trade deepened, but asymmetries arose as EU firms faced regulatory barriers while China benefited from European technology and expertise.”

5. China's Weaponisation of Trade and Investment

China's increasing technological prowess and supply chain advantages are aiming to ensure continued growth and prosperity for its people and geopolitical ambitions. China's industrial policy has evolved from low-wage manufacturing and heavy industry to high-tech industries and higher value-added segments of production. The ten-year comprehensive strategy, Made in China (MIC) 2025, focusing on intelligent manufacturing in 10 strategic sectors, aimed to position China as a global powerhouse in high-tech robotics, aviation, and new energy vehicles such as electric and biogas. (ISDP, 2018) Nevertheless, China's agenda towards "self-reliance" in strategic sectors includes the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan's broad goals for economic and social development. (CFR, 2021) The aim is to lessen dependence on foreign technology, bolster resilience, and position China at the center of the global economy. Closely associated with the ambition of the "rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" by 2049, the concept, which embodies Xi's notion of the 'securitization of everything,' has become a defining element of Xi Jinping's qualitative restructuring of China's national security framework. (MERICS, 2022) The EU has expressed concern over the MIC 2025 initiative, emphasising that the strategy will enable China to become a direct added-value competitor, thereby diminishing international competition within the Chinese market. Exacerbating concerns about supply chain dependency are compounded by perceived insecurity stemming from Chinese investments in critical infrastructure across Europe. (Jüris, 2023)

6. From Competitor to Defender

China's presence in Europe's critical assets has expanded, while the EU still lacks a unified mechanism to ensure economic security. These footprints underline the influence of

China and the needs of the EU's competing strategies to maintain economic security. The protection mechanisms must be extended to mitigate the risks of China's leverage in the EU's strategic sovereignty. These demonstrated threats underscore the need for robust EU Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) screening procedures with due diligence standards, scrutiny of ownership stakes held by China's state-owned companies, and stringent regulatory oversight. (Jüris, 2023) This risk can be mitigated only by reducing China's involvement and having a regulatory framework that effectively excludes certain Chinese investors from critical infrastructure projects. Beijing's focus may shift as China becomes more economically and technologically independent, decreasing reliance on the West and intensifying competition in the tech sector. Accordingly, the EU needs unified protection regulations with a shared responsibility with Member States, to enact mechanisms at the EU level. Failure to address this issue will undermine economic security and heighten market dependence on China, effectively shifting the EU's role from competitor to defender.

7. Conclusion:

The past half-century has shifted the nature of economic relations between Europe and China, reflecting a journey from cautious engagement to a complex and strategically

nuanced partnership. The two economies, once largely complementary, have now adjusted to an era of more direct competition. While economic interdependence remains a defining feature, China is prepared to leverage its economic power to advance broader foreign policy objectives. Meanwhile, the European Union is targeting a rebalance of the EU's China policy. The risks associated with certain economic linkages are evolving quickly in the current geopolitical and technological environment and are increasingly merging with security concerns. Accordingly, the EU must develop a comprehensive framework for a joint strategy, common tools to assess and manage risks to its economic security, in order to maintain its position as a competitive actor rather than retreating into a defensive posture. Looking ahead, the future of EU-China relations will depend on managing this multidimensional relationship, maintaining open channels for collaboration while mitigating risks arising from economic and geopolitical asymmetries. The question still arises - can the EU de-risk? Beyond the discussion of economic security, de-risking has yet to find a broad consensus among Member States, due to differing views and diverging economic interests. While the EU seeks to preserve European unity and strives for strategic autonomy, China's expanding global economic footprint heralds the reshaping of global power dynamics, economic influence, and the advent of a new era in the international order.

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Stefan Hagerman



On Exile And Expertise

Lessons for Diaspora Mobilisation
in Syria's Reconstruction

About the Article

Reconstruction fails when institutions are rebuilt without trust, legitimacy, or local knowledge. Stefan Noël Hagerman explores how Syrian diaspora expertise could contribute to reconstruction efforts and what political and institutional conditions determine whether that potential can actually be mobilised. Rather than treating diaspora engagement as a slogan, the article examines the practical and political obstacles that shape its real-world impact.

About the Author

Stefan Hagemann is a Political economist and peace builder with 3+ years of experience in conflict resolution, urban diplomacy, and economic development. Specialised in the nexus of peace, social cohesion and local economic development in the Middle East and Western Balkans regions.

1. Introduction

Syrria currently holds one of the most well-educated, well-established and productive diaspora communities in Europe. In the 15 years since the revolution in 2011 and the subsequent outbreak of the civil war, over a million Syrians fled to Europe (InfoMigrants, 2024), where they entered the job market, graduated from universities, or started their own businesses. In addition, many Syrians fleeing to Europe, met and, often for the first time, intermingled with fellow Syrians from different parts of the country and different communities (Herzog and Ott, 2025). Both the hard skills learned through study, employment or entrepreneurship, and the soft skill of getting to know your neighbour and humanising the ‘other’, can prove invaluable for the reconstruction and recovery of the post-war Syrian state. With the fall of Assad in December 2024, and the takeover of government responsibilities by a loose coalition of actors, some of whom former Hayat Tahrir al Sham (1), the Syrian state and people are now embarking on the difficult path of reconstruction, reconciliation and (economic) recovery. There is a need for support in rebuilding the country, the society and the economy, which the diaspora community can partially offer. However, as seen in past rebuilding efforts, externally designed diaspora mobilisation tends to produce elite capture and legitimacy backlash; the highest-value role for diaspora is enabling functions that are demand-driven, modular, and accountable to in-country institutions. How best, then, to help facilitate the mobilisation of these skillsets by the Syrian diaspora community, and how to avoid the pitfalls of earlier recovery efforts involving diaspora communities?

2. The Syrian Community in Europe

The Netherlands is home to between 150.000 and 165.000 Syrians. This number includes some 70.000 refugees. As of 2023, more than half of this number was actively working in one way or another, primarily in ho-

spitality and transport (DutchNews, 2023). In Germany, this number reaches up to 68%, on a population total of 1 to 1.3 million (InfoMigrants, 2024). In addition, a significant number of the non-working Syrians still hold academic degrees from their home country, their host country, or both (Betts et al., 2018). This makes the Syrian diaspora well-educated and generally well-employed (Masri et al., 2021). Simultaneously, the Syrian state is facing a plethora of issues. Fourteen years of civil war have resulted in a significant brain-drain, with many of the émigrés hailing from cities with large, educated populations (Frontline, 2019). This brain-drain has coincided with the large-scale destruction of infrastructure, much of which, including irrigation systems and agricultural and industrial compounds, critical for the country’s economic recovery. An approximate 50% of the country’s infrastructure has been destroyed, of which some 48% critical infrastructure in the energy, water and sanitation sectors (UNDP 2025; WBG 2025). Syria has a stark need for vocationally and academically trained professionals to help rebuild both this physical and the societal infrastructure that would be necessary to function as a state, but is demographically depleted of skilled workers. This situation provides us with both a demand, as well as a potential supply. Many Syrians living in Europe communicate the wish to ‘do something for their homeland’, if not eventually return to rebuild themselves (IOM, 2025). This apparent match between domestic need and external expertise is compelling. Yet, past experience demonstrates that without careful design, diaspora mobilisation can generate new hierarchies and legitimacy problems rather than institutional renewal.

