

# IAF

International Affairs Forum

## EUROPE – EU

Plus:  
ADDRESSING  
CLIMATE  
CHANGE





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# International Affairs Forum

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- We aim to publish content spanning the mainstream political spectrum and from around the world;
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EUROPE - EU

# The EU: Addressing Current Issues and Challenges Ahead

Interview with Stefan Lehne  
Carnegie Europe, Belgium

**The EU is currently strained by many issues including security crises in Ukraine and elsewhere around the world, climate change, migration, and a decreasing share of world GDP. Can the EU cope with this never-ending series of challenges?**

It is true that since the beginning of the Eurozone crisis in 2009, the EU has gone through a series of crises, ranging from the mass-influx of refugees/migrants, to Brexit, the pandemic, to the Russian invasion of Ukraine with its impact on energy and inflation. Parallel to managing these acute problems, the EU also has to deal with urgent longer-term challenges such as the climate transition or the persistent rule of law deficits in some member states.

Managing crises is no longer the exception, it has become the new normal in the EU. And it is safe to predict that this will continue for a number of years. Geopolitical rivalries and turmoil in neighboring regions, deep economic and social inequalities, and accelerating global warming make for a tougher environment than the union has ever experienced.

During these 15 years of “pluri-crisis” the EU has turned out more resilient than many observers had expected. The European Council has proven its worth as a top-level crisis manager, the European Commission has on several issues displayed impressive leadership and executive abilities. And in acute crisis situations, the governments of the member states have been willing to overcome their divisions and pull together. In view of the record of the past 15 years, one can be reasonably hopeful that the EU will also be able to cope with future challenges.

**The rise of geopolitics and the shift of economic and political power**

**to other parts of the world have somewhat diminished the EU’s international standing. How can the EU shore up its role in the world order?**

Foreign policy is clearly not the EU’s strong suit. The EU responded well to the Russian aggression against Ukraine, but showed little cohesion during the current war in the Middle East. Uniting 27 governments behind a common policy is a tough challenge at the best of times and it is even more difficult in the contested world of today. And the current transformation of the global constellation of demographic, economic, and political power is clearly not favoring the EU.

Nonetheless, the EU has a lot to offer to third countries, particularly when it comes to geo-economics. The EU remains the world’s largest trading power and is the top trading partner of 80 countries. Excluded, the EU imports more from developing countries than the US, Canada, Japan, and China put together. The EU and its member states, taken together, are by far the biggest provider of official development assistance, accounting for 43% of Global ODA.

As a diverse multilevel entity held together by law and values, the EU will never be very good at geopolitics, though it should and could try to become better at it. But its comparative advantage lies in its ability to deal

*[The EU's] comparative advantage lies in its ability to deal with complex issues through fact-based dialogue and results-oriented negotiations.*

with complex issues through fact-based dialogue and results-oriented negotiations. Given these qualities, it therefore has a lot to bring to the table when it comes to solving great transnational global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity, global poverty, health threats, and migration.

**Europe has witnessed an upswing in populist voting and leadership. This includes Hungary's Viktor Orbán, the Sweden Democrats, the National Front (France), and Giorgia Meloni in Italy. How does the EU uphold its principles of democracy and rule of law amid this trend?**

The rise of far-right parties is, to a large extent, a consequence of the crises of recent years that inflicted a lot of stress on the European population. It is likely that this trend will continue this year, although recent elections in Spain and in Poland have shown that these groups can also be defeated.

Recent experience – for instance in Italy or in Finland - also indicates that when far-right parties become more powerful and join government coalitions, they often moderate their policies. Demands for leaving the EU or the Euro have mostly disappeared from the party programs of far-right parties. Nonetheless, these parties usually remain hostile to a dynamic development of European integration and therefore can make it more difficult to respond effectively to the challenges facing the EU.

The rule of law is not only a fundamental principle of the EU treaty, it is also an essential requirement for the functioning of the internal market. The EU has a number of instruments to secure the rule of law ranging from infringement procedures involving the European Court of Justice to the recent conditionality regulation that makes access to EU funding contingent on upholding basic legal standards.

While these instruments can have a positive impact, ultimately, democracy and the rule of law cannot be imposed by Brussels. Lasting improvements can only come about through democratic change and reforms in the countries concerned. Poland has recently shown the way.

**On 14 December 2023, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Ukraine. What impacts will absorbing Ukraine into the European Union have, not only on member states but non-member states and relations with Russia?**

There is no more important objective for the EU's security than ensuring the survival of Ukraine as a functioning state committed to European values. This will require a massive mobilization of economic and military assistance and close and sustained cooperation with Ukraine's government.

The promise of future membership for Ukraine in the EU is crucial in this regard, as it implies a guarantee of the EU's continuing long-term engagement. The reconstruction efforts will have to be closely aligned to reforms that will eventually enable Ukraine to participate in European integration. The process will take considerable time, but Ukraine has shown great resilience and considerable institutional capacity, and with enough help from the EU, should be able to move forward at an impressive pace.

The current Russian government shows no readiness whatsoever to give up its aggressive and threatening behavior. This has brought the EU leaders to the conclusion that there should be no grey areas between Russia and the borders of the EU. They have therefore also offered Moldova and Georgia the perspective of EU membership.

Russia will, of course, remain a major power in close proximity to the EU. The potential of a cooperative relationship with the EU is enormous. However, unlocking this potential will first require a fundamental change in Moscow's attitude and behavior.





**Stefan Lehne** is a senior fellow at Carnegie Europe in Brussels, where his research focuses on the post-Lisbon Treaty development of the European Union's foreign policy, with a specific focus on relations between the EU and member states.

# Brexit and Europe

Interview with Lord David Frost  
United Kingdom

**You were the UK's Chief Negotiator for Exiting the European Union during Prime Minister Boris Johnson's premiership. Can you elaborate on your role? What was the greatest success and challenge during your tenure?**

I worked with Boris Johnson as his foreign affairs adviser while he was UK Foreign Secretary, and returned with him to 10 Downing St when he became Prime Minister. We had agreed that the role of Chief Negotiator required someone with a political as well as technical understanding of the issues, and therefore someone with a close political link to the Prime Minister. While my formal role was as a "special adviser", which in the UK system is a kind of political civil servant, I had a unique role as a public figure who made the government's case in public in the same way as my opposite number in the EU system, Michel Barnier. My job was to manage our negotiations with the EU both in 2019 on the Withdrawal Agreement and thereafter on the Trade and Cooperation Agreement during 2020. Beneath me we assembled ad hoc teams of civil servants and political advisers to do the work. This unusual set up proved effective in the unusual, and politically tense, circumstances of 2019-20. I went on to be a Minister, roughly our Europe Minister, until my resignation at the end of 2021.

The greatest success was delivering on the vote to leave the EU at all, at a time when many forces within British politics were dedicated to stopping it; and delivering a zero tariffs FTA in 10 months when many said it would take 10 years or simply could not be done.

The biggest challenge was undoubtedly in summer and autumn 2019 when we took over negotiations from the Theresa May government,

which had conducted them badly, and had agreed a draft Withdrawal Agreement which could not pass parliament because it in effect locked the UK in the EU's Customs Union and much of the single market for the indefinite future. The problem was that Parliament refused to agree to any other type of Agreement either, but nevertheless passed a law saying we could not leave the EU without an agreement with the EU endorsed by Parliament. This removal of the ability to walk away without an agreement seriously weakened our negotiating hand. In these circumstances, and given how short we were on time before the 31 October deadline for exit, we had to define our objectives as achieving the maximum possible improvement to the previous deal in certain key areas, accepting it would be imperfect, in the interests of finally delivering on the referendum result of 2016 and putting an end to the long constitutional agony. I believe we achieved that, by ensuring that Great Britain (as opposed to Northern Ireland) would not be in the customs union or the single market and had complete optionality about its future relationship with the EU. Northern Ireland had a temporary arrangement keeping it in EU customs and goods single market rules, but with the right to vote out four years later and at subsequent intervals. It is a pity that, initially because of the strain imposed on it by the consequences of the pandemic, the Northern Ireland arrangement has come under huge stress and (in my view) must now be replaced.

**What does the concept of sovereignty mean to you in the context of Brexit?**

It means the same thing as it means in any other context: that the supreme source of a country's legal order is to be found within that country and not outside it. It goes closely with democracy: that the

"The primary benefit to the UK of Brexit is democracy: the ability to change outcomes at elections and to run the country as citizens and politicians see fit."

citizens of a sovereign country have the right to reorder their polity and their government as they see fit, in line with the popular will. It therefore requires the existence of a demos which can make that democracy and hence that sovereignty meaningful.

We largely achieved the recovery of sovereignty in the Brexit negotiations. Unfortunately, we did not fully achieve this for Northern Ireland, where the EU's sovereign, the Council/Parliament lawmaking authority and the European Court of Justice, has the final say on customs and goods single market issues. This is not a stable situation.

EU member states themselves are of course not fully sovereign. They have ceded significant areas of their own authority to the EU institutions. In theory they can still leave the EU: in practice this is extremely difficult. The consequence of this is that they are not full democracies: citizens of a member state cannot themselves affect outcomes at EU level through their national elections, and there is no corresponding EU demos which could give legitimacy to outcomes at an EU level.

**Some argue that the benefits of Brexit to the UK have failed to be reaped: the Retained EU Law Act 2023 was watered down; many post-Brexit trade agreements are identical rollovers from when the UK was part of the EU single market; and widespread post-Brexit labour shortages exist. How would you respond to this view?**

The primary benefit to the UK of Brexit is democracy: the ability to change outcomes at elections and to run the country as citizens and politicians see fit. The consequential benefit is that we can legislate to achieve legal and economic outcomes which are better, in the sense of more flexible and more suited to our own conditions, than those of the EU.

I agree that we have not gone as fast down this road as we could have, partly because much of the British establishment is still not reconciled to leaving the EU, partly because of the "drag" of Northern Ireland's participation in the EU's single market for goods and related areas. But there is no block on us going faster under a government that wanted to do so.

**You have advocated for the UK's departure from the European Convention on Human Rights. Can you expand on this?**

I have reluctantly come to agree that - unless there is significant reform of the Convention at the European level, which seems unlikely - we need either to override parts of the Convention in our national law or leave it. It is impossible to re-establish control over borders and immigration, as we intended to after leaving the EU, without also leaving the ECHR. The effect of ECHR membership is that in significant areas rules relating to migration are in practice set by the ECHR (and by other international conventions as interpreted by the ECHR), not by the British people. That situation is not sustainable.

**In recent years, we have witnessed a rise in Euroscepticism not only in the UK, but also across Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in the European Parliament by the Identity and Democracy group. Would you discuss the impacts of Euroscepticism on politics in Europe?**

Euroscepticism takes various forms across Europe. In the UK, free-market liberals were often Eurosceptics because they saw the EU as a fundamentally social democratic organisation. The Brexit referendum was carried by a unique coalition of economic liberals, constitutional conservatives, and anti-migration political forces who all for different reasons wanted to "take back control".

This coalition does not exist in the same way across the rest of the EU. Euroscepticism in continental Europe seems to be driven primarily by anti-migration and social conservative forces, supportive of maintaining a degree of national integrity and decision-taking capability. This was entirely predictable. It was always likely that the EU (that is, the

institutions and national politicians who had bought into the Brussels ideology) would run up against resistance from some member states as they tried to impose their anti-borders measures and their post-modern values ideology more broadly.

I believe that this will remain the situation for the foreseeable future: that is, that there will be an uneasy status quo in which there is limited further integration but also no significant return of decision-making to member states, with pro- and anti-Brussels forces constantly waxing and waning within individual member states for largely national reasons. This will inevitably make the EU less than the sum of its component parts, preoccupied by its own internal decision-making and, like the Austro-Hungarian Empire, focused primarily on preserving its own continued existence and stability rather than contributing constructively to the outside world.

Lord David Frost was Chief Negotiator for exiting the European Union and then a Cabinet minister under the Boris Johnson government from 2019 to 2021. A former diplomat, he was appointed to the House of Lords in 2020.



He was Chief Negotiator and Europe adviser to Prime Minister Boris Johnson, and then Minister responsible for EU relations, until the end of 2021. He led the negotiations which broke the political deadlock over Brexit, took the UK out of the EU, and put in place the UK / EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement, the world's broadest free trade agreement. Lord Frost was subsequently responsible for the post-exit negotiations on the Northern Ireland Protocol, and for leading aspects of post-Brexit domestic reform.

He was Boris Johnson's political adviser on foreign policy in the Foreign Office (2016-18), British Ambassador in Denmark (2006-8) and Europe Director in the Foreign Office (2003-6). Lord Frost served overseas in the missions to the EU in Brussels and the UN in New York, and in Paris and in Nicosia. In the Department for Business, he was Britain's chief trade negotiator and the UK member of the EU's Trade Policy Committee (2010-13).



# An Enlarged EU Can Also Strengthen It

Sébastien Maillard  
Institut Jacques Delors, France

**T**he war in Ukraine has sadly entered its third year. As a consequence from the very beginning, it has put enlargement back on the European agenda. The country's negotiation framework for accession to the EU is expected in March from the European Commission. In contrast to Brexit, which four years ago saw one of its most powerful members leave, the EU is now preparing to potentially welcome up to nine new members in the coming decades. A Europe of 36 sets on its faraway horizon. Will this process weaken the European Union or, on the opposite, can it actually strengthen it?

Upon Robert Schuman's post-WWII vision of reconciling the continent, enlargement does not betray the European idea of unity. It even marks its accomplishment. But, in doing so, it paradoxically changes its curse. The admission of new countries is not simply extending the existing EU. It is part of a project to transform the bloc in response to the new geopolitical risks it is facing. Let us not forget that Ukraine applied to the EU just the week following its invasion by Russia. It was immediately followed by Moldova and Georgia, in the same reaction to the growing threat of Russian imperialism.

