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KOREA EUROPE REVIEW

ROUNDTABLE

Reactions of Germany, the EU, and NATO to the Ukraine War and their Global Implications

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Abstract

The shock of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which began on February 24, 2022, caused an initially unprecedented unity of the EU and NATO regarding the condemnation of this war. At the same time, the broad support for a respective resolution in the United Nations General Assembly showed that the vast majority in the world of states thought the same. However, different assessments of the events and political differences were evident from the outset with regard to the question of how to respond in concrete terms. Apart from differing interests, this was also related to differing fears and expectations regarding the consequences of the war.

1. <https://www.tagesschau.de/wirtschaft/deutsche-exporte-russland-101.html>

2. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/kein-bekenntnis-gegen-russland-wie-die-eu-auf-die-zurueckhaltung-der-asean-reagieren-kann>

Differences in sanctions policy against Russia and strategic considerations in supporting Ukraine

The EU and NATO quickly agreed on diplomatic, political and economic sanctions. These exceeded all the punitive measures imposed against a “rogue state” in previous decades. As is well known, they extended to decisions aimed at massively restricting energy and raw material supplies from Russia in a relatively short period of time. A number of significant companies gave up doing business in Russia. The flow of investment to Russia was massively restricted. Within weeks of the start of the war, trade between Western countries and Russia collapsed. From February to March, German exports to Russia halved.¹

However, many countries in Asia, Africa and South America did not go along with this sanctions policy. The ASEAN countries reacted with restraint. The narrative, put forward above all by the USA, that the world was in an ultimate struggle between democracy and autocracy, was seen as neither credible nor purposeful.²

While the EU and NATO sought to comprehensively isolate Russia, massive humanitarian, economic, and military support was immediately provided to Ukraine. This is an important reason why Ukrainian forces were surprisingly successful in resisting Russian troops. For the maintenance of state functions, the West committed to provide five billion euros per month, and for military support measures, the U.S. alone pledged \$33 billion.

This commitment also had to do with the fact that the successful resistance of the Ukrainian armed forces changed the war aims. Russia abandoned its

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3. <https://www.rnd.de/politik/krieg-gegen-die-ukraine-wie-biden-russland-dauerhaft-schwaechen-will-TJKJSKKWWJG4VHBEI4Y4S6LY54.html>

4. Vgl. FAZ, 31.5.2022, S. 3

5. <https://www.zeit.de/zustimmung?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.zeit.de%2Fnews%2F2022-05%2F21%2Fitalien-erarbeitet-plan-fuer-friedensprozess-im-ukraine-krieg>

6. August Pradetto: Realismus vs. Krieg: Neutralität als Chance; in: Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik 3/2022, S. 40–48, <https://www.blaetter.de/ausgabe/2022/maerz>

intention to bring about regime change in Ukraine and focused on working with Russia-oriented separatists to seize territory in the east and south of the country and secure it. At the same time, Moscow continued to want to prevent Ukraine from becoming a member of NATO. This goal had been written into the constitution by the Ukrainian parliament in 2019, and Kiev was supported in this by Washington and some other NATO members.

With the successful defense of the capital and increasingly large arms deliveries from the West, the leadership in Kiev abandoned the goal of a cease-fire that had been pursued at the beginning of the war. Now the aim was not only to prevent the capture of further cities and territories by Russian troops, but even to recapture those areas that had been lost in the ongoing war, and also the territory lost in 2014, namely parts of Luhansk and Donetsk as well as Crimea.

The complexity of the war and the change in war aims

Washington also began to orient toward a victory over Russian forces. According to leading politicians, including the president, this should lead not only to the liberation of Ukraine, but beyond that to such a “substantial weakening” of Moscow that such aggression could no longer take place in the future.³ NATO and EU members by a majority endorsed this strategy. But meanwhile fears about serious and long-term negative economic consequences of the war far beyond Ukraine and a possible escalation of hostilities intensified as the war dragged on.

Finally, initiatives such as those of the French government in April⁴ and the Italian government in May 2022⁵ showed that even in the West there were increasing differences in perceptions of the course of the conflict and its consequences, as well as in strategies for dealing with the crisis. The Italian government introduced a proposal whose political substance had already been pointed out as a possible solution by a whole series of experts and ex-politicians in the weeks, months, and in some cases years before the war began: a ceasefire, recognition of the status of Crimea and the “people’s republics” in the east created in 2014, withdrawal of Russian troops to these lines, an international conference to define a European peace order in which Ukraine would take a neutral place.⁶

For the time being, the war aims were too contrary to accommodate room for such diplomatic initiatives. Also, three months after the start of the war, there could be no talk of exhaustion on the part of either of the warring parties. The war thus developed into a complex military conflict. First, the disputes over the domination of territories, the disputes between the aggressor and the aggressed were only the immediately recognizable surface of what was going on. Second, it was about a war and proxy war by Russia (with pro-Russian Ukrainian separatists) against greater Western influence in Ukraine. Third, within weeks, the military clashes had mutated into a proxy war by the West against Russia. And fourth, it was an internal Ukrainian, internationalized conflict that was about a more or less strong Ukrainian or Russian identity of Ukraine.