3. Diaspora Mobilisation in History

Diaspora involvement in rebuilding and reconstruction has a long and turbulent history (EUDiF, 2025). As displacement comes as a natural effect of conflict, wars and civil strife generally see the development, if not

(1) An organisation, at least in its origin, formally linked in al-Qaeda.

enlargement, of a diaspora community. This has been true for Iraq, Afghanistan, the World Wars, or any recorded conflict going back to the Assyrian conquest of Samaria (Aleshkovski, Botcharov & Grebenyuk, 2021). The refugee phenomenon is a condition of conflict, and a prolonged and expanded refugee population naturally settles, and forms a diaspora (Van Hear, 2003). The involvement of these diasporas in the processes that constitute post-conflict resettlement and reconstruction also hails from a lengthy historical tradition, exemplified by Cyrus the Great's decision to allow the Judeans to return to their ancestral homeland to rebuild (Simkovich, 2025). The mobilisation of diasporas in reconstruction efforts has also come up in modern and postmodern examples. After the destruction of the first world war, returning refugee populations were crucial in rebuilding heavily destroyed Belgium (Schrover, 2017). Similarly, the Iranian revolution of 1979 saw large numbers of exiled communists return to their home country in an effort to help build the new republic (Haliday, 1980). Scholarship on the practice of active diaspora mobilisation and its effects, however, has been relatively new (Koinova, 2018), with authors mainly basing their writing on the experiences of post-9/11 conflict- and post-conflict reconstruction. In these works, light has been shed on both the positive (Smith and Stares, 2007; Orjuela, 2008) and negative (Perritt, 2008; Kaldor, 2001) aspects of diaspora involvement in conflict and post-conflict contexts. Authors such as Kaldor (2001) shed light on the risk of diaspora communities radicalising from abroad, maintaining conflict networks or building conflict-prone institutions. These risks are real and to be taken seriously (Koinova, 2018). Nevertheless, the pressing contextual realities of a context like Syria's, as described above, can tip the scales towards an argument for diaspora involvement. Researchers highlight the potential for a diaspora's role in development (Kapoor, 2004) and reconstruction (Kleist, 2008). In addition, examples from a multitude of contemporary contexts (2)

A diaspora is a dispersed community of people from the same homeland, maintaining shared ties, and a shared culture.



show that knowledge, skills and expertise provided by diaspora communities positively contribute to long-term peacebuilding, addressing root causes of conflict beyond immediate humanitarian aid (EUDiF, 2025).

4. Diaspora Instrumentalisation: Iraq and Afghanistan

These positive experiences, however, do not take away the potential pitfalls exemplified by the lived experiences from the past twenty-five years of international interventions. Efforts to mobilise (if not instrumentalise) diaspora communities following the fall of the regimes in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) created unforeseen issues exacerbating existing social and societal fissures. Externally imposed diaspora mobilisation, in these cases, has proven a major pitfall. When external sponsorship elevates a narrow circle of elite diaspora gatekeepers without strong domestic accountability, it risks producing a new insider–outsider hierarchy. This, in turn, fuels resentment among those who remained, exacerbates (or even adds to) social tensions, and ultimately weakens the legitimacy of the very institutions such mobilisation is meant to support.

Iraq

Trusting the voices of diaspora leaders, as well as their own instrumentalist designs, the US and UK took political and socio-economic measures shaping post-Saddam Iraq to the designs of exiles who, in some cases, hadn't been living in the country for decades. These measures empowered the (often well-educated and well-established) diaspora organisations, leading to the build-up of institutions favouring diaspora. This is exemplified by the fact that six of the seven modern Iraqi prime ministers have lived in diaspora (of whom four in the UK). Similarly, the upper echelons of the Iraqi civil service are still filled

(2) Including Armenia, Ethiopia and Ukraine.

with former exiles, often outranking Iraqis who have stayed behind. Any intervention mobilising the Syrian diaspora community is at risk of making the same mistake. As shown by Kadhum (2021), this instrumentalisation of diaspora communities by the US and UK in Iraq manifested a new layer in Iraqi society. A new, Western-educated elite, competing within the existing power structures with those Iraqis who stayed behind. This has led to resentment and dissent further fracturing Iraqi politics and society. Simultaneously, diaspora members who returned experienced a sense of culture shock as to how Iraqi society had changed. These cultural differences between diaspora and stay-behinds exacerbated the insider/outsider dynamics that fuelled the creation of this elite that, to many, felt disconnected. As such, the Iraqi case demonstrates that when diaspora mobilisation is externally driven, elite-centred, and insufficiently grounded in domestic social realities, it risks entrenching new hierarchies, deepening insider/outsider divides, and undermining the very legitimacy it is meant to support. In looking at potential roles for diaspora communities in Syria, this is something to avoid.

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, too, Afghan diaspora communities were quickly and wilfully mobilised by the US and their new Afghan allies, with newly instated president Hamid Karzai appealing directly to the Afghan diaspora for investments, support and remigration (Van Hear, 2003). The role of this diaspora in the bumpy process that was the building of an Afghan state has, however, been contested. Kouser Fatima (2014) argues that the Afghan diaspora community provided both financial resources and technical expertise that were much needed in post-Taliban state building. However, she notes that the individualistic attitudes of diaspora leaders, who often prioritised their own tribes or communities, impeded the extent of positive impact made. Mirroring the observation

“The limited effectivity of these diaspora initiatives can in part be attributed to the fact that they were not diaspora initiatives at all.”

made by Koinova (2018), Fatima noticed how US and Afghan policy makers seem to have underestimated the impact of how the diversity within the Afghan diaspora (reflecting ethnic and tribal divisions in the country) created challenges for cohesive engagement in reconstruction. Syria, as starkly shown during the fourteen years of civil war, is diverse. The country is home to a multitude of ethnic groups and religious denominations, as well as large urban and rural communities and an array of local and political identities (US State, 2017). Even in the dialects of spoken Arabic there are stark differences between the soft Damascene, the rhythmic Aleppo accent and the slightly coarse vocab found in the East.

Treating the diaspora as one, singular group overlooks all these differences, this diversity, and the impact they have on the worldviews and dreams of a future Syria. The Syrian diaspora, much like the Afghan, is not a monolith, and treating this incredibly diverse community as one group comes at the risk of overlooking and oversimplifying the process of post-conflict state building.

5. From Imposition to Involvement

In addition to these two factors (diaspora dynamics and diaspora diversity), one overarching flaw of these previous approaches is the instrumentality. The limited effectivity of these diaspora initiatives can in part be attributed to the fact that they were not diaspora initiatives at all.

Rather than responses from diaspora communities to the needs expressed by Iraqi and Afghan people, organisations and (government) institutions, these examples of

diaspora involvement were more of a diaspora imposition, where Western governments and local elites (well-intentioned or not) (3) instrumentalised exiles and émigrés for their own intents and purposes. Grassroots diaspora initiatives, on which Kadhum (2011) also sheds light, show another image. These initiatives have often been limited

(3) Another debate can be had on the intentions of the actors involving diaspora communities in Iraq and Afghanistan.

in their impact due to various reasons, including limited funding, local conflict and distrust, and the limited reach of individuals and small non-governmental organisations. However, diaspora initiatives have been effective in responding to needs expressed by local communities, often in part due to the direct lines of communication with community representatives (Herzog and Ott, 2025). The Syrian case shares many of the conditions that have previously rendered diaspora mobilisation both impactful and problematic: a large, educated exile population; deep internal diversity; and significant external interest in shaping post-conflict outcomes. These factors underline the need for an approach to diaspora engagement that avoids instrumentalisation, mitigates elite capture, and recognises diversity within the diaspora itself. The following section therefore turns to a normative proposal for how Syrian diaspora mobilisation might be facilitated in a way that is inclusive, responsive to locally articulated needs, and attentive to the lessons of earlier post-conflict interventions.