Before the war, one has to admit that this wide part of our continent, that stretches on the edge of today's EU, was an unthought part of European integration. The Western Balkans were implicitly considered to be the last who would enter the EU, at least in Paris. Their admission, in practice, has been pushed back to a point where the process has lost most of its credibility. Countries of the former Yugoslavia have not taken advantage of the new impetus to enlargement so far, except Albania and recently Montenegro. But elsewhere there is a new dynamic because Putin's will to restore Russian influence over the former Soviet Union forbids to let

Eastern Europe in some sort of grey zone, which would always be an area of instability. Any kind of 'buffer state' would live under permanent Russian threat. For the former Soviet republics, joining the EU thus means, first of all, saving their nation, preserving their freedom of action, and anchoring their country outside the sphere of so-called 'Rouski mir' (Russian world). When proudly waving European flags, Ukrainians are not pledging to an outside international organization but claiming the European identity enshrined in their own nation. Morally, a firm prospect of membership brings hope to the population at war. Economically, it also reassures private investors in view of the reconstruction.

Enlargement seems harder to admit in the West. France has been traditionally reluctant to the process, fearing it is prejudicial to deeper integration and to a nimbler EU. Small is beautiful, but is it powerful? Adding more member states is regarded as a burden that complicates the functioning of the EU and strains its budget (CAP, cohesion fund) rather than as a geopolitical imperative for the sake of our continent's security. A way for the EU to affirm itself in a multipolar world.

Whatever the reason, membership is primarily a democratic choice on both sides. Through enlargement, the EU is not creating an empire in that

*The admission of new countries is not simply extending the existing EU. It is part of a project to transform the bloc in response to the new geopolitical risks it is facing.*

it does not force any sovereign state to join it - or even to remain (Brexit). The first condition for any application, besides being regarded as a European country, is to be a liberal democracy. The other two conditions are to run a market economy and to respect European law. Hence, all the time needed to negotiate sector by sector, chapter by chapter (35 in total), to establish an accession treaty, which will then have to be ratified unanimously by each of the current Member States of the Union and will probably include transitional phases of several years before it fully comes into force. For sure, Ukraine will not be in the EU by tomorrow.

Even if enlargement responds to a new geopolitical imperative, it will not be achieved in one round. Another 'Big Bang', like the one that happened 20 years ago when the EU jumped from 15 to 25 member states, is not the most obvious option. The idea is rather to organize entries spaced in groups of 2 to 3 countries. At this stage, Montenegro, Albania, and North Macedonia stand out as the most likely to get near admission. On the other hand, letting in Bosnia and Herzegovina or Kosovo still seems a very distant prospect. But rather than a full admission only at the end of a long at times hesitating process, the idea also makes its way of a staged accession. It would enable all stakeholders, candidates, member states, and EU institutions alike, to become more familiar with one another. Future member states would learn to gradually absorb and manage European funds in several steps. In other words, should membership be compared to marriage, it would call beforehand an engagement period. The Commission has just published on March 20 a communication on pre-enlargement reforms, supporting 'gradual integration' ahead of accession.

Staged accession would also allow for stronger surveillance than in previous enlargements on the respect to the rule of law. Independence of the judiciary, freedom of the media, respect for the opposition,...: all the basic principles that make a liberal democracy are essential to building and sustaining trust between states in the Union. This trust must not fade away with enlargement. The ongoing case with Orban's Hungary has led to raising the level of requirement upstream.

Homework is also on the EU's shoulders for it to adapt its governance accordingly. Enlargement has thus put institutional reform back on the European agenda. Yet experience shows that the difficulty for member

states to agree together is not just a matter of how many they are or how sophisticated are their decision process. It is mostly the circumstances, the common understanding of what is at stake, and the shared perception of a direct threat, that forge political will and lead to consensus. The pandemic and then the ongoing war have led the bloc to make quick and far-reaching decisions at EU level that it would not do otherwise. Today, the harshness of geopolitical threats to be averted, from Russia and beyond, the need for the EU to develop its own industrial capacities to overcome any over-dependence, as de-risking from China, and the risk of a more isolationist US command the unity of Europeans. Necessary institutional improvements will then follow and not just for the sake of enlargement.

To address these concerns and become a full-fledged power in its own right, an enlarged EU does not have to form one uniformed single bloc. The changing number of countries joining the Euro area or the Schengen area proves that European integration is not a one-size-fits-all process. It leaves room for differentiation. This will prove even more essential to keep a Europe of "30+" nimble from within and not end up crippled.

As can be seen, enlargement poses great challenges. But it also offers unique opportunities and not just for the candidate countries. Ukraine will not only be a cost for the CAP but it will bring some of the most fertile land in the world to the single market. At a time when the EU is trying to secure rare-earth elements and produce its own batteries to equip electric cars, countries such as Serbia have reserves of lithium, which could reduce our external dependence. There are other examples of strategic benefits. Enlargement, the absence of which would also present a cost, can renew the perception of countries still very little or poorly known in the West. Their European perspective getting now more concrete will transform their economies and their political and social conditions but also make Europe more powerful in the world. At first historically a peace project, the EU is becoming a power-project. Enlargement is part of that shift.



**Sébastien Maillard** is special advisor to the Jacques Delors Institute, working in its Centre Grande Europe and Associate Fellow at the Europe Programme, Chatham House. He previously served as director of the think-tank, which he joined in 2016 after a career in journalism at La Croix, a French daily newspaper. He was a correspondent in Brussels (2007–10) and Rome (2013–16), covering Pope Francis’ pontificate. He also co-headed the newspaper’s world desk and covered President Macron’s first presidential campaign.

Sébastien Maillard has taught EU affairs at Sciences Po, from which he is a graduate, and at Boston College. He has written in-depth articles in several reviews and is a frequent media commentator. He is the author of *Qu’avons-nous fait de l’Europe?* and published an interview-book with former Italian PM, Enrico Letta, *Faire l’Europe dans un monde de brutes*. He was appointed Chevalier to the Ordre du Mérite in 2021.

# Closing the Doors to Europe: Will the European Union's External Migration Policy Work?

Dr. Bernd Parusel

Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies (SIEPS), Sweden

On 20 December, news broke that the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union had reached an agreement on the “New Pact on Migration and Asylum” after long and difficult negotiations.<sup>1</sup> This pact, which had been presented by the European Commission in autumn of 2020 and also includes earlier proposals, is a comprehensive package of laws and policy recommendations that cover many areas of the EU's common migration and asylum policy and contain some innovations. The pact introduces, for example, a mandatory screening of asylum seekers and migrants without travel documents who arrive at the EU's external borders; fast-track asylum and return procedures in closed reception centers at (or close to) the borders; specific rules for border crossing, reception conditions, and asylum processing in different types of “crisis” situations; and a new “solidarity mechanism” for better responsibility-sharing between the member states of the EU. These proposals, and also the compromise reached in December, have received a lot of criticism because they represent a tougher policy against people on the move, create an even more complicated asylum system than today, and generally weaken the right to asylum.

One might ask now whether it is this pact that will govern the EU's common migration and asylum policy for a long time to come, or whether there will be more measures designed to deter people from fleeing to Europe. As I argue in this essay, the pact is both the endpoint (for now) of a long-term reform process and a starting point for new or intensified strategies to control and limit refugee flows to Europe. In parallel with the pact taking the final steps towards formal adoption, we are already seeing many new activities in what is usually called the “external dimension” of EU migration policy. These include various arrangements to manage

migratory flows and displaced people in cooperation with countries of transit and origin outside the Union, such as in North Africa. What are these activities, and what is their potential impact? Are they legal and realistic? Do they solve any problems? These are the questions that this article will examine.

## The “external dimension” of EU migration policy

The external dimension of EU migration and asylum policy is nothing new in itself, and it goes without saying that refugee and migration flows to the EU are affected by the situation in people's countries of origin and developments in countries surrounding the EU. But at various times, often in times of increasing irregular migration to the EU and perceptions of migration crises, politicians have launched more or less radical proposals to try to stop or reduce the number of people who seek protection in the EU through measures outside the EU.

As early as 2005, the EU Heads of State and Government noted that migration issues had become increasingly important and that the public was concerned about migration. The European Commission then launched a “Global Approach to Migration” (GAM), which was further developed in 2007 and 2008 and eventually resulted in a framework for the EU's cooperation with other countries. The GAM aimed to build “comprehensive partnerships with countries of origin and transit”. With this policy framework, the EU intended to strike a balance between three migration policy objectives: promoting mobility and legal migration; optimizing the migration-development nexus; and preventing and combating irregular immigration.



The Arab Spring and the migratory and refugee flows it triggered put external action back high on the EU's agenda in 2011 and beyond. The EU launched dialogues on migration, mobility, and security with Tunisia and Morocco, and the GAM was revised to become the GAMM with two m's, the "Global Approach to Migration and Mobility". The new framework now had four priorities: to improve the organization of legal migration and to facilitate mobility; prevent and reduce irregular migration in an effective yet humane way; strengthen synergies between migration and development; and strengthen international protection systems and the external dimension of asylum law.<sup>2</sup>

Following the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers in the EU in 2015-2016, the EU moved towards tougher and more restrictive measures. Controversial agreements were made with countries outside the Union. The most prominent one is an informal agreement with Turkey which was aimed at preventing asylum seekers from countries such as Syria and Afghanistan from travelling via Turkey to Greece and from there to the rest of the EU.<sup>3</sup> The EU also started supporting the coast guard in civil war-torn Libya to prevent migrants and refugees from crossing the Mediterranean towards Malta and Italy.<sup>4</sup> Significant sums of money were channeled through a new emergency fund to projects in African countries in an attempt to address the "root causes" of forced displacement and irregular migration and to combat people smugglers.<sup>5</sup> One of the main recipients of EU funds was Niger; a state in the interior of West Africa that had been identified as a major transit hub for irregular migration from sub-Saharan Africa to North Africa and Europe.<sup>6</sup>

EU leaders also often talked about the importance of opening legal pathways to Europe to create alternatives to irregular and dangerous

EU leaders also often talked about the importance of opening legal pathways to Europe to create alternatives to irregular and dangerous travel, but legal immigration projects mostly remained small-scale, stalled after a while or did not materialize at all.

travel, but legal immigration projects mostly remained small-scale, stalled after a while or did not materialize at all. A possibility for non-EU nationals to apply for visas to travel safely to the EU and apply for asylum, instead having to use dangerous irregular routes, was never introduced. The number of quota refugees, i.e. persons selected for resettlement in countries of first refuge, received by the EU member states increased for a while but then decreased again.<sup>7</sup>

### Europe's "doorkeepers" in Asia and North Africa

The EU's agreement with Turkey, which is formally just a joint statement, is controversial in many ways. The cooperation contributed to people from Syria and Afghanistan, among other places, being prevented from moving on to Greece. Those who still did manage to get to Greece were often denied protection there, but sending them back to Turkey never fully worked in practice. The result was long stays of vulnerable people in substandard reception centers on Greek islands and many asylum seekers trying to leave Greece to travel on to other EU countries through the Balkans. If one is to see something positive about the Turkey agreement from a protection point of view, it is that the EU took over a number of Syrian refugees staying in Turkey under resettlement and that EU money helped organizations in Turkey that provided reception and integration programs for refugees.

Despite the fact that the arrangement with Turkey must be seen as questionable, the EU continues to work in the same direction and this work is intensifying. In June 2023, talks were held with Tunisia on an agreement on cooperation, financial support, and migration management. In previous months, there had been an increase in irregular arrivals via Tunisia of persons seeking protection in the EU, which was of particular concern to the right-wing government in Italy, which had promised to halt irregular migration across the Mediterranean Sea. A meeting between European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Italian and Dutch Prime Ministers Georgia Meloni and Mark Rutte, and Tunisian President Kais Saied in Tunis led to a Memorandum of Understanding on a Strategic Partnership signed on 16 July. The agreement rests on five pillars: macroeconomic stability, economy and trade, green transition, people-to-people contacts (e.g., through cultural, scientific,

and technological training and exchange programs), and migration and mobility. On migration, the parties underlined their intention to develop a holistic approach to address the causes of irregular migration, including by promoting sustainable development in disadvantaged areas. A common priority is the fight against irregular migration and smugglers.<sup>8</sup>

However, the Tunisian side did not seem entirely convinced, with the President stating that Tunisia did not intend to act as a border guard for the EU. In Europe, the agreement was heavily criticized by experts, human rights organizations, and the European Parliament, partly because it was seen as supporting Tunisia's increasingly autocratic government, which had taken extreme measures against refugees and migrants staying in the country, and partly because it was seen as ineffective or counterproductive in terms of the intended effect of reducing dangerous journeys across the Mediterranean. The agreement had also been reached without parliamentary scrutiny and some governments in the EU felt left out. However, the European Commission stated that the agreement should be seen as a model for similar deals with other countries in North Africa, such as Egypt.

### Offshoring asylum

The fact that the agreement with Tunisia – at least initially – did not lead to a rapid reduction in the dangerous journeys of asylum seekers across the Mediterranean might be one reason why Italy quickly went ahead on its own with a new and perhaps even more radical idea – to send asylum seekers, which the Italian Coast Guard picks up in the Mediterranean, to Albania instead of taking them ashore in Italy. Rome and Tirana announced at a press conference in early November 2023 that they had agreed on a deal that would allow Italy to use and operate two reception facilities on Albanian territory for at least five years. At any given time, up to 3,000 people would be able to live there while their asylum applications were being examined.