Finally, all actors, especially the forces involved in Ukraine as well as Russia, but also many politicians in NATO countries, considered the disputes as an existential issue for their respective interests and convictions. This made it difficult to find a compromise and a negotiated solution.

The New Iron Curtain and its Consequences for Europe

The hardening of political positions and the intensification of hostilities caused ever more widespread destruction in Ukraine. At the same time, the danger of an escalation of military conflicts beyond Ukraine increased. Some serious security

7. https://www.focus.de/finanzen/news/konjunktur/vertretbare-folgen-bis-zu-107-milliarden-euro-so-teuer-waere-ein-importstopp-fuer-russisches-oel-und-gas_id_66217039.html, <https://www.cicero.de/wirtschaft/ersatz-fuer-gas-aus-russland-afrika-nigeria-erdol-erdgas-gazprom>

and military consequences for Europe emerged rather quickly, even if in the best-case scenario the clashes would end soon. In response to Russian aggression by the EU and NATO, there is increased military bloc formation and a new Iron Curtain in Europe. Security and defense policy and military preparations for war and rearmament again dominate the agenda of Western industrialized countries over issues of prosperity, social cohesion, ecology and international cooperation for the objectives just mentioned.

The rift between Europe and Russia has been deepening since the second half of the 2000s. With the war against Ukraine, Moscow is isolating itself massively from the interdependencies on the European continent. Delimitations and nationalisms, which have been growing stronger for years in Europe as well as in Russia, are receiving a massive boost. In connection with this, the political mentality in the EU and NATO will be more strongly influenced by Eastern Europe in the future, especially with regard to demarcation from Moscow and the desire to rearm against Russia.

Moscow is thus excluded for the time being from shaping the European order and from European cooperation. For Russia, this means a considerable weakening, because Moscow will be able to compensate for these losses in economic and technological terms by cooperating with third parties, at best in the longer term. The EU was Russia's most important trade and investment partner.

It will be even more difficult for Europe to exert influence on Russia than it has been in the past. Moscow restricts communication channels to the West, and the same is true in reverse. Scientific, cultural and civil society cooperation become much more difficult. The EU loses a market of 140 million people that has been extremely lucrative as a destination for consumer goods exports and as a source of energy imports. This also weakens the European economy. The cost of transforming the energy supply is enormous.⁷

This, in turn, comes at the expense of many of the tasks and challenges facing Europeans, from tackling the causes of increasing migration, to taking precautions against pandemics, to making the economic and technical changes that would need to be made in view of climate change. In addition, the EU is expected to bear most of the reconstruction costs for post-war Ukraine. They will be enormous. As all of the above problems are exacerbated by the war and its aftermath, we can also expect increased domestic polarization and intensified disputes in the EU over distributional issues.

Readjustment in the foreign trade, investment and cooperation structure in the changed Europe-USA-Asia coordinate system

The economic, political, security and defense policy consequences resulting from the reactions of EU and NATO states simultaneously mean a decision for even stronger cooperation with and dependence on the USA. The U.S. gains not only economically through the increased sale of armaments, through the attempt of European states to compensate for economic losses in the East through increased trade and investment with the U.S., and through the concomitant increased dependence on U.S. energy sources and resources.

As a result of the conflict with Russia and the associated decisions, Europe will once again be more dependent on the U.S. militarily. This is simultaneously associated with intensified political dependence. In the intensified confrontation with the nuclear power Russia, the USA is once again mutating into an indispensable security guarantor for the European NATO members. As a result, the project of European independence in security and defense matters – always viewed skeptic-

8. <https://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/plus-238569191/Ukraine-Krieg-China-abkoppeln-Europas-neues-Bewusstsein-fuer-Asien.html>

9. <https://www.nzz.ch/wirtschaft/russisches-gas-und-oel-afrika-als-alternative-fuer-europa-ld.1678924>, <https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/ukraine-krieg-alternativen-zu-russischem-gas-und-oel-welche-laender-mit-energieerohstoffen-nun-in-den-fokus-ruecken/28150512.html>

10. <https://www.zeit.de/zustimmung?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.zeit.de%2Fpolitik%2Fausland%2F2022-05%2Fchina-pazifik-kooperation-abkommen-inselstaaten>, <https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/chinas-aussenminister-unterzeichnet-diplomatisches-abkommen-mit-sa-moa-102.html>

ally by the U.S. and many Eastern Europeans – has been put on the back burner.