6. Viable Alternatives

The (limited, but real) successes of grassroots initiatives in Iraq can be replicated in Syria. Through being mindful not to incept a new diaspora elite, not to add to the many social fissures, and not to overlook the diverse nature of the diaspora community itself, a diaspora mobilising itself can be a powerful catalyst. An enabling power, through both providing the knowledge and expertise needed by the Syrian state and Syrian communities, and through showing that inter-ethnic and inter-religious collaboration is indeed possible. Through the diaspora interacting with their peers and counterparts in Syria, a German-educated Syrian Kurd assisting with an infrastructure project in Druze Suweyda can make a positive impact both physically and psychologically, through building both a canal and the trust needed for the Syrian state to function. A Syrian diaspora consultation my colleagues and I have held in The Hague this February reflected many of these sentiments. Participants from 15 diaspora organisations argued for a coordination mechanism that could align

expertise with needs articulated from within the country. The proposed platform was conceived as a facilitating structure for grassroots initiatives. Participants proposed mapping skills, connecting professionals, and creating a transparent interface through which Syrian municipalities, institutions and organisations could request technical support. International examples were discussed as inspiration, yet with a clear awareness that any model would need to avoid centralising authority in a narrow circle of self-appointed spokespeople. The outcomes of the meeting were correspondingly pragmatic. Participants highlighted the need for shared purpose and principles, with particular emphasis on transparency and rotating responsibilities. A shared communication channel was established to reduce fragmentation among existing initiatives, and preparations began for a broader conference involving Dutch and Syrian institutional counterparts. Participants focused on coordination, knowledge exchange and responsiveness to locally defined recovery priorities. In substance, the consultation signalled a shift away from symbolic mobilisation towards structured, accountable cooperation designed to support, rather than supersede, domestic actors.

7. How to Proceed?

A solution to the conundrums of diaspora mobilisation could thus be to facilitate the diaspora in mobilising itself. Rather than seeing the diaspora community as an instrument in a broader peace building or state building design, as a tool in recovery and reconstruction, the diaspora can be seen as a platform. A platform through which individual community members and community organisations can present the tools, knowledge and expertise needed to solve the great many issues the Syrian state is dealing with. By bringing these members and organisations together, and by facilitating the alignment of their shared goals and messages towards recovery and reconstruction, a coordinated effort can be made towards the inception of a truly inclusive, truly effective, and truly Syrian future. Moving beyond rhetoric, priority-setting should rest with

representative actors inside Syria. Diaspora professionals can advise and contribute expertise, but decisions on what is rebuilt, and in what order, must be anchored domestically:

- Demand must be clearly articulated from within the country. Transparent requests for technical assistance issued by local councils, hospitals, utilities or professional associations can prevent well-intentioned but misaligned interventions.
- Safeguards against elite capture are necessary. Increased transparency through public reporting on funding flows and time-limited mandates can reduce the risk of a new external elite emerging.

- Accountability mechanisms should link funding to tangible service-delivery outcomes, with joint monitoring arrangements that include in-country partners and structured feedback from affected communities.

- Collaboration should begin at the local level, where trust can be built through visible improvements in water, energy, health and education, before moving into national political arenas.

Approached as such, diaspora mobilisation shifts the focus from symbolic inclusion to institutional design. The question for policy makers and foundations is therefore not whether to engage the diaspora, but how to redesign their portfolios accordingly.

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Strategic Evolution

A Four-Star General's Lessons on Leadership and Security

About the Interview

Team-Centric Leadership: True leadership is rooted in organizational culture. Success relies on utilizing the collective intelligence of a team rather than solitary decision-making. **Whole-of-Society Resilience:** Security is no longer purely military. It requires integrating the Bundeswehr with civilian sectors, private financing, and a resilient, unified society.

About the Interviewee

General Christian Badia is a distinguished German Air Force officer serving as NATO's Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Transformation. Throughout his career, he has held key leadership roles, including Director General for Planning at the Ministry of Defence. A seasoned pilot, he is a central figure in modernizing military capabilities and shaping NATO's strategic evolution. He focuses on bridging technological gaps to ensure collective security.

About the Interviewers

Theodor Himmel connects students with experts in diplomatic and economic affairs. Together with his colleagues, he built EPIS Think Tank into one of the largest student-led think tanks in Europe and also initiated the EPIS Network. He currently serves as Chairman of EPIS. Alongside this, after completing an LL.M. at Leiden University, he is finalizing his legal training as a law clerk at the Regional Court of Baden-Baden. Currently, he works as a consultant in a Munich-based family office.

Alisa Grunert holds a B.A. in PolSci & Sociology. She has more than 4 years of experience in Political Education & worked 3 years as a project manager in ESD. She finished a short time study program on the EU at CIFE, works in a Research Project on European Industrial Policy & instructs workshops on parliamentarism and ESD. In her Master's, she focuses on IR, especially security politics. She is a member of WIFIS & in the Board of MEF. Alisa aims to build bridges between IR research & society.

A *lisa Grunert:*

First, thank you very much for doing this with us. We would be interested in hearing about your experience with strategic thinking throughout your career. How did this shape you?

Christian Badia:

Well, when you join the Bundeswehr as a young person, I was 21 years old at the time, in the lowest rank the Air Force has to offer, you have a completely different perspective, and motivation. At that age, you're primarily interested in experiencing things. Then I was offered the chance to do fighter pilot training, and I obviously took that opportunity. I flew fighter jets for 25 years. And as it applies to every aspect of life, you develop, and past experiences build on top of one another. What I am incredibly grateful to the Bundeswehr for, after 41 years and three months of service, is that it is an organization that allows you to rise all the way to the top. We say: aptitude, performance, and capability. You have to bring your own motivation, and you also need a basic level of ability. But the Bundeswehr invests an enormous amount of time into qualifying its personnel. This is the point at which strategic thinking is gradually incorporated within the Bundeswehr. The further you develop through courses, programs, and continuing education, these components come together. It's modular training, a lifelong learning system is essen-

tially what the Bundeswehr offers. And depending on which direction you move, different modules are added, and eventually, a lot of strategic thinking is offered as well. Even though in my opinion, it is nowhere near enough.

Alisa Grunert:

So there is still room for improvement?

Christian Badia:

There is definitely room for improvement. But you see it as you move upward in the organization.

Alisa Grunert:

And what would be a concrete example of that so-called room for improvement?

Christian Badia:

I think it's similar to many companies: most people work in operational tasks. But strategy and planning, although closely related to operations, follow their own career path as you advance. I was the Head of Planning for the Bundeswehr, where I was responsible for capability planning. I had dealt with parts of this before, and later I did it for NATO. So you can see that it's a path that develops over time. And once you're on that path, you encounter these topics in a completely different way and get the

opportunities that come with it. But if you're an operational commander somewhere, then you're more in the operational-tactical sphere, and logically, are trained differently. It's like life in general, you come to a crossroad, and when you look back, you hopefully took the right one.

Alisa Grunert:

A bit of path dependency, essentially.

Christian Badia:

Exactly.

Alisa Grunert:

I'd like to explore your understanding of leadership. More specifically how your experience and career shaped your understanding of leadership over time.

Christian Badia:

Leadership is the be-all and end-all. Looking back now, I have to say, leadership starts with a clear understanding of the culture you operate in, how you were socialized, and how people build on one another. Because in the end, you can have the best procedures, processes, and technical capabilities. However, if the culture in the organization isn't right, which is just as true for the Bundeswehr as it is for Siemens, Microsoft, or any other company, then things won't work. So much comes down to culture, specifically how you're socialized, how you understand processes, how you implement them, and in which context. In the military, we speak of a "combat community" that shapes how leadership develops. For me, it's absolutely clear, and I always tell people this: the team is everything. Unfortunately, there are many who believe, "I don't need anyone else, I'm my own best advisor." But you simply can't operate like that today. It's crucial to train young leaders so they truly internalize the principle that everything is based on the team. The better you use your team, the better the organization becomes. Support it, and let it

Strategic leadership in the Bundeswehr is a lifelong modular learning process that evolves from operational tactics to high-level capability planning across international alliances like NATO.



grow. The smarter the people around you, the better you are, and in turn, the organization becomes better. Leadership is absolutely essential.

Alisa Grunert:

So the group is only as strong as its weakest link.

Christian Badia:

Exactly. And in our case, tragically, if you are in deployment or war, you must ensure that every link in the chain is as strong as possible so that the team survives.