The relocation agreement between EU member Italy and the non-EU country Albania differs in important respects from other offshoring strategies in Europe, such as the United Kingdom's agreement with Rwanda or similar plans that Denmark had discussed with a number

of countries. In the UK, the goal is a pure deportation policy – asylum seekers who cross the English Channel to the UK should simply be sent to Rwanda, and Rwanda should take care of their asylum procedures, reception, integration, and everything else that follows. Italy's deal with Albania, by contrast, is based on the idea that Italian authorities handle the entire procedure and that Italian law applies even if the people are geographically on Albanian soil. In addition to managing the asylum process, Italy would provide necessary services inside these facilities, which include, for example, health care and order and security. Albania would mainly ensure safety outside and around the facilities. Even after the asylum examination is carried out, people would be handled by Italy.

Whether extraterritorial solutions of this kind are legal under international law is questionable, to say the least. The Supreme Court of the United Kingdom ruled in November 2023 that asylum seekers may not be sent to Rwanda because that would violate the asylum law principle of *non-refoulement*. The UK would simply not be able to guarantee that Rwanda would not send people seeking protection back to the countries from which they have fled and where they would face political persecution or other circumstances that would give them a right to protection elsewhere.

In the Italian case, experts' objections relate to international maritime law and EU law, among other things. People rescued from distress at sea must normally be taken to the nearest place of safety. In most cases, given the geographical situation and the main Mediterranean migration routes, this would be ports in Southern Italy and not places further up the coast of Albania. The current EU Asylum rules require Member States to process asylum requests on their territory, and this will likely also apply under the reformed rules of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, even if it widens the possibility of designating third countries as "safe" for return. Other arguments that have been put forward are that arbitrary or automatic detention of persons seeking protection is prohibited under international law and that a number of fundamental rights of asylum seekers cannot be adequately upheld in locked reception centers outside EU territory.<sup>9</sup>

More generally, it can also be said that the various asylum offshoring proposals currently being discussed in Europe risk violating general

principles of asylum law. An important one, often emphasized by the UN Refugee Agency UNHCR, is that cooperation between states when it comes to asylum seekers and protection is acceptable – even desirable – when the goal and the result is enhanced protection for people on the move and responsibility-sharing between countries. Trying to shift responsibilities undermines the idea of international protection.

Despite these tensions, several EU governments have launched various types of outsourcing or offshoring ideas. Austria has shown interest in the British deal with Rwanda. Germany declared in December that it would explore the possibility of “third-country solutions”. In Sweden, the government is looking into the possibility of setting up “return hubs” in third countries for people who have had their asylum applications rejected but cannot be returned to their countries of origin. At present, however, none of these proposals has led to concrete results, which is probably partly due to legal and practical problems and partly to the fact that non-EU countries (with Rwanda and Albania as possible exceptions at this time) have not been interested in helping the EU with migration control measures that these countries perceive as unfair.

### **Levers, incentives, and conditionality**

Although this may sound cynical, the question for the EU then becomes how to possibly motivate recalcitrant third countries to sign up for the EU’s restrictive migration policy goals. For some time now, there have been discussions about different types of means of pressure, or levers, to be put on other states so that they stop people who want to flee to the EU and take back asylum seekers and other migrants who are not allowed to stay in EU countries. These discussions include visa rules, aid, and trade. For example, the EU can make it more difficult for people from countries that do not cooperate with the EU on migration to obtain visas, reduce or stop development aid to recalcitrant countries, or threaten with trade restrictions. Diplomatic outreach to countries can be another tool, and it has been said that legal migration opportunities could be created for people that Europe wants, such as certain workers or students, in exchange for efforts in countries of origin and transit to prevent irregular migration.

Measures of this kind have been discussed for a long time, but it is difficult to see that any significant progress has been made or will be made in the future. Transit and origin countries are not a homogeneous group, which means that if pressure is to be exerted at all, the measures may need to be adapted to the specific circumstances of each country of origin and transit. Not all countries react in the same way to threats from the EU about visa restrictions, and in many parts of the world it is already very difficult for many people to obtain EU visas. Making trade preferences or development aid conditional on the obedience of third countries to the EU's restrictive migration policy objectives might work if a country is truly dependent on this, but if remittances sent home by refugees and migrants in the EU are a more important source of income, a reduction in official aid may not be a decisive lever.

Some measures in the external dimension could also be completely ineffective, or even counterproductive to the objective of reducing migration. If people are to have better living conditions in their countries of origin so that they do not feel they have to migrate, reducing aid or trade may not be the best way forward. Many third countries may also perceive the EU's pressure strategies as one-sided, paternalistic, or as expressions of neo-colonial attitudes. Third country governments generally have no interest in their citizens risking their lives on dangerous irregular journeys to Europe, but they tend to expect the EU to offer safe and legal alternatives, to treat their citizens humanely and fairly, to support their integration and to allow them to send money (so-called remittances) back to relatives in their home country – instead of taking them into detention and forcibly removing them. Unilateral pressure thus does not buy goodwill, at least not in the longer run, and there is an imbalance between the migration policy interests of many third countries on the one hand and those of the EU on the other. EU proposals that are perceived as unfair can lead to frustration and reluctance among third countries rather than to a willingness to cooperate, and this risks eroding the trust and sense of partnership that would be needed to create conditions that help build a better global framework for a responsible and humane migration policy.

## Negative consequences all around

A final question that can be asked is why various and sometimes quite crude and radical measures in the external dimension of the EU's migration policy seem to be booming again right now, despite the fact that researchers and experts have been warning about potential risks for many years. It is likely the result of two factors: first; the EU is once again experiencing an increasing number of irregular arrivals and asylum seekers, and this trend coincides with serious capacity problems in asylum reception systems in several EU member states and tougher economic conditions. This raises fears of new "migration crises", fears that in many parts of Europe are exploited and amplified by right-wing populist forces that present seemingly simple solutions to complicated problems. Second; there is a growing realization that the implementation of the internal asylum and migration reform via the EU's New Pact on Migration and Asylum will take time and might in the end not reduce the number of people fleeing to Europe as much as some policy-makers want. Those in the EU who want fewer asylum seekers are therefore looking beyond the internal reform process and pushing for measures to stop migration abroad before people even reach the EU's borders.

It is important to note that cooperation between the EU and non-EU countries can be beneficial if done the right way; for example, if it leads to fewer people having to flee; if safe and legal pathways to protection are opened so that people do not have to risk their lives on irregular journeys; and if the result of cooperation is a sharing of responsibilities that strengthens protection systems. However, the EU's strategy today is not primarily about that, but rather about trying to push down the number of asylum seekers at almost any cost and as quickly as possible.

Considering that most displaced people are in the Global South, often in the vicinity of countries suffering from conflict or war, it is unfair if Europe tries to place additional responsibilities on communities and regions already struggling with severe crises and major refugee situations in their neighborhoods. Many countries and governments see this unfairness, so if the EU continues on this path, there is a risk that it will end up with only autocracies and dubious regimes left to work with. If it becomes

dependent on them, which it already is to some degree, such regimes can gain power over European politics by threatening with migratory flows. Thus, the current orientation of the EU's external migration policies not only undermines the global protection system. It may also further damage the EU's reputation and influence in the world.

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# EU's Eastern Border and Inconvenient Truths

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## Securitization of migration in the EU after the Russian invasion of Ukraine

The increased securitization of migration in the EU is all but a new phenomenon that has been discussed in a multitude of fora – particularly in the context of 9/11 and its aftermath. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, alongside with the EU's confrontation with Russia's ally Belarus, however, has opened up a whole new chapter in this area.

The developments in EU Member States sharing a land border with Belarus and Russia – namely, Poland, the Baltic States and Finland, - give reason for particular concern and, perhaps, have no analogy in the EU's history. Highly politicized conflict-related securitization narratives have rarely found their way so swiftly into Member States' domestic migration and asylum laws, leading to open and far-reaching violations of EU and international human rights law. Hardly ever before have ill-defined concepts and indiscriminate assumptions been so broadly accepted and used to shift from an individual-focused approach to blanket measures stigmatizing, dehumanizing, and excluding entire groups. And, last but not least, rarely before have radical changes of this kind received so little criticism from civil society, including academics, - a deeply unsettling and dangerous trend.

## EU-Belarus border crisis

The crisis at the EU's external border with Belarus and, more recently, Russia, has been the most salient example of this process. The origins of the current situation date back to summer 2021 when, following the EU's decision to impose sanctions on Minsk, Belarus started actively issuing

visas to nationals of Middle Eastern and African countries, allowing them safe passage through its territory and no longer preventing irregular border crossings into the EU.

In response, Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia – three EU Member States bordering Belarus – took an unprecedented step and adopted long-term, far-reaching, and blanket domestic legislative measures that severely restrict the right to seek asylum and openly authorize pushbacks – in direct breach of EU, international refugee, and human rights law. As a consequence, EU's border with Belarus has become a highly securitized exclusion zone where protection seekers are being continuously exposed to various types of inhuman and degrading treatment (e.g., forced to remain in the forest for up to seven months) and where deaths, disappearances, and amputated limbs are an everyday reality.

The rationale, used by Member States for excluding the racialized 'other' from human rights protection, has been the so-called 'migrant instrumentalization' by the Belarusian and Russian regimes. Persons crossing from Belarus are framed as a security threat and an element of 'hybrid warfare' against the EU, a dehumanizing narrative that has intensified following the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In June 2023, Latvia further cemented the ongoing practice of pushbacks in domestic law,

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following a similar move by the neighboring Lithuania – irrespective of a 2022 CJEU ruling that declared such approach incompatible with EU law. Most recently, the instrumentalization discourse has also been taken up by Finland that, first, amended its Border Guard Act and then temporarily closed all its land border crossing points with Russia – as a reaction to increasing numbers of foreign nationals attempting to cross from Russia and apply in Finland for international protection.

### **‘Migrant instrumentalization’ and realities on the ground**

The ‘migrant instrumentalization’ concept has become so deeply embedded in political, media and, regrettably, even academic discourses, that is hardly ever challenged at all. In essence, it indiscriminately implies that every asylum-seeker crossing from Belarus or Russia has been instrumentalized and therefore, can be denied their fundamental rights.

This approach, however, is highly problematic on many levels. First and foremost, it diverts attention from the main reasons of why people undertake dangerous and irregular routes to seek protection in Europe – namely, global passport inequality, the EU’s externalization and containment policies, and the consequent absence of legal routes to seek protection. For those holding an Iraqi, Syrian, or Afghan passport it is nearly impossible to obtain a visa for Europe; in most cases, rendering the deadly Mediterranean route their only option. The third-country nationals involved make up a highly heterogeneous group and frequently belong to categories with relatively high asylum-recognition rates. Examples include Afghans fleeing the Taliban, Syrians fleeing compulsory military service, Iranians fleeing political persecution, and Yazidis, an Iraq-based ethno-religious minority that was persecuted by ISIS and has been living in protracted displacement for nearly a decade.

Second, there is a significant gap between the generalized and simplified ‘instrumentalization’ discourse and realities on the ground. While in summer and autumn 2021, Belarus indeed appears to have used migration as a political leverage against the EU, this no longer seems to be the case. Following pressure by the EU, foreign airline companies or governments, including Belarus, introduced travel restrictions on nationals of certain Middle Eastern countries. Already in November 2021,

Turkey banned Syrian, Yemeni, and Iraqi nationals from flying to Minsk. The Belarusian state airline Belavia equally announced it would no longer carry nationals of these countries to Belarus, whereby hundreds of Iraqi nationals were returned from Minsk to Iraq via so-called repatriation flights.

My empirical research suggests that most individuals arriving at the EU’s external border currently hold Russian, not Belarus, visas that are issued for purposes such as tourism, study, work, or private visits. Non-EU nationals are typically brought to the EU’s border with Belarus by intermediaries of diverse backgrounds who are non-state actors. My research also shows that Belarusian authorities now increasingly attempt to intercept people who try to cross into the EU, detain, and return them to Russia. Many people had also previously resided in Russia for prolonged periods of time (either regularly or irregularly, including with expired visas) before deciding to seek protection in the EU.

Media reports reveal that people in such situations were also among those who recently attempted to cross from Russia into Finland. The latter group also included people who were brought to the Russian border by fixers following previous unsuccessful attempts to cross into the EU from Belarus. Further, there are people who arrived at the Belarus border by land via Russia and Central Asian countries (e.g., from Afghanistan), had never procured Belarusian or Russian visas or had any other connection with the Belarusian or Russian authorities.

### **Misleading numbers and disproportionate response**

The Member States’ responses to the issue are highly disproportionate not only from a legal, but also from a public policy perspective. The number of individuals attempting to enter the EU through Belarus is generally very low and nowhere near the number of arrivals via the Mediterranean, let alone the figures of 2015-16 when the EU received over 2.5 million asylum applications, or the millions of Ukrainian nationals welcomed by the EU since the start of the Russian aggression.

In 2021, at the peak of the crisis, Polish border guards recorded fewer than 40,000 ‘attempts of illegal border crossings’ from Belarus, with

the numbers having dropped sharply in 2022 and 2023. Moreover, it is crucial that the number of recorded border crossing attempts does not represent the actual number of people crossing the border, as many are pushed back and forth multiple times, inviting this abuse of statistics by the relevant governments. For example, in the period from August 2021 to April 2022, Latvian authorities claimed to have registered over 6,600 border crossing attempts. Yet, my analysis suggests the actual number of people behind these figures was as low as around 250.

### **Russian citizens as a security threat**

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, individuals holding Russian passports have equally become target of legislative changes, specifically designed by Member States to limit entry and residence rights of this group. Evidence- and individual-based approaches towards this category has been substituted by the WWI 'enemy alien' logic where Russian citizens are portrayed as a security threat and assigned collective responsibility for Putin's actions.

The most visible EU-level step in this regard has been the suspension of the EU-Russia Visa Facilitation Agreement in September 2022, following which Russian citizens face longer visa processing times and extra checks. Moreover, Member States are allowed to deprioritize applicants whose reason for travel is not considered 'essential'. Poland, the Baltic States, and Finland, however, went much further and – in breach of the Schengen Borders Code – unilaterally introduced a nearly absolute entry ban on Russian citizens, including holders of short-term Schengen visas issued by other Member States.