Since the conflict between Russia and the West is also interpreted as a conflict between democracy and dictatorship, the European decision also means a change in the Europeans' relationship with China. Efforts to become more independent of the Chinese market and, above all, of Chinese supplies in strategically relevant areas are already evident.⁸ Europe's reaction therefore also means a general readjustment in the foreign trade, investment and cooperation structure. This is likely to benefit cooperation with other states in Asia and also in the rest of the world that are not of such great geostrategic importance as China. This tendency is already manifested in the increased cooperation between European countries and the EU with countries in the Middle East and Africa, especially with regard to energy sources.⁹

The strengthening of the identitarian aspect in international relations – democracy or dictatorship – is also significantly related to security considerations. China is increasingly being understood as the main antagonist of a world order that 30 years ago, at the end of the Cold War, was understood in the West not only as having no alternative, but also as being practically beyond question.

The Russian war against Ukraine is proving to be a catalyst for repolarization in international relations and increased confrontation between the West and China. This development also has consequences for the complicated web of relations in Asia. Some trends are visible in Japan's rapprochement with the United States, in the activities of the QUAD group, and in Russia's rapprochement with China, among others. After the bipolarity of the Cold War was replaced by unipolarity following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact - combined with rapid U.S. overstretch, especially in the Middle East -, an era of multipolarity seemed to take root beginning in the 2010s. Now, in the 2020s, it seems to be back to bipolarity - this time between a world of the West and the East, ideally constructed as a world of democracy vs. a world of autocracy, with the pole centers being the United States and China. In the U.S., this perception has been dominant for a number of years; in Europe, this view is being promoted by the Ukraine war.

This identitarian charge puts its stamp on many other problem areas and disputes in international relations and the search for solutions. However, this does not make it any easier to work together to solve common problems and global challenges.

China and the USA as winners?

It can be assumed that after the end of the Russian war against Ukraine, there will be a return to a smaller extent to the realities of the international system as it has partly emerged disruptively in the last three decades. Not least, economic considerations will push in this direction. Overall, however, the effects will be more serious in the direction outlined above than has yet been seen, for reasons that result not only as consequences of the current war, but simultaneously from a strengthening of previous tendencies and structural upheavals.

China is already attempting, against the background of its experience with Western sanctions and isolationist policies, to diversify its foreign policy activities and goals even more strongly and to secure them more offensively than before. The agreements with governments on various islands in the South Pacific in May 2022 are an example of this.¹⁰

The war in the eastern part of the continent is exacerbating Europe's crisis, which has been enriched with ever new dimensions, especially since the 2008

11. <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/der-aufstieg-chinas-und-das-neue-strategische-konzept-der-nato>

12. https://sipri.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/environment_of_peace_security_in_a_new_era_of_risk_0.pdf

financial crisis. This, in turn, by no means only concerns the immense costs involved in the reconstruction of Ukraine, the loss of the Russian market and the changeover in energy supply. The scope for distribution is becoming narrower and, at the same time, the need for new debt is becoming more serious, thus fueling inflation. Climate change intensifies all the problems Europe faces, not least the sensitive issue of migration from the south to Europe.

The millions of refugees from Ukraine, far from all of whom will return to their country, aggregates this problem. Europe, no matter how much land Moscow's forces capture and hold in Ukraine or how successful Ukrainian forces ultimately are, faces a constant flashpoint on its critical eastern periphery. This simultaneously means additional friction with Eastern European members of the EU and NATO. At the same time, the Russian leadership, in order not to generate even more resistance domestically due to the massive negative consequences of the war for it and the ongoing tensions and disputes in Ukraine, which it partially occupies, is intensifying propaganda and demarcation policies against the West. This, too, will become a permanent burden for European development. Analogous reactions are to be expected in the West.

Conclusion

Alongside the USA, China could emerge as a winner from this European crisis insofar as Russia will align itself more strongly above all with Beijing. China will thus gain better access to Russia's vast raw material reserves and can simultaneously hope for new investment opportunities. At the same time, due to the tensions in international relations, the Western policy of demarcation and the interpretation of the power struggle between the U.S. and China as a struggle between democracy and dictatorship, strategic and military cooperation between the two nuclear powers, China and Russia, is intensifying.¹¹

Europe and Russia are the losers in this crisis. The hopes of many Europeans to establish a more multilateral international system determined more by law than by military power after the end of the Cold War and the Western-Soviet bipolarity are suffering a setback. This does not mean that the tendency of medium-sized countries to escape the rivalry of the great powers and to enter into greater cooperation in order to be able to influence the shaping of the international order is not growing again. However, this is tending to become more difficult. Particularly since, as the latest SIPRI report convincingly demonstrates, the world is heading for a new "age of risk"¹² in which conflicts and disputes not only overlap but mutually reinforce each other.



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