Alisa Grunert:

Absolutely. Since we're still talking about the Bundeswehr, and you've retired now, we'd like to know what your path looks like now, post-Bundeswehr. In what you've just explained, you used many economic metaphors. Does

that indicate that you see yourself moving in that direction, or what does your future path look like?

Christian Badia:

I always say the Bundeswehr is an organization like any other—and also not. We used to say it's not like any other, because in the end, we swear an oath and are willing to give our lives for the country. That is always at the forefront. And that must be explained, especially to young people, that this is the ultimate consequence of joining the Bundeswehr. And I would recommend it to anyone. But still, the Bundeswehr has changed significantly in how it operates and how it is structured. That's why I often use economic metaphors: because a lot of what we do is no longer purely military in nature. The fighting, the military operations, leading missions that must, of course, remain purely military. But logistical supply, warehousing, wait times, telecommunications, cybersecurity, all of these have strong links to the civilian economy. And often the private sector can do these things better and more efficiently, because our resources are limited. So now, after retiring, I see it as my mission to explain these things.



We are a resilient society, hopefully. We need to work hard to achieve that. There is no separation between the Bundeswehr and society; rather, there is a single society with several instruments, one of which is the Bundeswehr. But we always have to combine the strengths of multiple worlds to succeed.

Alisa Grunert:

You just said you would recommend young people join the Bundeswehr. Why, in your view?

Christian Badia:

First of all, serving your country is always a good thing. I strongly support mandatory national service, not conscription specifically, but service duty. I strongly believe all young people, men and women, should serve their country in some capacity. I would recommend that to everyone, even to those who don't join the military. For those who do join the Bundeswehr, I can only say: if you bring motivation and capability, every opportunity is open to you. I had 28 different assignments in 41 years. Imagine having 28 different, highly demanding roles in your career, that's incredible. I always say, I never had a dull moment in my life. It was always varied, always exciting, and you continued to develop yourself further.

Theodor Himmel:

To follow up, what were your last assignments, and what was the biggest challenge?

Christian Badia:

Every assignment is a challenge in its own way. Let me give three examples from when I was a Colonel. First, I was the Wing Commander of a fighter wing. At the time, I was an active F-4 Phantom pilot, and the F-4 was being phased out while the Eurofighter was being introduced. The Phantom aircraft were consolidated into the wing I was leading. At the peak, I had 62 fighter jets and 1,800 personnel under my responsibility as a Colonel. It was incredibly exciting, balancing leadership, responsibility for all these people, and keeping the wing tactically ready for airspace surveillance over Germany or elsewhere. Second, still as a Colonel, I was Chief of Staff for the Parliamentary State Secretary Kolbow, and later for State Secretary Dr. Pflüger in Berlin. That meant working at the interface of military policy and parliament. Completely different world, completely different tasks, however, also extremely exciting. My last assignment as a four-star general at NATO included the responsibility for capability planning for 32 nations. And there you see again how qualification, continuing education, and strategic thin-

king build over time. You cannot learn that in a one-year course. It develops through decades and through diverse assignments like these.

Alisa Grunert:

And how long did it take to develop your strategic thinking? Looking back, how much time did you need?

Christian Badia:

Some people feel comfortable in their comfort zone; that's normal. Others naturally look beyond it. I was always someone who wanted to see more. And that's what the Bundeswehr recognizes. When you see someone with interest and potential, you assign them differently, offer opportunities, and send them to the right places. It's reciprocal. So a larger ecosystem forms, which then develops the next generation of leaders. This develops over time.

At around age 30, you enter your first leadership roles. Then you realize, the Bundeswehr offers a two-year General Staff Course. What other organization gives you two full years of education, including military, social, and societal topics? All of this develops step by step. I'd say by age 30, the building blocks began to meaningfully connect.

Alisa Grunert:

And within the broader European security structure, what role does the Bundeswehr play?

Christian Badia:

I'd say a crucial one, but not an overwhelming or dominant one. As I like to explain, there are "Instruments of Power" that a state must have: political, economic, financial, and then military. The Bundeswehr is the military instrument. A state is resilient only when all of these instruments are strong. That in turn deters adversaries because they calculate how capable a society is of defending itself as a whole. So the Bundeswehr is absolutely vital, just as

important as a strong healthcare system, police structure, emergency services, etc. But it is only one part of the whole.

Alisa Grunert:

So this all fits into the whole-society approach?

Christian Badia:

Exactly. Today, resilience means a whole-of-state, whole-of-government approach—and that must be understood.

Theodor Himmel:

I'm curious, especially since we are in a pan-European think tank. You mentioned your assignment involving 32 nations. From that experience, how does the Bundeswehr compare to other European armed forces?

“The team is everything... the better you use your team, the better the organization becomes. Support it, and let it grow. The smarter the people around you, the better you are.”

Christian Badia:

In NATO, you must consider the "big four", the nations that still possess full-spectrum military capabilities and therefore provide the holistic defense backbone for smaller nations to connect to.

Those four are, in order: the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France. So you already see Germany's importance, and this is also how others see it. Many Polish colleagues told me repeatedly, "We need you. Be confident in your leadership role; we want you to fill it." And that reflects reality. Germany is valued and respected. And I can say, German personnel in the NATO structure are highly regarded.

Theodor Himmel:

You've reached the end of your military career, but your mission doesn't end. What is next for Mr. Badia?

Christian Badia:

My next goal is to explain this geopolitical complexity wherever needed: How does NATO work? How does it interact with the EU? How do bilateral relationships

between nations fit in? It is a complex system, but we must not let it become complicated. It must be understandable. My other motivation, and something I find very positive, is that society is again more willing to pay attention to the armed forces. And from the private sector, including finance, more funding is becoming available. Ursula von der Leyen calls this the “third pillar of financing”, private financing. Private equity and venture capital. So I also explain these structures and help people understand how this market works and how investments can support better capabilities, not only for the Bundeswehr but for European armed forces as a whole.

Christian Badia:

One last question: if you anticipate what will happen in the next ten years, what would be part of your scenario?

Christian Badia:

Based on what we see and how we prepare, the Bundeswehr and European armies must be capable of deterrence. We need to become stronger and more credible. But I do not believe that, if we succeed, a major direct conflict between Russia and NATO Europe is likely. The bigger threat, if we are not careful, is the hybrid threat. Hybrid warfare is always about destabilization. And I believe Russia has understood very well how to destabilize Western societies. That is my bigger concern at the moment:

hybrid threats, hybrid warfare, and destabilization. But that means we must become more capable of deterrence and improve our whole-of-government approach to counter it.

Alisa Grunert:

And in the context of hybrid threats, what does deterrence look like, especially when warfare moves into the grey zone?

Christian Badia:

Exactly, and you are right: this moves toward modern technologies. You must achieve information dominance and decision dominance. Technologies like cyber, AI, and the internet are essential. To generate situational awareness, you need data, not just data, but structured, analyzed data. Once you can attribute attacks, who did it, to what happened, you must reach the point where a community of states engages in what is called the “blame and shame” approach. When you can publish who is responsible, different measures follow. So first, you must detect it. Then analyze it. Then establish a joint situational awareness center. Then publish it. And finally, employ sanctions and countermeasures. That is the logical sequence. NATO and the EU are currently discussing how to orchestrate this. We are not yet fully there as a unified EU or NATO. But all states understand where we need to go.



Axel Leicht
Alisa Grunert

Thales and the Future of European Security

Navigating High-Tech Defense in an Era of Urgency

About the Interview

System Criticality: Thales provides essential, non-interchangeable naval and radio systems. Their deep integration means entire weapon platforms would fail without their specific subsystems. **Technological Autonomy:** By divesting from civilian sectors and investing €10B in AI, Big Data, and Cyber, Thales acts as a „one-stop shop“ to reduce Europe’s defense reliance on the U.S.