Such measures have had profound implications for the persons involved and have targeted a much larger group of individuals than those who, in the words of EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, 'travel[ed] to the EU for leisure and shopping as if no war was raging in Ukraine.' The first group particularly disadvantaged in this regard are those fleeing the oppressive regime, all the more so because since February 2022 the human rights situation in Russia has significantly deteriorated. Among other categories, the entry restrictions affect Russian citizens fleeing military draft whose options to claim protection in the EU are now extremely limited – particularly given that several Member States

have expressly refused to issue humanitarian visas to this category. The second group severely impacted by the restrictive measures are Russian family members of EU citizens and residents, including Ukrainian refugees living in the EU – contrary to the governments' reassurances that this would not be the case.

### **Dual citizens and long-term EU residents**

The climate of suspicion has been particularly omnipresent in Latvia and Estonia, where the events in Ukraine have exacerbated traditionally strong fears of potential Russian aggression towards these countries. Apart from banning Russian citizens from entry, such anxieties have manifested themselves in targeting other groups, including Ukrainian citizens travelling to the EU through Russia and their own Russian-speaking population.

Since February 2022, Estonia, for instance, has refused entry to hundreds of Ukrainian passport holders who had stayed in Russia for longer periods of time or had dual Russian-Ukrainian citizenship. This was done irrespective of the fact that many of them travelled to the EU from the occupied territories, fell within the scope of the Temporary Protection Directive, and/or might have been pressured or actively encouraged to acquire Russian citizenship for practical reasons.

Further, in September 2022, the neighboring Latvia introduced amendments to its Immigration Law targeting around 25,000 Russian citizens living in the country on the basis of a permanent residence permit. Those belonging to this group (unless they are aged 75 or older or diagnosed with certain health conditions) are now required to pass a Latvian language proficiency test at a minimum level of A2. It is expected that those who fail to do so will lose their right to reside in the Latvia and will be required to leave the country.

The amendments primarily affect former Latvian non-citizens\* who had previously acquired Russian citizenship to be able to receive a Russian pension. Most of them are elderly people who live in a predominantly Russian-speaking environment and now risk being removed to Russia despite either having been born in Latvia or lived there for decades. The legislative changes not only have caused severe anguish among this

group but also arguably undermine the principle of legal certainty and come into apparent tension with the ECtHR jurisprudence on the right to respect for private life, protected under Article 8 ECHR. The government policy, however, was recently upheld by the Latvian Constitutional Court that justified it by a security threat emanating from Russia and, potentially, from its passport holders.

### The high cost of securitizing migration

A distinctive feature of the current developments is that these have been tacitly or explicitly accepted at the EU level, irrespective of open violations of EU law. In the context of the EU-Belarus border crisis, for instance, the European Commission not only failed to initiate infringement proceedings against the Member States involved, but also appears to have embraced the 'migrant instrumentalization' narrative. Moreover, the last two years have also seen recurring efforts to introduce the 'migrant instrumentalization' concept into EU asylum law – currently as part of the New Pact on Migration and Asylum.

This has created a situation where, in essence, the governments can rely on the Russian invasion of Ukraine to justify any types of derogations from the existing migration and asylum framework. Even more worrisome, this is accompanied by increasing attempts to silence and stigmatize critical voices by various means, including launching smear campaigns and bringing criminal charges against human rights defenders, thus reinforcing the culture of silence and self-censorship. In Latvia, for instance, there are currently criminal charges pending against human rights activists who travelled to the border area to ensure that five Syrian asylum-seekers receive humanitarian assistance in line with interim measures issued by the ECtHR. Moreover, even foreign-based researchers and international organizations criticizing the Latvian policy towards asylum-seekers are heavily stigmatized, accused of having connections with the Kremlin or playing into the hands of Russian propaganda.

Given the current political climate, the future looks rather bleak. Derogations from EU and international refugee and human rights law have become a norm, and any shift towards restoring the Rule of Law in this area is highly unlikely. The current crisis offered the EU an

opportunity to demonstrate its strength by holding firm to its founding values, upholding human rights standards, and dealing with potential security risks on a case-by-case basis within the existing legal framework. Instead, the EU appeared ready to sacrifice its principles and undermine the Rule of Law in the name of security – even though in reality security gains from these measures are all but clear.

\*The 'non-citizen' status was created for former Soviet citizens who had moved to Latvia after it was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940, and their descendants. 'Non-citizens' are guaranteed the right to stay yet denied the right to vote and to work in public se

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# Si vis pacem, para bellum? Europe's Shifting Security Landscape

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## Introduction: The Return of Geopolitics

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine underlined the significance of geopolitics as an element of the strategic and security paradigm<sup>1</sup>, not only in terms of scholarly reflections (e.g., theories like offensive realism making a return) but also regarding strategic and operational dimensions. An uncertain outcome of the war in the EU's close neighborhood is among the most important factors shaping developments in the strategic and security domains. How Ukraine and Russia emerge from the conflict will largely determine future moves on the 'grand chessboard'. Today, Ukraine's NATO membership remains elusive. In a similar vein, accession to the EU should be viewed as a very demanding process. In particular, for a (candidate) country such as Ukraine, which must continue its reforms process (in order to meet the Copenhagen criteria) amid an extremely brutal war with an uncertain outcome. Against the background of an uncertain future, de facto Ukraine is already being incorporated into the Western peace and security architecture. With the geopolitical pendulum swinging in the direction of Central and Eastern Europe, Ukraine can be considered the centerpiece of effective European defense. The EU's interest lies in Ukraine becoming a resilient democratic state along the 1991 borders, able to withstand ongoing and future hybrid challenges. However, such an outcome is not guaranteed. More importantly, the concept of the European integration as a peace project may need to be adapted to arguably the most significant security challenge since its inception after World War II.

The global strategic and security landscape is adapting to challenges that have emerged since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The EU is no exception to the trend. Brussels is making efforts to keep pace with an

epochal geostrategic shift in foreign policy (also known as *Zeitenwende*). In 2012, key European dignitaries Jean-Claude Juncker and Jose Manuel Barroso received a Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of the EU: "For over six decades of contribution to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy, and human rights in Europe."<sup>2</sup> The latter constituted a milestone accomplishment and a realization of a historical mission for an integration process, which was conceived to promote (economic) cooperation, instead of (military) confrontation. At this time, military aggression in Europe as an instrument of dealing with disputes was perceived as "not merely unthinkable, but materially impossible."<sup>3</sup> The European response to Russia's revisionist, neo-imperialistic policy begs the question of whether the seven decades of relative peace and stability in Europe will not turn out to be an Interbellum in a region which has a long history of armed conflicts.

Examining trends within the broader strategic and security realm can bring us closer to the answer. A war of this magnitude creates previously unseen challenges and exacerbates existing ones. Even before the tragedy unfolded in Ukraine, a European security was fragile (e.g. Balkans, South Caucasus, Eastern Europe). In retrospect, one may well see the European response to these challenges as naïve and complacent<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, in ongoing conflicts and civil wars (e.g., Syria, Afghanistan, Sahel), many have criticized the lack of European presence and viable long-term strategy.

## Shaping Factors, Key Actors, and Issues Driving the Change in Europe

The EU's legacy of being a successful regional peace project ensured

its active role in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and post-conflict stabilization. In the 1990s, this commitment was formalized through the establishment of the Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), which allowed the EU to participate in numerous civilian and military missions, spanning from the Balkans to Africa and the Middle East. Russia's renewed aggression towards Ukraine in 2022 does not negate the relevance, nor the importance of the mission to advance peacebuilding, embark on effective conflict prevention, and participate in crisis management. The invasion of Ukraine further underlines the importance of the EU's commitment to maintain stability and address security challenges. The pressing question in 2024 therefore is not so much about the "why" but increasingly "how" these goals should be attained. The delay in the adoption of its Strategic Compass<sup>5</sup> by the EU reflects a paradigm shift. Brussels had to clarify not only its approach to crisis management and capacity building but also develop a viable strategy against the background of growing multipolar competition in the world, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, ongoing political-military turbulence in Africa, and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.

The latter became an act of open, blatant opposition to core values associated not only with the European Union but with the international rules-based order—the rule of law, human rights, and the freedom of expression. It emerged as a shock test to the peace and security architecture carefully crafted after World War II. This process has prompted a reflection on core principles and ideas behind security and defense strategies on the national (e.g., Germany, UK, France, Baltic states, Scandinavia) and supranational levels (the EU). Furthermore, a continuing large-scale war has served as a practical measure to assess the preparedness of both military forces and societies in terms of combat readiness, organization of defense, and resources needed for an effective and successful war effort. The latter process has been driven by anxieties about the apparent inability of militaries across Europe to defend against a brutal military offensive, should one be launched on the territory of the EU in the immediate future<sup>6</sup>.

The same can be said about the concept of collective defense, which has been the prevailing approach to Europe's security and stability. Over time, the EU's military ambitions have started to grow, which is reflected among

others in the interest to pursue 'strategic autonomy' in the defense realm. The latter desire has been dictated by challenges such as the presidency of Donald Trump, characterized by the disengagement of the US from Europe; Brexit; and hostile foreign influences. The invasion of Ukraine further accelerates the consolidation of European security architecture. Whether it is Finland and Sweden deciding to join NATO despite their long history of neutrality and non-alliance, or Denmark opting-in the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy, room for neutrality and strategic ambiguity is closing. However, as the consolidation occurs, the potential emergence of a new Iron Curtain looms. The outcome of the Ukraine war and its aftermath will determine the timing and existence of this prospect. Yet, it has already revealed that this phenomenon is likely not to be confined to the regional context but to escalate into a global rivalry.

While the overarching goals to promote peace, security, and stability remain crucial, the instruments to achieve them continue to change considerably. In particular, the EU's Eastern Policy (Ostpolitik) was built around promoting economic interdependence, de-escalation, and strategic ambiguity. These policies failed to effectively prevent Russia's invasion of sovereign states (e.g., Georgia, Ukraine), nor stabilize the proverbial "ring of fire" around its neighborhood. As a result, voices calling for the EU to become a soft power with hard edges have intensified. Russia's aggression against Ukraine is making these edges ever sharper—for example, through the adoption of the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) or the application of the European Peace Facility to provide lethal equipment and non-lethal support for Ukraine. The Facility expands beyond the original scope of the instrument designed to finance common foreign and security policy (CFSP) activities with military or defense implications. The defense domain after the start of the invasion is increasingly reminiscent of Cold War dynamics, with governments heavily investing in their military capabilities. This is a noticeable shift from the period characterized by what many saw as modest defense budgets across the EU, limited foreign deployments (e.g., Afghanistan), predominantly civilian crisis management, and military training missions to (e.g., Sahel)<sup>7</sup>.

Transatlantic cooperation has been a consistent element of the security and defense architecture of the collective West since the end of WWII.



*The ongoing war in the heart of Europe emphasizes the intricate nature of contemporary security challenges. For European stakeholders, it has served as a catalyst to further redefine, broaden and enhance the strategic approach to security and defense by incorporating non-traditional and non-military threats were already underway before 2022.*

NATO has been a vital forum for the United States and its European allies to foster close military and political ties, ensuring collective security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic region. Russia's invasion of Ukraine prompted historically neutral states like Finland and Sweden to join NATO, while across the region the belief in Washington as a foundation of Europe's security only strengthened. Poland alone is expected to buy an arsenal from the USA: Abrams tanks, F-35 fighters, advanced rockets, and rocket launchers worth billions of dollars<sup>8</sup>. While this is a pivotal election year in the US, one can anticipate that conversations regarding the imbalance in the Transatlantic partnership and the European Union's dependence on the United States as a security guarantor will continue to gain traction<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, there are calls for the EU and its member states to diversify their security partnerships. On the other hand, support for Ukraine has shown the importance of robust transatlantic relations between Washington and Brussels.

The ongoing war in the heart of Europe emphasizes the intricate nature of contemporary security challenges. For European stakeholders, it has served as a catalyst to further redefine, broaden, and enhance the strategic approach to security and defense by incorporating non-traditional and non-military threats were already underway before 2022. It is likely that these efforts will gain momentum in Europe, propelled by the first-hand revelations caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This conflict has illuminated the diverse battlefields of modern warfare, encompassing information and digital domains, critical infrastructure, supply chains, energy, and socio-demographic dimensions. The German government, among others, highlighted this shift in its inaugural security strategy published in June 2023, advocating for an integrated approach

to security that encompasses resources, energy security, climate change, health, and counteracting disinformation<sup>10</sup>.

Finally, the possible revival of the defense industry in Europe is an important development worth keeping an eye on. Once the process of militarization occurs, it should not be expected to quickly disappear from the political and policy agendas. Sweden's Saab, Nordics' Nammo, Germany's Rheinmetall, France's Nexter and MBDA, KNDS, and Dassault Aviation are among the companies that currently pursue long-term contracts with governments to ensure the increased demand for their services will not wane<sup>11</sup>. It is yet unclear whether the European industry will be able to gain and maintain a favorable position. We have already witnessed contracts in the Netherlands, Denmark, Romania, and Poland going to Israeli, Turkish, and South Korean companies. The resurgence of military production is intensifying competition and adding strain to supply chains. Inflation, access to (raw) materials, and the availability of skilled labor are crucial factors influencing the future of the European defense industry. Additionally, there is a need for vigilance regarding the concerning trend of strategic dependencies on third countries, such as the importance of raw materials from China for the success of the green and digital transition.