About the Interviewee

Axel Leicht is the Strategic Account Manager for the German Armed Forces at Thales Germany, overseeing key accounts for the Air Force, Army, and Navy. A former Naval Officer and graduate in Economics from the Helmut Schmidt University in Hamburg, he brings extensive military and industrial expertise. He has been with Thales for twelve years, most recently serving as Director of Marketing & Strategy since 2017. He leverages his background to drive long-term strategic defense partnerships.

About the Interviewer

Alisa Grunert holds a B.A. in PolSci & Sociology. She has more than 4 years of experience in Political Education & worked 3 years as a project manager in ESD. She finished a short time study program on the EU at CIFE, works in a Research Project on European Industrial Policy & instructs workshops on parliamentarism and ESD. In her Master's, she focuses on IR, especially security politics. She is a member of WIFIS & in the Board of MEF. Alisa aims to build bridges between IR research & society.

A **Alisa Grunert:**

I'll start with the first question. Please describe in a few sentences what brought you to Thales.

Thales:

So, the question is why I work at Thales.

Alisa Grunert:

Exactly, a little about your career path.

Thales:

Yes, alright. So, I'm a former officer in the Navy. After twelve years of service, I wanted to stay in the defense industry or at least the defense-related industry. That's why I joined Thales. I was mainly interested in the portfolio and the international nature of the company. I stayed there for three years, then took a ten-year break at what is today Airbus Defence & Space, before returning to Thales again, basically for the same reasons.

Alisa Grunert:

Before that, you had a military career and then moved into the company. What was the trigger for that?

Thales:

The end of my military service, quite simply.

Alisa Grunert:

What role do you, or rather Thales, play in the European security structure?

Thales:

First of all, we are a system-critical company for German defense, for the German Armed Forces (Bundeswehr). I believe Thales holds an outstanding position among other defense companies as well. For example, in the area

of radio equipment, where we supply radios to the German Armed Forces, the naval domain for naval systems like communications, or command and weapons systems on ships. We are also relevant in re-

gards to simulation, where we build simulators for small arms and where soldiers train marksmanship as well as in crypto distribution and crypto management systems, we're system-relevant for the German Armed Forces there as well.

Alisa Grunert:

So that's at the forefront, essentially, those are the unique selling points compared to others?

Thales:

I mean I'd say the defense sector is collaborative in spirit, but we are one of the manufacturers that supply the German Armed Forces, and because of that, we have a

A global technology leader in defense and security, specialized in high-tech systems like naval command, radio communication, and cybersecurity, bridging the gap between innovation and military need.



certain system criticality. If we were to disappear, there would be a gap, not one that no one could fill, but considering our product cycles, you can't just switch suppliers for a weapons system or subsystems overnight. That simply doesn't work. You need constancy within the defense-industry ecosystem. And Thales is one of the players providing things that can't easily be replaced. For example, in the Navy, communication systems or command & weapons systems on ships. If Thales suddenly disappeared, you couldn't replace that overnight; entire weapon systems wouldn't function. That's the kind of system relevance we're talking about. We are also one of the few companies in Europe in the defense sector with a portfolio that truly offers a "one-stop shop." This is also true for cyber-security and AI. If you look at our defense, space, and cyber security portfolio, we cover everything, from the depths of the ocean, like sonar on submarines, over everything that swims, drives, and moves on land, all the way into space with satellites and satellite payloads. And everything is secured through our own cyber architecture. That makes us unique.

Alisa Grunert:

Thinking about strategic direction, has anything changed in recent years?

Thales:

Yes, we've increasingly re-shaped our civilian business. For many years, we had activities in the transport sector, ground transportation systems, railway systems, digital interlocking, and train control systems. We sold all of those activities across the group, including in Germany, to Hitachi Rail, who took them over.

Alisa Grunert:

And since you already mentioned cyber, are there specific developments or technologies that are particularly relevant?

Thales:

Yes, of course. We've been one of the pioneers from the beginning. As a group, we have invested almost ten billion euros in recent years, organically and inorganically. Organically by building our own competencies, inorganically through mergers and acquisitions. So naturally, we're at the forefront of technology, not only in cyber, but also in big data and artificial intelligence. We combined all that with an in-house Digital Factory, that's our internal startup environment, where many young people and students help us drive new technologies forward. We also integrate external startups to secure talent pipelines and match the rapid innovation cycles in cyber, where the market increasingly demands solutions that don't require ten years of development.

Alisa Grunert:

And when we talk about such short innovation cycles, how does cooperation with governments fit into that?

“Thales serves as a system-critical „one-stop shop“ for European defense, providing irreplaceable technologies across sea, land, air, space, and cyber domains to ensure strategic autonomy.”

Thales:

Well, that cooperation is always there, that's our daily business. With "governments," we mean pro-

urement authorities. In Germany, that includes the Cyber and Information Domain Service (Kommando CIR), the Ministry of Defense, and so on.

Alisa Grunert:

Do you have examples from other countries?

THALES: Yes, France, for example, has the DGA, the procurement authority, and specialized agencies. What also needs to be considered are the procurement processes in general. There are acceleration laws meant to ensure faster development and procurement. From an industry perspective, there is still room for improvement so that increased needs can be met quickly, and the end-user ultimately gets what they need in time.

Alisa Grunert:

What challenges arise from that? Even with those laws, how does it work in practice?

Thales:

We do notice that procurement processes run much faster than five or seven years ago, that's clear. Partly due to new legislation. There are more direct procurements. Budget funds have been increased. Lower-level military units have been given their own budgets. So, for small and very small procurements, the entire procurement chain doesn't need to be activated. A brigade commander can purchase what his / her soldiers or his / her brigade needs – up to a certain spending limit.

Alisa Grunert:

In a global security-structure context, are these the same challenges that Thales faces?

Thales:

Yes, certainly. It's not a Thales-specific issue, it applies to the entire industry, to our customers in Germany, and in Europe as well. There's pressure, especially in Europe, to become more autonomous in defense, to reduce reliance on the U.S. Not to abandon it, but to reduce it. And you can see that reflected in procurement processes as well.

Alisa Grunert:

If you had to describe the greatest challenge for the overall security architecture in just one word, what would it be?

Thales:

Time. Time. Time.

Alisa Grunert:

We're nearing the end. What expectations do you have of decision-makers from the perspective of Thales?

Thales:

I think especially in these times, it's important that the user, the procurer, and the industry move closer together. To reduce friction, there's still a lot of that, driven by processes. We need to reduce it step by step. Ultimately for the benefit of the soldiers, those in the field, at sea, and in the air.

Alisa Grunert:

Since we are a student-run think tank, what expectations would Thales have of young people?

Thales:

My appeal to you as young people: move through this new world with open eyes. Be open to new technologies, new topics, and new industries like ours. Compared to the traditional sectors that have been attractive for graduates, aviation, automotive, engineering, mechanical engineering, we also offer excellent jobs, great perspectives, and highly innovative technologies across the industry. And we urgently need young people. Young people are the future of this country, and we are not anymore. That's just the reality.



Alisa Grunert

David Voskuhl



Innovation and Growth in a Time of "Zeitenwende"

David Voskuhl on the Role of Diehl Defence

About the Interview

The European security architecture is facing historical challenges. David Voskuhl (Public Relations at Diehl Defence) speaks in this interview about his path into defense technology, the global networking of systems, and the difficulty of creating planning certainty in a world full of uncertainties.

About the Interviewee

David Voskuhl brings over 25 years of aerospace expertise, having joined Airbus in 1995 where he led international media relations in France and Germany. After serving as Head of the Management Office, he moved to Diehl in 2009 to lead communications. He rose to Senior VP of Communications at Diehl Aviation before becoming Vice President Public Relations at Diehl Defence in 2021. His global background includes experience in the USA and the UK.

About the Interviewers

Alisa Grunert holds a B.A. in PolSci & Sociology. She has more than 4 years of experience in Political Education & worked 3 years as a project manager in ESD. She finished a short time study program on the EU at CIFE, works in a Research Project on European Industrial Policy & instructs workshops on parliamentarism and ESD. In her Master's, she focuses on IR, especially security politics. She is a member of WIFIS & in the Board of MEF. Alisa aims to build bridges between IR research & society.