### **Implications for Europe: Embracing the (Un)certainly**

With buffer zones disappearing and the spirit of the Cold War looming, geography will continue to be a significant factor shaping global affairs. Furthermore, the growing tensions between 'the West and the rest' have tempted an increasing number of countries to entertain foreign-policy autonomy and/or non-alignment with the democratic camp. The EU may feel a less immediate impact from these desires when expressed by the Sahel or Saudi Arabia; however, Turkey's active pursuit of strategic autonomy in foreign policy has already introduced significant challenges to the architecture of European peace and security<sup>12</sup>.

Despite occasional attempts by individual actors to pursue non-alignment and foreign policy autonomy, the current trend is towards block formation. The global order may well end up transitioning towards multipolarity, marked by the formation of blocks consolidating around geographical

borders and issues of strategic significance. Simultaneously, there is a noticeable acceleration in militarization and an increasing securitization of public space. Deterrence policy is undergoing a shift from a political emphasis, such as forging interdependence, to a framework centered on strong, developed military capabilities. Moreover, a comprehensive 'whole of society' approach to security is emerging on both national and supranational levels. The emphasis is on enhancing societal resilience against hybrid threats like disinformation and polarization. Finally, preserving critical infrastructure against malign foreign influence is seen as indispensable within the defense domain.

There are a few observations to be made about the possible outlook of the strategic and security realms from the European perspective in the context of the changing international landscape:

- Russia's aggression against Ukraine underscores the crucial role of the EU's enlargement and neighborhood policies as part of its peace and security toolkit. Brussels should work towards minimizing geopolitical competition in favor of cooperation. Furthermore, growing geopolitical tensions emphasize the need for transparent, partner-driven, fair, and sustainable relations with the Global South.
- Having said that, the EU must promote effective multilateralism for the peaceful and stable future of European integration. The EU's renewed pursuit towards promotion of multilateral approach should rely on the strategy of interdependence, incorporating limitations to ensure that all participants adhere to shared rules. Leveraging the integration of non-democratic states, such as China, into the global economic order is essential to maintain their involvement in the system while averting their dominance in crucial areas of development. Conversely, the Global South should be presented with an enticing proposition that encourages exploring alternative partnerships, preventing conflicts over exclusive spheres of influence.
- The EU's current legal-institutional framework confines it to the reality of politico-economical polity. The war in Ukraine highlighted the challenges facing the EU in its potential transition towards a military power. To address security challenges and until treaty changes

become a viable option for EU decision-makers, the implementation phase of the ambitious agenda outlined in the Strategic Compass must be adequately supported with financial and political backing. While Brussels should continue exploring complementarity with NATO, the capacity and agency to set priorities and make decisions autonomously in external action is crucial. Furthermore, the EU must confront its current dependencies and adopt a strategy of diversification. Additionally, the scope of the EU's strategic autonomy should not be confined solely to the military domain. Its unique contributions lie in areas such as conflict prevention, mediation, post-conflict peacebuilding, and resilience-building<sup>13</sup>.

- Russia's war in Ukraine is expected to provide a strong stimulus for the development of Europe's military-industrial complex. However, decades of underinvestment have taken its toll and the competition outside the EU is fierce. While supporting Ukraine's military, the EU should continue replenishing and modernizing its own stocks. Furthermore, coordination, cooperation, and diversification are essential to avoid bottlenecks when it comes to infrastructure, personnel, and raw materials.
- A comprehensive security strategy focused on bolstering the European defense complex should not undermine existing EU policies and programs, especially those dedicated to tackling major challenges such as climate change and post-pandemic recovery. This includes initiatives like EU Cohesion Policy and The National Recovery and Resilience Plan.
- Off-budget instruments like the European Peace Facility may address ad hoc security needs. In the long-term, the EU requires a more robust system of decision-making in foreign and security policy arenas, as well as a defense budget to respond swiftly and effectively to modern challenges as they arise.

*The views and opinions expressed in this article are solely those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of Foundation for European Progressive Studies*



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# Secular Stagnation in the UK and Barriers to Sustainable Growth of Economic Welfare

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**B**y comparison with the previous decades, the growth experience of the UK since the Global Financial Crises (GFC) has been one of sluggish growth (annual rate 1.1 percent of GDP, 0.5 percent of GDP per capita between 2007 and 2022), albeit that there had been some slowdown of growth in the years prior to the GFC. This type of experience has been shared with many other industrialized economies.

Promoting faster growth has been rising up the political agenda, reflecting the experiences of the past few years, often with declining living standards for many. This has been summarized in statistics, such as real earnings that were around the same level in 2023 as in 2013. In early 2023, Prime Minister Sunak stated his economic missions of halving inflation (which has been achieved) and achieving a modest aim of restoring growth (specifically, growth positive rather than negative). The Labour Party has been in opposition but is widely expected to win the general election due before the end of the year and has set as one of its five missions to achieve the highest sustained growth rate in the G7 by the end of the next Parliament. It will prove difficult to assess whether the objective is reached (attained over what period of time? What counts as sustained?). Given the slow growth in many other G7 countries, it may not involve much of an increase in the UK's growth rate.

*There has been a complete lack of consideration (among politicians and the media) of why growth, whether in the UK or other industrialized economies, has tended to decline over the past decades.*

When growth is discussed, it refers to rising gross domestic product (GDP). It is rarely asked whether such rising GDP would be socially beneficial and environmentally friendly. No regard is paid to the well-known shortcomings of GDP as a measure of economic well-being or even as a measure of the size of the economy (as it only refers to the marketed output). This is important in at least three respects. First, there is a need to pay attention to the composition of GDP including failing public services and resources used for investment, particularly 'green' investment rather than the promotion of growth in general without regard to its composition. Second, there must be recognition of the damage done to the environment and health through externalities and pollution. Third, some welcome activities would reduce GDP while improving economic benefits – notably improving heating efficiency lowers energy use (hence GDP) while maintaining or even improving living conditions.

There has been a complete lack of consideration among politicians and the media as to why growth, whether in the UK or other industrialized economies, has tended to decline over the past decades. There may be mention of austerity or, for the UK, the effects of Brexit. While these have contributed to slower growth, they do not address the length of time over which growth has slowed. Particularly for the UK, there is often mention of relatively low investment though the slowdown in growth has gone alongside maintenance of the level of investment. There is little consideration of whether higher investment, and thereby faster growth of the capital stock, would enable an upward shift in the trend rate of growth of output, which is to be viewed as related to growth of the labor force and productivity. And are there forces which have held back investment?

There are more generally industrial structural changes that have been

unfavorable to environmentally sustainable growth—these broad structural changes have tended to hold back investment but also shift incomes towards profits and rent, and to direct resources in socially detrimental ways. Here there is a focus on three though others could be mentioned (e.g., increasing monopolization).

First consider financialization which in the words of Gerald Epstein "means the increasing role of financial motives, financial markets, financial actors and financial institutions in the operation of the domestic and international economies." The financialization of our economies has been conducive to instability and growth of debt. The growth of the financial sector in recent decades has been associated with slower growth as the focus of that sector shifts away from funding productive investment to boosting household debt and increasing trade in financial assets, neither of which contributes to growth. It is then inappropriate to boost the financial sector (as the UK Labour Party has been recently doing) without fundamental reform of that sector to ensure that funds are directed towards sustainable investment with the development of mutual and public banks, and financial transactions taxes to restrain speculation.

Second, there has been over the past half century a major shift towards the 'pursuit of shareholder value' being the appropriate objective for corporations. The 'pursuit of shareholder value' is the promotion of the view that profits and dividends (and thereby the stock market valuation of the corporation) should be or are the primary purpose of the corporation. The 'pursuit of shareholder value' places the shareholders (and thereby financial interests) above those of other stakeholders such as employees, customers, and the wider society. The 'pursuit of shareholder value' favors dividends over re-investment. Re-designing corporations to have responsibilities for all its stakeholders could offer a more sustainable program of investment.

The third is the emergence of a rentier society. In the words of Brett Christophers, "Rent is payment to an economic actor (the rentier) who receives that rent – and this is the key factor – purely by virtue of controlling something valuable. The 'something', whatever it happens to be, is referred to generically as an 'asset': an 'item of value owned' ... that is valuable precisely in view of the fact that control over it endows the

owner with the capacity to generate future income." The growth of rentier income shifts the focus from value creation to value extraction.

The Labour Party's proposals relate to 'growing the economy' through increased investment. There is no mention of how investment is to be increased (other than perhaps a suggestion of lower taxes on profits) and the limitations placed by the conditions mentioned above are to be overcome. There is no concern over environmental sustainability or broader economic welfare. These proposals come without any clear direction travel by which the economy will grow. It fails to address the major structural issues mentioned above, and addressing those is vital not so much for raising growth but for ensuring that the growth which does occur is the growth of economic and social being consistent with planetary boundaries.

The Labour Party is prone to portraying GDP growth as coming before and necessary to public expenditure (particularly on health) and on a 'green new deal'. This is completely the wrong way round. The increased expenditure on the health service (which is near to collapse through underfunding) would bring socially beneficial growth. Expenditure on a 'green new deal' would help to stimulate economic activity and make a good contribution to meeting environmental commitments.



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# The Conflict in Ukraine as a Catalyst for EU-NATO Relations

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According to Hedley Bull (1977: 181),

“From the point of view of the international system ... war appears to be a basic determinant of the shape the system assumes at any one time. It is war or the threat of war that help to determine whether particular states survive or are eliminated, whether they rise or decline, whether their frontiers remain the same or are changed, whether their peoples are ruled by one government or another, whether disputes are settled or drag on, and which way they are settled, whether there is a balance of power in the international system or one state becomes preponderant.”

It can safely be argued that since the 2014 events in Ukraine, which led initially to the Russian annexation of Crimea and later on to the failure of the Minsk Agreements and the eventual Russian invasion, the conflict in Ukraine has had exactly the relevance described by Bull. Not only has the Russian invasion of Ukraine signaled a transition to a multipolar world but it has also helped solidify EU-NATO relations.

Of course, nobody should disregard the fact that due to its military might, the United States has been the dominant power in NATO. Hence US-EU bilateral relations have had a significant impact on EU-NATO relations.

...the Russian invasion of Ukraine has not only contributed to the cementing of EU-NATO relations but has also ensured US dominance and primacy within the transatlantic Alliance.

Therefore, the purpose of this article is twofold: first, to identify the issues dividing the EU and the United States; and second, to explore how the conflict in Ukraine has helped to address outstanding issues in EU-US relations and, as an extension, address EU-NATO differences.

Hardly anyone would disagree that the US-EU partnership has been mainly asymmetrical in favor of the United States. However, there have been many occasions that some of EU members states and the EU as a whole sought to challenge the primacy of the United States with the hope of creating a more equal transatlantic partnership. The article argues that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has not only contributed to the cementing of EU-NATO relations but has also ensured US dominance and primacy within the transatlantic Alliance. This is not surprising because the militarization of international relations and especially wars allow the dominant military power in a coalition to increase its diplomatic leverage and political influence vis-a-vis the other coalition partners. At the same time, political and economic differences among the coalition partners are either obscured or are settled, at least, in the short run.

The fact conflict in Ukraine has contributed to the development of EU strategy is highlighted in the *2016 Global Strategy*, which indicates that “Managing the relationship with Russia represents a key strategic challenge (European Union 2016: 33). It is also recognized that “the EU and Russia are interdependent” and that’s why it was regarded as essential for the EU to “engage Russia to discuss disagreements and cooperate if and when our interests overlap” (Ibid., 33).

This document, however, was written and published at a time when the EU had adopted a less belligerent approach to its relations with Russia

in comparison with that of the United States. However, as the conflict in Ukraine evolved, so did the EU's position, which moved closer to that of the United States and eventually became identical. This development is highlighted in the *2022 Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*. In the introduction of this document, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, argues in its introduction that "Russia's aggression against Ukraine has shown both how essential NATO is for the collective defense of its members and the important role that the EU plays in today's complex security and defense environment" (European Union 2022: 5). The *Strategic Compass* provides an assessment of Russia's actions and intentions not only in eastern Europe but also in other parts of the world. Consequently, a series of military measures are envisaged to address the Russian threat in conjunction with NATO (Ibid., 29). Indeed, the *Strategic Compass* makes it clear that "The EU's strategic partnership with NATO is essential for Euro-Atlantic security" and that the EU remains "fully committed to further enhancing this key partnership also to foster the transatlantic bond" (Ibid., 53).

### EU-US/NATO Relations Prior to February 2022

In 1990, US-EEC relations were formalized by the adoption of the "Transatlantic Declaration." A regular political dialogue between the two sides was thereby initiated at various levels, including regular summit meetings. The cooperation focused on areas including the economy, education, science, and culture (European Commission 2012). The "New Transatlantic Agenda" (NTA), which was launched at the Madrid summit in 1995, carried the cooperation forward. The NTA contained five broad objectives for US-EU collaboration: promoting peace and stability; promoting democracy and development around the world; responding to global challenges; contributing to the expansion of world trade and closer economic relations; and building bridges across the Atlantic (Ibid.).

Corresponding with the adoption of the NTA, a "Joint EU-US Action Plan" was drawn up committing the EU and the United States to a large number of measures within the overall areas of cooperation. As an extension of the NTA efforts, agreement was reached at the 1998 London Summit to intensify trade cooperation, which resulted in the Transatlantic Economic Partnership (TEP), covering both bilateral and multilateral trade.

Bilaterally, TEP was designed to address various types of obstacles to trade and strived to establish agreements on mutual recognition in the areas of goods and services. TEP envisaged cooperation in the areas of public procurement and intellectual property law. The interests of the business sector, the environment and the consumers were also to be integrated into the work of TEP (Ibid.).