1. The Path into Defense Technology

E Alisa Grunert:

Thank you very much for taking the time for this interview. To start, could you describe in a few sentences how you reached your current position at Diehl Defence?

David Voskuhl: Certainly. I have been active in public relations and press work for a good 30 years now. I spent 25 of those years in aviation and have been with Diehl Defence since 2021. Before that, I spent twelve years within the Diehl Group at Diehl Aviation, our sister sub-group that operates as an aviation supplier.

Alisa Grunert:

What was your original motivation for entering this field?

David Voskuhl:

The interest in journalism and communication was there early on. Even as a high school student and later during university, I worked a lot for local newspapers—the classic student job. After university, I briefly moved away from the field technically but returned very quickly when the opportunity arose to join Airbus in Toulouse as a press spokesperson. In total, I spent 14 years at Airbus at locations in Toulouse and Hamburg.

Diehl Defence in the European Security Structure

Alisa Grunert: What role does Diehl play in the current European security structure?

David Voskuhl:

You have to see it in context: the Diehl Group is a family-owned company with five sub-groups active in different industries—Metall, Controls, Defence, Aviation, and Metering. Diehl Defence is responsible for defense technology within the group. In Germany, we are one of the larger providers. Globally speaking, there are even larger players, but in our core segments—namely guided missiles and ground-based air defense—we are among the world leaders technologically.

Autonomous Cyber AI: Systems capable of identifying vulnerabilities, generating exploits, and adapting operations without continuous human supervision.



Alisa Grunert:

What is your strategic orientation in these areas?

David Voskuhl:

We have a broadly diversified product portfolio. The three most important pillars are guided missiles for various applications (especially air-to-air and naval), systemic ground-based air defense, and ammunition.

2. The Challenges of the „Zeitenwende“

Alisa Grunert:

Have the events of recent years—especially the war in Ukraine—influenced your strategy?

David Voskuhl: We are living in a completely new world today. When I moved from aviation to defense technology in 2021, the environment was still relatively quiet and



manageable. With the war in Ukraine and the associated „Zeitenwende“ (turning point), stormy growth set in. Interestingly, this dynamics reminds me of phases I previously experienced in the aviation industry.

Alisa Grunert:

Which technological developments are currently in the foreground for you?

David Voskuhl:

There isn't just one „miracle technology“; rather, we are working on a variety of innovations. A key focus is the further development of our guided missile expertise for the next generation. One example is the development of a missile to defend against hypersonic weapons. In the future, networking will play a central role. Think of concepts like FCAS (Future Combat Air System), where fighter jets are networked with units on the ground, at sea, and in the air. A „system of systems“ is emerging. Similarly, in our ground-based air defense, radar, launchers, and other components must be highly networked with each other.

“Autonomous cyber systems can analyse networks, identify weak points, generate exploit code and adapt their own behaviour dynamically.”

3. Cooperation with Governments and Partners

Alisa Grunert:

How is the cooperation with politics and authorities organized?

David Voskuhl:

Cooperation takes place along many strands—from the procurement office and the armed forces as users to key political bodies such as defense ministries, parliaments, and budget committees. These contacts have intensified massively in the last three to four years. Today, we see a significantly higher density of high-ranking visits. Just recently, for the laying of the foundation stone of a new building in Überlingen, we had a visit from the Parliamentary State Secretary from the BMVG (Federal Ministry of Defence) and high-ranking officers from Germany and abroad.

Alisa Grunert:

How is your business distributed internationally?

David Voskuhl:

About half of our volume comes from the German public client. We generate the other 50 percent in the rest of the world, with European NATO countries being the focus here. As is well known, we also deliver to Ukraine. In addition, there are exciting cooperations in the Asian region, such as with South Korea on the new KF-21 fighter jet, as well as customers in Brazil and South Africa.

4. The Bottleneck: Capacities and New Talent

Alisa Grunert:

What challenges does this massive growth pose for the security industry?

David Voskuhl:

The biggest challenge is certainly meeting the extremely increased demand from our customers. We have to build up capacities in a very short time—in development as well as in production and support. This creates pressure on the entire industry. We must simultaneously become significantly more efficient in terms of pure volume, but also in quality for new developments.

Alisa Grunert:

Speaking of capacities: How are you mastering the expansion?

David Voskuhl:

Growth is taking place on three levels : First, we are massively expanding our own properties. Second, the entire supply chain must keep up—it's no use if we have 99 percent of a product ready but a small part from a supplier is missing. Third is the workforce. We need qualified personnel in all areas—from development and program management to trade fair organization. We handle a significantly higher number of events today than in 2019.

5. A Wish for the Future

Alisa Grunert:

Finally, if you had one wish for the European security architecture, what would it be?

David Voskuhl:

My wish would be that we all work together to ensure as much planning security as possible. I am aware that you cannot simply pray for security in an uncertain world. We still have to get used to these new global challenges. But it must be our goal to master this growth and these tasks collectively.

Alisa Grunert:

Mr. Voskuhl, thank you very much for the interesting conversation.



Nicholas Dungan

NextGen Europe Should Embrace 360° Resilience

Young leaders from Generation Z can Make Europe Great Again

About the Article

Europe faces many threats: American aggrandisement, Chinese competition, Russian revanchism. Europe's young leaders currently emerging from Generation Z — those born roughly between 1995 and 2010, aged between 16 and 30 today — have the qualities that can Make Europe Great Again. To do that, they should embrace the ambition of 360° resilience, for themselves and for their Europe.

About the Author

Nicholas Dungan is founder and CEO of CogitoPraxis, advising senior leaders and boards on net assessment, strategic foresight and resilience across business, finance and government. He previously served as president and CEO of the French-American Foundation in New York and earlier worked as a senior investment banker in London, New York and Paris with firms including Merrill Lynch and Société Générale. As an adjunct professor at Science-Po Paris, he taught courses on strategic leadership and international relations and is a frequent commentator on international affairs.

Nicholas Dungan is a Fellow of the Advisory Board of EPIS, CEO of CogitoPraxis, a former professor of practice at SciencesPo, and earlier was an international banker and president of the French-American Foundation.

1. Introduction

Europe faces mounting pressure: American aggrandisement, Chinese competition, Russian revanchism. The geopolitical environment is harsher, less forgiving and more unstable than at any time since the Cold War. Yet Europe possesses an underappreciated strategic asset: Its young leaders currently emerging from Generation Z. Those born roughly between 1995 and 2010, now aged between 16 and 30, have the qualities that can Make Europe Great Again. To do that, they should embrace the ambition of 360° resilience, for themselves and for their Europe.

2. NextGen European leaders are toughened by the times

Generation Z has been shaped by adversity in ways earlier generations were not. Most of today's established leaders — executives, politicians, academics — are largely from Generation X (1965-1980). They grew up in an era of peace, came of age after the Berlin Wall fell and pursued their careers in the illusory Fukuyama-Esque world of "the end of history." Liberal democracy and capitalism appeared secure. For them, globalisation, a worldwide economy and no political fractures constituted the new normal. No wonder they are considered the most stressed generation today: all their comfortable assumptions were proved wrong. Yet they are in charge now — and often badly mismatched for the responsibility of shaping the future in a 21st century they can hardly recognise. Millennials (Generation Y, 1980-1995), faced greater disruption. They endured 9/11 as students, saw fruitless "forever wars" conducted by the United States and its NATO allies, then entered into an economy of corrupt and broken capitalism epitomised by the financial crisis of 2008-2009.