Although the United States and the majority of EU member states are members of NATO, they have regularly disagreed with each other on a wide range of issues, as well as having often quite different political, security, and economic agendas (Sayle 2019; Hankimaki et al., 2012; Forsberg & Herd 2006; Kaplan 2004). Thus, in the post-Cold War era, a number of issues not only prevented the EU and the United States to optimize their bilateral collaboration, but also affected the function of NATO. Such issues pertain to American unilateralism, the question of European "strategic autonomy", NATO burden sharing; conflict of economic interests between the EU and the United States, their relations with China, and the nature of EU/German-Russian relations. Since the EU lacks a fully integrated foreign policy, US/NATO-EU relations became further complicated when the EU member states could not reach a common agreed position.

Other issues that the EU and the United States have disagreed on include genetically modified food, rendition, capital punishment, global development (including debt relief and aid to Africa), US adherence to the International Criminal Court and Kyoto Protocol, visa waiver reciprocity, and privacy (Simoni 2013). Nevertheless, these bilateral issues have not had a considerable impact on EU-NATO relations.

### American Unilateralism

There was an implicit expectation among the European Allies that in the post-Cold War era, the United States not only would consult them whenever needed but also take seriously into account their positions and interests. In practice, however, this has not been the case.

On 13 December 2001, the United States informed Russia of its intention to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM). This decision

attracted many foreign critics, especially in Europe, who viewed the construction of a missile defense system by the United States, leading to fears of a U.S. nuclear first strike, as the missile defense could blunt the retaliatory strike that would otherwise deter such a pre-emptive attack. European experts predicted that the withdrawal would be a fatal blow to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and would lead to a world without effective legal constraints on nuclear proliferation. This issue was of major importance to the EU as the strengthening of NPT was declared a core policy goal.

In 2003, the United States decided to invade Iraq. This led to a significant division within the EU with some states supporting military action and some being against it. This caused a major transatlantic rift, especially between the states led by France and Germany, on the one hand, who were against military action, and the United States with United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and Poland, on the other. Following the US occupation of the country, both NATO and the EU became involved in Iraq with the EU focusing on the civilian security sector and NATO helping to build the capacities of Iraqi defense and security structures. A scaling up of EU efforts with a non-combat advisory mission launched at the Brussels Summit in July 2018, at the request of the Iraqi government. This EU mission was to compliment the NATO mission which focused on defeating ISIS and other international actors operating in Iraq.

During the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008, the United States surprised its European Allies by stating its intention to invite Georgia and Ukraine to join NATO. Despite opposition and resistance by French President Nicola Sarkozy and the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who saw this move as eventually leading to a conflict with Russia, the United States used its diplomatic and military influence and leverage to convince its NATO allies to go ahead with Washington's proposal. Since this stage of NATO expansion was considered by Moscow as a "red line", it is not surprising why Russia invaded Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in February 2022.

Following the Libyan uprising in Benghazi, on February 17, 2011, Russia and China argued that they would prefer peaceful means for resolving the conflict. Germany also emphasized the need for peaceful resolution

of the conflict and warned against the unintended consequences of armed intervention. However, France and Britain led the UN effort to pass a resolution that would allow UN member states to use "All necessary means". As a result, the United States decided to get involved in the military intervention. However, questions pertaining to the management of the conflict and its eventual resolution led to the withdrawal of the United States. Thus, the Europeans were left to handle the emerging situation.

In 2013, secret documents obtained by German news magazine – *Der Spiegel* – revealed that EU offices in the United States and United Nations headquarters were targeted for spying by the National Security Agency (NSA). The reports revealed that the United States bugged offices, accessed internal computer networks, obtained documents and emails, and listened to phone calls. Subsequent media reports indicated that EU offices in Brussels and individual European leaders, such as the German Chancellor Angela Merkel were also targeted. The EU demanded a full clarification from Washington and stated that if the allegations were true, EU and US relations would be severely impacted. The 2014 events in Ukraine that led to the Russian annexation of Crimea put this issue at the back stage.

In 2014, the United States played a crucial role during the Euro-Maidan protests in Kiev. Evidence suggests that Victoria Nuland, the then Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, accompanied by the US Ambassador in Ukraine, sought a settlement of the crisis without consulting the EU and using inappropriate language that signified the "irrelevance" of the EU to the United States. European leaders, and especially the German Chancellor Angela Merkel protested this American attitude. The subsequent annexation of Crimea by Russia helped put this issue to rest.

As a result of Russia's actions in Ukraine in 2014, the United States unilaterally imposed sanctions on Russia. In mid-June 2017, Germany and Austria issued a joint statement that indicated that the proposed anti-Russian "Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act" bill heralded a "new and very negative quality in European-American relations" and that certain provisions affecting gas pipeline projects with Russia were an illegal threat to EU energy security. In July 2017,

France described the new US sanctions as illegal under international law due to their extraterritorial reach. At the end of July 2017, the proposed law's Russian sanctions caused harsh criticism and threats of retaliatory measures on the part of the EU, while Germany described the sanctions as illegal under international law and urged the EU to take appropriate counter-measures. Eventually, this issue was settled as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine with the EU joining the United States by imposing a series of sanctions on Moscow.

The European experience with the Trump Administration created a significant degree of uncertainty regarding the long-term orientation of US foreign policy. The period saw a deepening of contradictions between both parties, including trade, climate action (Europe has a better track record and has formulated more aggressive plans), and adherence to international treaties.

In October 2018, President Donald Trump announced that he was withdrawing the US from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty). The United States formally withdrew from the treaty on 2 August 2019. Numerous prominent nuclear arms control experts urged President Trump to preserve the treaty. The decision was criticized by the chairmen of the House Committees on Foreign Affairs and Armed Services, who argued that instead of crafting a plan to hold Russia accountable and pressure it into compliance, the Trump administration had offered Putin an easy way out of the treaty and played right into his hands. Similar arguments were brought by European members of NATO who urged the US to try to bring Russia back into compliance with the treaty rather than quit it, seeking to avoid a split in the alliance that Moscow could exploit. In March 2019, Ukraine announced that since the United States and Russia had both pulled out of the treaty, it now had the right to develop intermediate-range missiles, citing Russian aggression against Ukraine as a serious threat to the European continent. This Ukrainian approach was seen by EU and NATO as having serious destabilizing effects on European security. It is also an issue that both the EU and NATO have taken into account in managing their approach to the war in Ukraine.

EU-US relations got off to a rough start after President Biden's election in

2020. The rapid and ill-planned withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan in August 2021, the announcement of the AUKUS security pact the following month, and protectionist measures, such as the 2022 "Inflation Reduction Act" left many European leaders wondering whether President Biden would represent a significant improvement over his predecessor, Donald Trump. Eventually, the Russian invasion of Ukraine put these issues to sleep.

### ***The Question of European Strategic Autonomy***

In February 1992, the EU adopted the Maastricht Treaty, which envisaged an intergovernmental Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the eventual framing of a common defense policy (ESDP) with the Western European Union (WEU) as the EU's defense component. In June 1992 in Oslo, NATO Foreign Ministers supported the objective of developing the WEU as a means of strengthening the European pillar of the Alliance and as the defense component of the EU, that would also cover the "Petersberg tasks" (humanitarian search and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks, crisis-management tasks including peace enforcement and environmental protection). In January 1994, NATO member states agreed to make collective assets of the Alliance available, on the basis of consultations in the North Atlantic Council, for WEU operations undertaken by the European Allies in pursuit of their CFSP. NATO endorsed the concept of "Combined Joint Task Forces", which was to provide for "separable but not separate" deployable headquarters that could be used for European-led operations and which constituted the conceptual basis for future operations involving NATO and other non-NATO countries. In June 1996 in Berlin, NATO Foreign Ministers agreed for the first time to create a European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) within NATO, with the aim of rebalancing roles and responsibilities between Europe and North America. An essential part of this initiative was to improve European capabilities. They also decided to make Alliance assets available for WEU-led crisis-management operations. These decisions led to the introduction of the term "Berlin Plus".

Following these developments, a debate began about aspects of ESDI (McArdle 1995; Howorth & Keller 2003). It has been argued (Hunter 2002: 33) that much of the transatlantic disagreement stemmed "from the

desultory and almost haphazard way in which the 1996 agreements had been presented in public, on both sides of the Atlantic, and certainly to the U.S. Congress” and even the concept of “separable but not separate” military capabilities were not “self-evident and required explanation.” The situation became even more complex when at their summit in St. Mâlo in December 1998, France and the United Kingdom made a joint statement affirming the EU’s determination to establish a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Saint Mâlo provided “political highlighting, especially for Americans, who were surprised to see Britain and France in agreement on a matter of military security and activities affecting NATO” (Ibid., 33).

The American response was provided at the semi-annual NATO foreign ministers’ meeting in Brussels on 8 December 1998 by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. She recalled U.S. support for an ESDI “within the Alliance,” and stated that the United States “enthusiastically support any such measures that enhance European capabilities” (NAC 1998). But she then set out three standards for judgment, which became known as the “three Ds”: namely that any EU initiative must avoid pre-empting NATO decision-making by de-linking ESDI from NATO, avoid duplicating existing efforts, and avoid discriminating against non-EU members.

### *De-linking*

The term “de-linking” was related to the idea of “autonomous” European action introduced in the St. Mâlo Declaration, along with the absence of the ritual words “separable but not separate” military capabilities; a fact that led the United States to raise a warning flag. Thus, in response to the St. Mâlo Declaration, Washington made it clear that the United States had to agree to the release of NATO assets for WEU use.

To address the issue of “de-linking”, the EU, in its 2016 *Global Strategy*, highlighted its commitment to “deepen its partnership with NATO through coordinated defense capability development, parallel and synchronized exercises, and mutually reinforcing actions to build the capacities of our partners, counter hybrid and cyber threats, and promote maritime security” (European Union 2016a: 36-37). In its *Implementation Plan on Security and Defence*, the EU also made it clear that “While respecting

the autonomy of the EU’s decision-making processes, the EU will continue to work closely with its partners, particularly with the United Nations and NATO” (European Union 2016b: 2) and that “This work will also be pursued in cooperation with NATO, which remains the foundation for the collective defense for those States which are members of it” (European Union 2016b: 13).

The war in Ukraine has strengthened the US position in NATO and any fears of a serious European strategic autonomy in military affairs have disappeared; especially with the need of the European Allies to refill their empty military depots by purchasing American hardware.

### *De-coupled*

There was an American concern that actions by either the United States or the EU might lead the security of the two sides of the Atlantic to be “decoupled”. In other words, the United States was concerned that European allies taking part in ESDI could create circumstances in which they would see their security as somehow decoupled from the Atlantic framework. Nevertheless, the United States welcomed the fact that the EU allies would be doing more for defense and hence for intra-allied burden sharing while some European military capacity, not solely bound up in NATO, could reassure Europeans of their ability to take some actions in circumstances in which the United States chose not to become engaged. In Washington’s view, this would reinforce European confidence in US commitments to European security and thus the political and military coupling of the two sides of the Atlantic.

Responding to the question of “de-coupling”, the 2003 *European Security Strategy* (ESS) made it clear that “one of the core elements of the international system is the transatlantic relationship” and that “NATO is an important expression of this relationship” (European Union 2003: 11). This document also indicated that the transatlantic partnership “is irreplaceable” and “reflects our common determination to tackle the challenges of the new century” (Ibid., 15). In its 2008 *Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy*, the EU also stressed the “need to strengthen this strategic partnership in service of our shared security interests, with better operational co-operation, in full respect

of the decision-making autonomy of each organization, and continued work on military capabilities” (European Union 2008: 24). Yet, in relation to the United States, the EU, in its 2016 *Global Strategy*, expresses its commitment to strive for a Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), which, according to the EU “demonstrates the transatlantic commitment to shared values and signals our willingness to pursue an ambitious rules-based trade agenda” (European Union 2016a: 37). On the broader security agenda, the EU envisages the US to be its core partner and declared its intention to deepen cooperation with the US on crisis management, counter-terrorism, cyber, migration, energy and climate action (Ibid., 37).

In the introduction of the 2022 *Strategic Compass*, Josep Borrell argues that “the EU will help to strengthen NATO and become a stronger Transatlantic partner: a partner that is more capable of sharing the burden of maintaining international peace and security” (European Union 2022: 5). He also highlights the EU’s commitment to “defend the European security order” and notes that “A stronger and more capable EU in the field of security and defense will contribute positively to global and transatlantic security and is complementary to NATO, which remains the foundation of collective defense for its members” (Ibid., 10). However, he added that the transatlantic relationship and EU-NATO cooperation will take place “in full respect of the principles set out in the Treaties and those agreed by the European Council, including the principles of inclusiveness, reciprocity and decision-making autonomy of the EU, are key to our overall security” (Ibid., 10).

Finally, the 2022 *Strategic Compass* highlights the importance of EU’s strategic partnership with the United States and states that

“The dedicated strategic dialogue on security and defence between the EU and the US is an important milestone in the consolidation of the transatlantic partnership. It will foster closer and mutually beneficial cooperation in areas such as respective security and defence initiatives, disarmament and non-proliferation, the impact of emerging and disruptive technologies, climate change and defence, cyber defence, military mobility, countering hybrid threats including foreign information manipulation and interference, crisis management

and the relationship with strategic competitors” (Ibid., 55).

The study of the 2022 *Strategic Compass* and the *NATO 2022 Strategic Concept* (NATO 2022) reveals the centrality of the war in Ukraine in cementing EU-US political, security and military relations and keeping both sides committed to European security.

### *Non-discrimination*

Discrimination against non-EU members of NATO was also a concern for the United States. The issue was whether any of these states could take part in WEU military operations. This was most pertinent in regard to Turkey, which was already an associate member of WEU. At the Helsinki EU Summit, Turkey was finally put on the list of countries that would be “destined to join the Union” although “on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate States.” The real issue, however, was not whether non-EU members of NATO would participate in operations where NATO was to release assets for use by WEU since the North Atlantic Council (NAC) would first have to approve it, by consensus, and Turkey had a veto. The issue was rather about the participation of non-EU members of NATO in military actions within the ESDI framework but without calling upon NATO assets. As a result, all non-EU members of NATO made clear their concerns about being side-lined in the event of a military action within the framework of ESDP.

When it became clear that Turkey would not have full access to EU/WEU process; in December 2000, Ankara placed a hold on further work between NATO and the EU on defining security relations between the two institutions. As the Turkish hold on formal agreements continued, a further and more important U.S. concern developed, namely that the EU might forge ahead with its own developments, potentially widening the political and psychological gap with NATO, perhaps more by inadvertence than by design (Hunter 2002: 40).

Eventually, Turkey became a contributor to CSDP missions and operations but only if EU member states could agree to that. Nevertheless, political and military pressures stemming from the war in Ukraine have caused the strengthening of CSDP-NATO collaboration



and have brought non-EU members of NATO within the CSDP strategic framework.

Addressing the issue of non-discrimination, the EU's *Global Strategy* indicates that "While NATO exists to defend its members from external attack, Europeans must be better equipped, trained and organized to contribute decisively to such collective efforts, as well as to act autonomously if and when necessary" (European Union 2016a: 19). But it was also made clear that

"When it comes to collective defence, NATO remains the primary framework for most Member States. At the same time, EU-NATO relations shall not prejudice the security and defence policy of those Members which are not in NATO. The EU will therefore deepen cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance in complementarity, synergy, and full respect for the institutional framework, inclusiveness and decision-making autonomy of the two. In this context, the EU needs to be strengthened as a security community: European security and defence efforts should enable the EU to act autonomously while also contributing to and undertaking actions in cooperation with NATO. A more credible European defence is essential also for the sake of a healthy transatlantic partnership with the United States" (Ibid., 20).

### *Non-duplication*

As Robert Hunter has suggested, a very important and tangible fourth 'D' emerged: duplication (Hunter 2002: 41). Secretary Albright's injunction "to avoid duplicating existing efforts" was simply a US plea for the Europeans, in crafting ESDI, not to spend scarce resources on trying to create a second set of capabilities that they could just as easily obtain from NATO, on the basis of the 1996 grand bargain (Sloan 2016 & 2003). Thus, the issue of "unnecessary duplication" occupied the center of transatlantic debate about the future of ESDI-ESDP and its relationship to NATO. Given the need of European Allies to refill their empty military depots by purchasing American hardware, the war in Ukraine helped to eliminate any American fears regarding duplication. In addition, it was decided that European efforts were to primarily focus on producing

ammunition, with the United States focusing on producing the hardware needed by the Ukrainian Army.

### *EU-NATO Cooperation After St. Mâlo*

In April 1999, at the NATO Summit in Washington, NATO Heads of State and Government decided to develop the "Berlin Plus" arrangements. Meanwhile, in June 1999, The Cologne European Council decided to provide the EU with the necessary means and capabilities to assume its responsibilities regarding a common European policy on security and defense. At the Helsinki Council meeting, in December 1999, EU member states established military "Headline Goals" to allow the EU to deploy up to 60,000 troops by 2003 for "Petersberg tasks". EU member states also created political and military structures including a Political and Security Committee, a Military Committee and a Military Staff. The crisis-management role of the WEU was transferred to the EU with the WEU retaining residual tasks (NATO 2023; Krause et al. 2003). In November 2002 at the NATO Summit in Prague, NATO members declared their readiness to give the EU access to NATO assets and capabilities for operations where the Alliance is not engaged militarily.

Cooperation further developed with the signing of the "NATO-EU Declaration on European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)" in December 2002. Specifically, the NATO-EU Declaration on ESDP reaffirmed the EU assured access to NATO's planning capabilities for its own military operations and reiterated the political principles of the strategic partnership: effective mutual consultation; equality and due regard for the decision-making autonomy of the EU and NATO; respect for the interests of EU and NATO member states; respect for the principles of the Charter of the United Nations; and coherent, transparent and mutually reinforcing development of the military capability requirements common to the two organizations (NATO 2023). As part of the framework for cooperation adopted on 17 March 2003, the so-called "Berlin Plus" arrangements provided the basis for NATO-EU cooperation in crisis management in the context of EU-led military operations that make use of NATO's collective assets and capabilities, including command arrangements and assistance in operational planning (Ibid). In effect, these allowed the Alliance to support EU-led operations in which

NATO as a whole was not engaged.

In October 2005, an Agreement on Military Permanent Arrangements establishing a NATO Permanent Liaison Team at the EU Military Staff and an EU cell at SHAPE was reached. As a result, in November 2005 a permanent NATO Liaison Team was set up at the EU Military Staff, while in March 2006, an EU cell was set up at SHAPE (Ibid).

### **Conflicts of Economic Interest**

Conflicts of interest between the EU and the United States have been evident in the field of trade and particularly in the agriculture sector. Therefore, it is not surprising that even the conflict in Ukraine has not managed to address the outstanding issues facing the two sides. In fact, the most recent Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiation round has not led to a successful conclusion.

However, economic disagreements between the EU and the United States have moved into important strategic sectors. For example, there have been disagreements regarding defense contracts. Specifically, in March 2010, the European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS) and its US partner pulled out of a contract to build air refueling planes worth \$35 billion. They had previously won the bid but it was rerun and EADS claimed the new process was biased towards Boeing. In fact, there was substantial opposition to EADS in Washington due to the ongoing Boeing-Airbus (owned by EADS) dispute. The two companies, Boeing and Airbus, are the major competing aircraft manufacturers, and both companies were accused of receiving forms of subsidy from the United States and from some of the EU member states respectively. Both sides criticized each other for doing so. In December 2020, the United States announced plans to impose additional tariffs on certain products from France and Germany, particularly aircraft parts and wines, in retaliation to tariffs imposed by the European Union.

On December 2, 2020, following the 2020 US Presidential elections, a joint communication published by the European Commission proposed a new agenda of improvement of the EU–US relations with the incoming Biden Administration, seeking for partnership in four major policy areas:

health response, climate change, trade and tech, and security. On March 5, 2021, following a call between EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and US President Joe Biden, the EU and the US agreed to suspend all the retaliatory tariffs linked to the Airbus and Boeing disputes for a 4-month period.

On September 20, 2021, EU Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen called “not acceptable” the treatment of France over the AUKUS submarine deal, when Australia, the United States and the UK negotiated a defense pact ditching a long-standing Australian agreement with France. Similarly, European Council President Charles Michel denounced a “lack of loyalty” on the part of the US. However, following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, EU-US differences were put aside.

Relations with China have posed another challenge to fruitful EU-US relations. According to the *National Security Strategy* documents, Washington views China as an economic threat and as a strategic rival (Simon 2023). In addition, according to US intelligence estimates, the Chinese military has been instructed to be prepared for an invasion of Taiwan by 2027. This explains the tough stance that President Trump initially and President Biden later took towards Beijing. In its 2016 *Global Strategy*, the EU declared its intention to “deepen trade and investment with China, seeking a level playing field, intellectual property rights protection, greater cooperation on high-end technology, dialogue on economic reform, human rights and climate action” (European Union 2016a: 18). However, in its *2022 Strategic Compass for Security and Defence*, the EU indicated that although China remained “a partner for cooperation”, it has now been elevated to an “economic competitor and a systemic rival” (European Union 2022: 38). Washington and Brussels still lack consensus on how to respond to hostilities East Asia. The US is likely to assist Taiwan, whereas EU member states have sent inconsistent signals about their intentions. However, the war in Ukraine brought Russia and China closer to each other. Simultaneously, the Russia-China alliance has brought the EU and the United States closer to each other and made them more eager than before to meet the challenges posed by China, their common strategic/systemic rival.

One of the most important strategic outcomes of the war in Ukraine

*One of the most important strategic outcomes of the war in Ukraine has been the counter effect of EU sanctions on Russia and the loss of access to Russia's energy resources.*

has been the counter effect of EU sanctions on Russia and the loss of access to Russia's energy resources. Economic sanctions caused the contraction of European economies and, most importantly, that Germany faces recession and de-industrialization. Unless the German Government finds ways to address the demands of German companies, many of them could decide to move their business operations to the United States. This would have a positive impact on the American economy. Moreover, since Germany has been the locomotive behind the European economic and trade power, German recession would further impact the economic situation in Europe. Most importantly, the reindustrialization of Germany and the European economic recovery would need access to significant energy resources. Thus, the United States is the country which could help the economic recovery of Europe but perhaps at a high price. This, of course, would further strengthen the American economy.

### ***NATO's Relevance and EU/German-Russian Relations***

One of the most important issues that raised warning flags in the United States was the relations between the EU and Russia, in general; and between Germany and Russia, particularly.

In its *2003 European Security Strategy* (ESS), the EU considered Russia as one of the partners that could provide stability in the Balkans (European Union 2003: 9). EES stated that the EU "should continue to work for closer relations with Russia, a major factor in our security and prosperity. Respect for common values will reinforce progress towards a strategic partnership (Ibid., 16). Contrastingly, in the United States, the ideas of Henry Kissinger and Zbigniew Brzezinski have been widely shared by the White House, the Department of State, and the Department of Defense. They argued against the belief that with the dissolution of the USSR, hostile intentions had come to an end and traditional foreign policy considerations no longer applied. Instead, Kissinger argued, "Russia,

regardless of who governs it, sits astride the territory which Halford Mackinder called the geopolitical heartland, and it is the heir to one of the most potent imperial traditions." Therefore, it was suggested that the United States should "maintain the global balance of power vis-à-vis the country with a long history of expansionism." (Kissinger 1994: 814).

Unlike Kissinger, George Kennan (1997) described NATO's first post-Cold War enlargement as a "strategic blunder of potentially epic proportions." He also opposed the War in Kosovo and the second round of NATO expansion expressing fears that both policies would worsen relations with Russia. He advised against any further NATO expansion eastwards as this would "inflame the nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic" opinions in Russia", and argued that "The Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies" (Ibid). Kennan was also bothered by ideas that Russia was "dying to attack Western Europe," explaining that, on the contrary, the Russian people had revolted to "remove that Soviet regime" and that their "democracy was as far advanced" as the other countries that had just signed up for NATO then" (Ibid).

Kissinger, on the other hand, pointed out to the centrality of NATO as a means to maintain the link between the United States and Europe (2014: 95) and argued for the need for NATO to expand eastwards to meet the future security challenges posed by Russia. In other words, the management of European security required to separate Russia from Europe.

After Russia, the second geopolitical threat which remained in Europe was Germany and its partnership with Russia. During the Cold War, Kissinger argues, both sides of the Atlantic recognized that,

"Unless America is organically involved in Europe, it would later be obliged to involve itself under circumstances which would be far less favorable to both sides of the Atlantic. That is even more true today. Germany has become so strong that existing European institutions cannot strike a balance between Germany and its European partners all by themselves. Nor can Europe, even with the assistance of Germany, manage [...] Russia all by itself." (Kissinger 1994: 821).

Thus, Kissinger believed that no country's interests would ever be served if Germany and Russia were to ever form a partnership in which each country would consider itself the principal partner. They would raise fears of condominium. Without America, Britain and France cannot cope with Germany and Russia; and "without Europe, America could turn ... into an island off the shores of Eurasia." (Kissinger 1994: 822). This meant that Germany should be separated from Russia and the cutting of energy dependency of Berlin on Moscow would be the means to achieve this goal. This explains President Trump's emphasis on how German-Russian relations and German energy dependence on Russia were undermining NATO as well as President Biden's commitment to destroy Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, if needed. Those American objectives were achieved during the war in Ukraine.

Although the EU's Report on the Implementation of the European Security Strategy indicated that stability in EU's neighborhood "would require continued effort by the EU, together with UN, OSCE, the US and Russia" it also noted that

"... relations with Russia have deteriorated over the conflict with Georgia. The EU expects Russia to honour its commitments in a way that will restore the necessary confidence. Our partnership should be based on respect for common values, notably human rights, democracy, and rule of law, and market economic principles as well as on common interests and objectives" (European Union 2008: 23).

This was the first time that Russia was perceived by the EU as a threat to European security.

In 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski argued that

"Europe and Asia are politically and economically powerful.... It follows that... American foreign policy must...employ its influence in Eurasia in a manner that creates a stable continental equilibrium, with the United States as the political arbiter.... Eurasia is thus the chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played, and that struggle involves geo- strategy – the strategic management of geopolitical interests.... But in the meantime, it

is imperative that no Eurasian challenger emerges, capable of dominating Eurasia and thus also of challenging America... For America the chief geopolitical prize is Eurasia...and America's global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained." (1997: 55)

This explains the geopolitical importance of Ukraine and Georgia and why a decision was taken to invite them to join NATO. This also helps us to understand why Russia considered the entry of those countries into NATO as a "red line."

### **NATO Burden-Sharing**

The issue of burden-sharing within the Alliance is not new. Actually, it was President Carter who first brought the issue to the forefront requiring European Allies to spend 5% of their GDP for collective defense purposes. Since then, some US presidents brought up the issue during various NATO summits. However, it was President Trump who applied pressure to the extent that he linked European Allies' contributions to NATO to the very existence of the Alliance (Truitt 2020). This, however, was not the first time that this blackmail strategy used by an American President. In fact, only three years after NATO was established in 1949, President Eisenhower threatened to withdraw all the US forces from Europe if the European Allies did not accept the creation of twelve German divisions as a means to increase the capacity of NATO to defend Western Europe against a numerically and conventionally superior Soviet Union.

The war in Ukraine has made it clear to the EU member states that if Russia needs to be confronted, additional investments should be made in the defense sector. Since the military depots of European Allies have been depleted - due to the transfer of military equipment to Ukraine - significant investments should be made not only to replace this equipment but also add to it considerably to meet the needs of European defense in case of a larger war in Europe. Thus, the war in Ukraine has almost automatically addressed the issue of burden sharing.