But they were the Facebook generation. They were too narcissistic and tell-all but not digital natives, brought up like their forebears in an analogue world and ill equipped for the new and existential challenges never faced by humanity before: climate change, the dominance of unbridled tech, massive competition from the former 'developing countries', once-prosperous societies transformed by the loss of comfortable bourgeois certainties and privileges. Generation Z has known no such illusions. Members of Generation Z — born between 1995 and 2010 more or less — were born into permanent instability: financial aftershocks, accelerating climate change, technological upheaval, pandemics and intensifying geopolitical rivalry. However, they crave, indeed insist upon, a sense of purpose in their life and in their work. They recognise the reality of climate change, biodiversity loss and the need to incorporate sustainability into their daily habits. They don't love cars and are more responsible about airplane travel. GenZ was born into a fully globalised world where they as individuals found themselves in competition with everyone from everywhere. Family status or being the product of the "industrialised world" were no guarantee of a job, a lifestyle or the ability to build wealth. They endure a relentless, ruthless culture of competition and they adapt to it. They don't display the sense of entitlement of earlier generations. They are far more anchored in hard-bitten day-to-day realism. GenZ are digital natives and have acquired the caution towards technology that their predecessors failed to show. The higher up the young-leadership scale, the less you will find NextGen Europe clinging to their phones, obsessing over messages or even, to the frustration of some, paying much attention to their emails. GenZ judge themselves on discipline and achievement rather than being satiated by pleasure and comfort. As reported (1) in the *Financial Times*, "The definition of luxury has changed. ... Young people don't want

(1) <https://www.ft.com/content/e98ddb7c-baf0-4d4c-a3a6-b24ca1c4252e>

white tablecloths. ... They want a sexy gym, with incredible equipment." They would rather order (2) a green tea than get wasted and sloppy on booze. They understand that holistic wellness (3) includes cultivating their health, fitness, nutrition, sleep, appearance and mindfulness. In a word, the young leaders of NextGen Europe are a generation of sophisticated Stoics. That is why they are better suited to Make Europe Great Again. That is why they can and should embrace 360° resilience for Europe.

3. Resilience means more than stamina

"Resilience" has become a buzzword, a keyword, a shortcut for expressing strength and success. But resilience is not a state, not a condition, not a status. It involves vastly more than just the ability to bounce back. True resilience is a complex, multi-functional, multi-faceted, dynamic and interdisciplinary process. Resilience requires the ability to anticipate, absorb and recover from disruption. It requires the unceasing ability to adapt to change. Even more, resilience means the capacity to accept risk, measure threats and achieve foresight. It also involves psychological balance: emotional control, self-confidence, self-awareness and self-discipline. These are NextGen virtues. A fundamental tenet of resilience is the commitment to sacrifice now for increased security in the future — something contemporary European leaders have conspicuously failed to do. Resilience allows an individual or a society to take ownership of their future — to assume responsibility today for our own tomorrow. This is what NextGen Europe can do. Resilience depends on adaptability and flexibility, not stability or stasis — the ability to navigate ever-changing complex systems, not just stationary complicated systems. To attain resilience ne-

Resilience requires the ability to anticipate, absorb and recover from disruption. It requires the unceasing ability to adapt to change.



cessitates a ruthless and rigorous sense of reality: what is happening? what does it mean? what depends on what? what fits with what? Absorbing shocks or disruption demands robustness; recovering from shocks or disruption is a test of rapidity. NextGen Europe young leaders share this sense of reality. There is a philosophical side as well. The determination to achieve resilience is rooted in the components of classical Stoicism: wisdom, courage, temperance and a sense of justice — characteristics more like those of GenZ than their forebears. In action, resilience is a manifestation of human agency, the ability of humans to control themselves and their environment. Stoicism teaches that it is not what happens to us but how we react to what happens to us that shapes reality. We must constantly re-appraise ourselves and the situations we face, adapt our thinking to changing circumstances. Stoicism incorporates this need for mindfulness. And NextGen Europe young leaders display this Stoicism.

4. 360° resilience involves everyone

360° resilience is whole-of-society comprehensive security. It is individual, personal, cultural. 360° resilience is local, societal, national and geostrategic. 360° resilience tests the ability of individual people, communities and interdependent systems to act together to anticipate, absorb, adapt to and recover from disruptions. The best example and to date the finest model of whole-of-society comprehensive security is the system developed by the Finns in the 1960s to forestall and withstand aggression from the Soviet Union. The Finnish model (4) has the distinction of being the first society-wide resilience model in recorded history to be developed in a democracy and adopted voluntarily, not imposed by the force and fear of some autocrat

(2) <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2025/dec/29/gen-z-shunning-the-pre-flight-pint-for-matcha-green-tea-airports-say>

(3) <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/consumer-packaged-goods/our-insights/future-of-wellness-trends>

(4) <https://turvallisuuskomitea.fi/en/security-strategy-for-society/>

exploiting the population. The Finnish model also demonstrates an important and too-often neglected component of resilience: deterrence. Effective and evident deterrence is a fundamental element of resilience, the discouragement of an adversary who considers that your ability to suffer or thwart his attacks reduces his chances of success and raises his costs of failure too fully for him to want to come after you. Threats and risks don't just happen: they very often arise from human agency and they can be deterred, discouraged, limited and even prevented by our human agency. It is no surprise that Finland and Sweden were the first to show the highest states of awareness and preparedness in Europe. Both are vulnerable to Russian aggression. Until the current war in Ukraine, neither was a member of NATO. Each had to fend for itself. Much of Europe's weak resilience today stems from an over-reliance on and an over-confidence of American support which has been seriously and perhaps lastingly eroded by the current US administration. The rest of Europe can — and is trying to — learn the lessons of the Finnish and Swedish examples. France, Germany and the Netherlands, among others, have issued booklets to their citizens on how to prepare for war or catastrophe. Again, Sweden was one of the first to do so and has just issued (5) a new booklet for businesses to increase their readiness, robustness and resilience. The recently installed Chief of the Defence Staff of the UK has renewed the call

“ Resilience requires the ability to anticipate, absorb and recover from disruption. It requires the unceasing ability to adapt to change. ”

(6) found in the British Strategic Defence Review (7) for whole-of-society comprehensive security. Another European vulnerability stems from the changes in how society functions compared to the immediate post-war years. Today the vast majority of critical services in society are provided by the private sector (8), by companies under capitalistic ownership and driven by financial management and profitability. There is scant evidence that the military establishment or governments have internalised the shocking truth that when an attack comes, society's access to vital services may simply not be met, yet the private sector is key to delivering those services. Europe is woefully under-prepared (9) to achieve whole-of-society comprehensive security as things stand today. Its warmaking capacity is severely compromised; its infrastructure is badly out of date and ill adapted to military transport (10). Few members of European societies have any direct military exposure. Most members of European societies have no experience of destruction or deprivation on a vast scale such as is only too obvious in Ukraine, though far from vivid enough in the rest of Europe. Young people, NextGen Europe, who feel most European, are among the most sensitive to what is happening to other Europeans, especially in Ukraine. They will also be the ones to be called up for service and sacrifice when conscription (11) is reinstated. They deserve, and should demand, their say (12) in how Europe plans for its military defence: they will

(5) <https://www.mcf.se/en/the-brochure-preparedness-for-businesses/>

(6) <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chief-of-the-defence-staff-speech-15-december-2025#:~:text=We%20need%20to%20be%20ready%20to%20deter,%20fight%20and%20win,stronger%20and%20more%20lethal%20NATO.>

(7) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-strategic-defence-review-2025-making-britain-safer-secure-at-home-strong-abroad>

(8) <https://europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/europe-needs-360o-resilience-and-the-private-sector-is-key/>

(9) <https://eda.europa.eu/webzine/issue12/cover-story/europe-needs-a-military-schengen>

(10) <https://www.ft.com/content/d77d4c1d-da26-4624-8b77-2178d4ac1125>

(11) <https://www.politico.eu/article/pressure-mounts-on-germanys-merz-to-restore-military-conscription/>

(12) <https://www.politico.eu/article/military-cold-war-service-lithuania-europe-uk-germany/>

be the ones to do the fighting. If they want to and if they can, they will be the ones who will Make Europe Great Again.

5. NextGen European young leaders can Make Europe Great Again

What are the keys to success if NextGen European leaders want to take ownership of their future and Make Europe Great Again?

5.1 Unite

Involve everybody. “Unity in Diversity” is the motto of the European Union. Including everybody means more than just every nationality and every culture, it also requires every age group, every social status, every vocation, every person, every community. The young leaders of NextGen Europe can’t be leaders if they don’t have followers. They must pull together in families, schools, shops, workplaces, and use their digital savviness to bring people together, to overcome separations and differences and get everyone involved to Make Europe Great Again.

5.2 Shout

Make your voices heard. Insist on (13) being listened to. The older generations who are running companies and countries today are shamed by the idea that they do not understand young people and petrified that young people will turn against them. There has never been so much effort to include young voices. Make the message clear day in and day out to everyone who should listen that you intend that European society and European values should be fit for success in the future.

5.3 Demand excellence

Tolerance is a fundamental European value, but not tolerance of mediocrity, laziness, indolence and complacency, doing nothing for the community or society as a whole, taking advantage of everyone else and exploiting government generosity for one’s own personal, passive, egotistical easiness and superficial satisfaction. Too many Europeans of previous generations expect to be protected, to have the right to be happy without hardship and to be guaranteed a life of ease without effort. NextGen European young leaders harbour no such illusions. Excellence and achievement come at a cost, the cost of caring enough to try, risking enough to fail, determination enough to succeed.

5.4 Show your stuff

Display thought leadership. There can be no success in taking ownership of Europe’s future unless NextGen European young leaders demand the cultivation of intelligence, insight, debate, intellect, strategy, analysis alongside the personal virtues of endeavour and performance.

5.5 Promote European values

NextGen European leaders should not be shy in asserting that Europe represents humanism, the Enlightenment, justice, the rule of law and the rights of man and the citizen. This is not to denigrate other cultures and societies, but NextGen European young leaders can still be committed to ensuring that Europe stands firm on its values in the face of American aggrandisement, Chinese competition and Russian revanchism.

(13) <https://www.ft.com/content/8edfe87e-c3b9-4a1f-ace6-cd904f19f138>

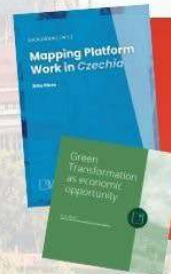
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EPIS **BASICS:**

ESCALATION: A CRUCIAL CONCEPT IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

In EPIS Basics, our authors explain basic knowledge of international foreign affairs and security policies. This encompasses basic theories, organisations and events. This series is presented in depth here in the magazine. You can also find other smaller contributions on our Instagram page

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Pablo Mathis studied Security Studies at Leiden University in the Netherlands and now pursued a Master at the King's College London. Pablo's main area of interest is national security, with a special focus on great-power competition and nuclear and conventional deterrence. When analyzing these issues, Pablo believes in adopting a historical perspective and building on various international relations theories.



1. Introduction

On February 5th, 2026, the last arms reduction treaty between the US and Russia expired. The New Start treaty had reduced Russian and US nuclear warheads and delivery mechanisms. The expiry of the New Start treaty thus constitutes the latest manifestation of what appears to be a continuous escalation in foreign and security politics. Against this background, this instalment of EPIS Basics looks at the concept of escalation. Escalation denotes an increase in the severity of relations among actors and can take multiple forms, depending on the domain. In this contribution, escalation will be examined in the military domain. Specifically, the following paragraphs describe military escalation as occurring along one of, or a combination of, the three dimensions identified by Morgan et al. (2008) in their book “Dangerous Thresholds”.

2. Vertical Escalation

Analysts speak of vertical escalation if an actor increases the number of attacks, the number of targets, or changes the type of target. Alternatively, a belligerent might also employ new weapons. Vertical escalation is, thereby, assessed against both material and normative yardsticks. For example, the use of nuclear weapons, as threatened by Russia in its war in Ukraine, would constitute an escalation not only due to its increased lethality. Instead, the use of nuclear weapons also constitutes a vertical escalation due to the violation of the norm on the non-use of nuclear weapons. Similarly, the engagement of new types of targets might be deemed escalatory owing to both the military and symbolic value of the targets.

3. Horizontal Escalation

In addition to vertical escalation, a conflict can escalate horizontally by increasing its geographic scope. A military might continue to engage the same type and number of targets but do so in other geographic locations. For instance, Ukraine’s targeting of military facilities further inland in Russia has constituted a horizontal escalation.

4. Political Escalation

As military means serve political ends, military escalation might occur through a change in the political ends. In cases where the political objectives are increased, political rhetoric is sharpened, and rules of engagement are loosened, Morgen et al (2008) speak of political escalation. Often, a political escalation is achieved by combining political with horizontal or vertical escalation. To illustrate, the German declaration of unrestricted U-boat warfare in the First and Second World Wars allowed German U-boats to target civilian and military ships of belligerents and neutrals. Political escalation was, thereby, achieved through a vertical escalation in the types of targets.

5. Escalation as a Tool of Analysis

This publication has examined escalation only in the military context. Nevertheless, even when limited to military matters, the dimensions of escalation provide an invaluable tool for mapping the military options and their consequences in times of war. But even outside the conduct of war, the dimensions of escalation can provide an intriguing insight into deterrence. After all, deterrence seeks to prevent war by threatening escalation. As such, the concept of escalation constitutes an essential bedrock for understanding an increasingly hostile international system.

Recommended Literature

Radin, A., Demus, A., & Evans, A. T. (2024). A vocabulary of escalation: A primer on the escalation literature for military planners. Rand Corporation. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RRA1900/RRA1933-1/RAND_RRA1933-1.pdf

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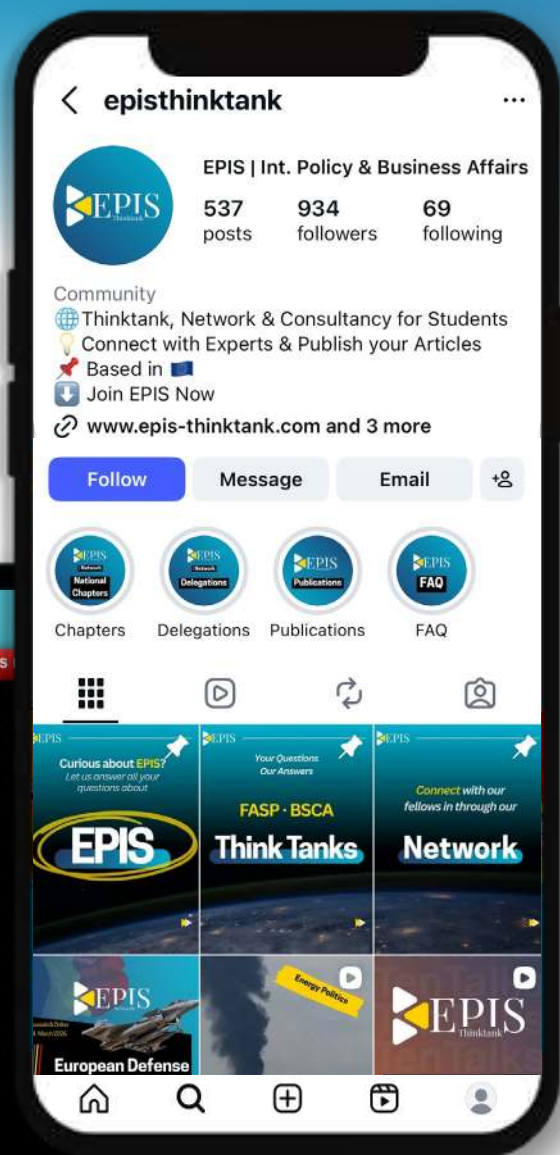
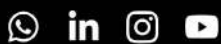
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