## EU-NATO Relations After the Russian Annexation of Crimea

NATO-EU cooperation has significantly expanded since 2014, building on three Joint Declarations as well as the *2022 NATO Strategic Concept* and the EU *2022 Strategic Compass*.

Specifically, in July 2016 at the NATO Summit in Warsaw, a “Joint Declaration” expressed the determination to give new impetus and new substance to the NATO-EU strategic partnership in light of common challenges. Areas for strengthened cooperation included: countering hybrid threats; operational cooperation including at sea; cybersecurity and defense cooperation; development of defense capabilities; defense industrial cooperation; exercises; military mobility; addressing issues pertaining to terrorism and WMD proliferation; and improving resilience civil preparedness and protecting critical infrastructure. On the basis of the mandate by the “Joint Declaration”, common sets of proposals were endorsed by the EU and NATO Councils in December 2016 and 2017. Altogether 74 concrete actions are under implementation in the seven areas (see list). Eight progress reports have been submitted highlighting main achievements and added value of EU-NATO cooperation in different areas (NATO 2023).

On 10 July 2018, the “Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation” underlined the importance of continued EU-NATO cooperation to address multiple and evolving security challenges as well as steps being taken by both organizations to strengthen capabilities in defense and security. European Allies also argued that the EU remains a unique and essential partner for NATO. They also discussed about taking further steps to implement the common set of 74 proposals, emphasizing the importance of the commitment to improving cooperation between the two organizations (Ibid).

The *2022 NATO Strategic Concept* – the Alliance’s core policy document, which sets NATO’s strategic direction for the coming years – also described the EU as a unique and essential partner for NATO and calls for an enhanced and strengthened strategic partnership (NATO 2022).

On 10 January 2023, the third “Joint Declaration on EU-NATO

Cooperation” highlighted the importance of EU-NATO cooperation in the context of the changed security environment following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and the upcoming increase in shared members (Ibid). Following the adoption of the *2022 NATO Strategic Concept* and the EU’s *2022 Strategic Compass*, the 2023 “Joint Declaration” aimed at strengthening and expanding the strategic partnership between NATO and the EU, building on unprecedented progress in cooperation between the two organizations since the previous declarations were signed in 2016 and 2018. The heads of the EU and NATO also resolved to address growing geostrategic competition, resilience issues, and the protection of critical infrastructure. Other priority areas of work include emerging and disruptive technologies, space, the security implications of climate change, and countering foreign interference and information manipulation (Ibid).

On 21 February 2023, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, and Ukrainian Foreign Minister, Dmytro Kuleba agreed to convene NATO, EU, and Ukrainian procurement experts to see what more can be done together to ensure Ukraine has the weapons it needs to defend itself against Russia’s aggression (Ibid). Finally, on 29 June 2023, the NATO Secretary General participated in the European Council meeting for discussions with the EU leaders about NATO-EU cooperation in the context of Russia’s aggressive war against Ukraine, as well as on broader common challenges (Ibid).

## Epilogue

This paper had two main purposes: first, to identify the issues dividing the EU and the United States; and second, to explore how the conflict in Ukraine has helped to address and shape EU-US relations and, as an extension, EU-NATO relations. The article examined the impact of American unilateralism on EU-US/NATO relations, the question of European “strategic autonomy”, the conflicts of economic interest between the United States and the EU and their effect on EU-US/NATO relations, the question of NATO’s relevance and the impact of EU/German-Russian Relations on EU-US/NATO relations, and the issue of NATO burden sharing. In doing so, it demonstrated how war in general,

and particularly the war in Ukraine, can help bridge intra-alliance political divisions and foster a stronger alliance. The article has argued that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has not only solidified EU-NATO relations but has also ensured US dominance and primacy within the transatlantic Alliance. Using the conflict in Ukraine as a case study, the article also sought to demonstrate how the militarization of international relations and actual wars allow a dominant military power in a coalition (e.g., US in NATO) to increase its diplomatic leverage and political influence vis-a-vis the other coalition partners as well as how political and economic differences among the coalition partners are either obscured or are settled, at least, in the short run.

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Dr. Stivachtis has published numerous journal articles and book chapters, as well as several books. He is currently the editor of the Critical European Studies book series (Routledge) and co-editor of the Athens Journal for Mediterranean Studies. His current service includes External Expert for the Research Executive Agency (REA) of the European Commission; Senior Advisor of the Center for European & Mediterranean Affairs (CEMA) of the Athens Institute for Education & Research (ATINER); Senior Advisor of the Research Institute for European and American Studies (RIEAS); and Advisory Board member of the Center for Intelligence and Security Studies, Bellevue University.



# Murky Waters: Quick Remarks About the French Political Crisis

Professor Manlio Graziano  
Sciences Po Paris, at la Sorbonne, France

**T**he upcoming European elections will seal Marine Le Pen's victory in France, an event that many treat as if it were the pivotal moment of the century. In reality, Le Pen's party had already secured victories in the two preceding European elections: in 2019, garnering 23.3 percent of valid votes (equivalent to 11.7 percent of the electorate, amid a 50 percent abstention rate), and in 2014, with 24.9 percent (translating to 10.4 percent of the electorate, amid a 57 percent abstention rate).

Two preliminary considerations must be made. Firstly, slightly more than one in ten voters opted for Le Pen's Rassemblement National (formerly the Front National), a meager score to label as a far-right "landslide." Secondly, voters, not just in France, exhibit little interest in the European Parliament, often using its election to "send a message" to their national governments, with scant concern about the future governance of the European Union. After all, a poll from a couple of years ago revealed that two-thirds of French citizens did not know who Ursula von der Leyen was, and three-quarters had never heard of Charles Michel.

It is highly probable that in June, Le Pen's party will surpass its previous European elections share, with polls indicating support ranging from 27 to 31 percent, and the collective far-right formations possibly reaching up to 37 percent of the votes. However, given an anticipated abstention rate again close to 50 percent, the so-called "landslide" would be determined by only 1.8 out of 10 French voters.

Nonetheless, the political problem is real. Instead of leading the country, political parties are being led by the moods of an electorate increasingly fearful of the future, an electorate increasingly inclined to rely on

politicians who offer simple solutions to complex problems. We need not delve here into the analysis of the root causes of this growing social anxiety. The international political situation would suffice to justify it, even though it is not the primary cause. Nor let us dwell on the obvious fact that simple solutions to complex issues are not solutions, and almost always exacerbate problems. Instead, let's direct our attention to the so-called "leaders" who have very often become "followers," frequently succumbing to the lowest, albeit understandable, self-preservation instincts of the population.

The 2017 election of Emmanuel Macron was a stroke of luck for him, or, more aptly put, a consequence of the stupidity of the party that was expected to secure victory, which stubbornly bowed to a candidate embroiled in a nepotism scandal, eventually leading him to a four-year prison sentence. Nevertheless, Macron was not just a president by default. What resonated positively with voters were his competence, his noteworthy experience despite his youth, and his substantial alienation from a gridlocked political system. Also resonating, perhaps, was his central idea, which can be summarized as: France is nothing without Europe.

The practical translation of these qualities has, to put it mildly, fallen short of expectations. Macron's Europeanism, while more resolute than that of his predecessors, has not significantly deviated from their vision of Europe as the continuation of France by other means—a vision that, when translated into practice, complicates Europe's trajectory rather than streamlining it. Macron's reform initiatives have been caught in the opposing pulls of the far right and far left, frequently aligning, as evident in their support for the yellow vest movement. These reforms

...what has most undermined Macron's credibility has been his tendency to be swayed by the fluctuating sentiments of the electorate, subordinating many of his original policies to a frenetic pursuit of consensus.

have transformed into mere semblances of reforms, ratified through institutional extra-parliamentary mechanisms. Moreover, Macron's competence has often manifested as an annoying emphatic vanity and overconfidence. However, what has most undermined Macron's credibility has been his tendency to be swayed by the fluctuating sentiments of the electorate, subordinating many of his original policies to a frenetic pursuit of consensus.

The "immigration law" was the latest masterpiece of the genre. Tracking the popular propensity for self-absolution—according to which it is always others, those from outside, who are the source of our problems—Macron has gone so far as to expand his majority on that specific issue to Marine Le Pen's far-right. So, it will come as no surprise if, in June, the far right enjoys electoral gains on the basis of a very simple argument: trust us, because we have been attacked and demonized for years for supporting what today the government finally does, and parliament approves, by a large majority.

Macron's latest attempt to regain support involves the replacement of Élisabeth Borne with Gabriel Attal as prime minister. It is important to bear in mind that the prime minister in France is just a fuse, that is, a device whose purpose is to protect the president by burning out in case of overloads or short-circuits. That will be Attal's main task as long as he remains prime minister. However, according to many, Attal has been chosen to be not only Macron's dauphin, but also a kind of Macron 2.0, in view of a 2027 presidential election in which the current Elysee tenant cannot run again.

As of now, however, the only qualities of the new prime minister that are vaguely reminiscent of the 2017 candidate Macron are his young age (which is not necessarily an asset) and his communication skills. His competence and strategic vision are yet to be proven. Thus far, using

the well-known Platonian metaphor, Attal has been a mere shadow of Macron's shadow, and a track record as a yes-man is hardly a guarantee of great individuality, even less of maturity. Moreover, during his tenure as a fuse, Attal may burn his chances. There is little doubt that the aspirants to the 2027 presidency, even from within his own government, will do their utmost to ensure that he burns out, thus ultimately helping Marine Le Pen who sits on the riverbank patiently waiting the corpses of her opponents to float past.

In a historical phase marked by escalating international tensions, soaring public debt, and looming crises, subservience to polls further complicates the predicament. Competence is often sold out for a plate of electoral lentils, leaving real problems unaddressed and worsening. While anything is possible in politics, the likelihood of Gabriel Attal righting the fortunes of France and Europe seems, at the present time, rather slim.

*Article was written 02/01/2024*

**Manlio Graziano, PhD**, teaches Geopolitics and Geopolitics of Religions at Sciences Po Paris, at la Sorbonne, and at the Geneva Institute of Geopolitics. He collaborates with the *Corriere della Sera* and with the geopolitical journals *Limes* and *Gnosis*. He founded and directs the Nicholas Spykman International Center for Geopolitical Analysis. He published several books including *What Is a Border?*, *Holy Wars and Holy Alliance: The Return of Religion to the Global Political Stage*, *Geopolitics of International Relations in the 21st Century*, and his latest book, *Disordine mondiale: Perché viviamo in un'epoca di crescente caos* (Milano, Mondadori, 2024).



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### Program

#### Day 1 – Monday June 24

10am-12pm CET

Prof. Manlio Graziano      Brief Introduction to Geopolitics as a Tool for Analysis of International Relations

2pm-2:30pm CET

Dimitri Neos      Welcome Speech to the Spykman Center's Summer School

3pm-5pm CET

Benjamin Sutherland      How to Write a Geopolitical Analysis

#### Day 2 – Tuesday June 25

10am-12pm CET

Prof. Petr Kratochvíl      Religions and Global Disorder

2pm-3pm CET – 1st Seminar

Sanne de Jong      The European Green Deal: EU's Great Power Strategy?

3 :30pm-4:30pm CET – 2nd Seminar

Giordani Dimitrov      Iran and Its Proxies in the Middle Eastern Crises

#### Day 3 – Wednesday June 26

10am-12pm CET

Prof. Stefano Feltri      How the Media present Crises and Wars

2pm-4pm CET – 3rd Seminar

Mariam Qureshi, Romios Stavros, Riya Shah, Alexander Vogt

A Working Group Experience: India between Ambitions and Possibilities

#### Day 4 – Thursday June 27

10am-12pm CET

Prof. Manlio Graziano      A Geopolitical Approach to the War in Ukraine

2pm-3:pm CET – 4th Seminar

Francesco Stuffer      Central Asia, the Next Bone of Contention between Russia and China

3:30pm-4:30 pm CET – 5th Seminar

Rocco Salvatori      The Editor's Toolbox: Strategies for Enhancing Geopolitical Analysis

4:30pm CET

Filippo Pallaroni      Closing Speech

Each lecture session will last for a duration of 2 hours. The first hour will be devoted to lecture, followed by an hour for discussion.

**For further information and registration:** [admin@spykmancenter.org](mailto:admin@spykmancenter.org) or scan:



# ADDRESSING CLIMATE CHANGE

# Formulating a Strategic Plan to Tackle Climate Change

Interview with Sir David King  
Climate Crisis Advisory Group, United Kingdom

**You have held several government posts, advising four UK Prime Ministers - Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Theresa May. In what is likely to be an election year in the UK, what would be your advice to the next Prime Minister on the top climate priorities?**

The current Prime Minister seems to be backing off from actions on climate change and I am expecting that Keir Starmer will be the next Prime Minister. My advice to him is to return to the all-party agreement made in 2008 which was to reduce emissions by 80% by 2050. Subsequently Theresa May made the commitment to reach net-zero by 2050.

These commitments have been developed in government policy since that commitment was made, but have gone through Parliament and the Climate Change Committee was established, which means that Parliament was setting challenges for each government, whatever their color. We are in the peculiar situation now where the Chair of the Climate Change Committee retired one and a half years ago, but we still haven't got a new chairman: this is up to the Prime Minister to confirm what the selection process produces as the replacement chair.

Keir Starmer is already committing to actions that would take us back to this original 2008 commitment. This is good, but not enough. The world is in a different place and the biggest difference is the asymmetry in temperature rises across the world. We've seen that the Arctic circle region is now heating up at 4 times the rate of the rest of the planet. In Greenland, we already have ice looking as if it is melting irreversibly. Even in 50 years, that means several metres of sea rise.

What we need to agree on, and this is what my advice would be to the next Prime Minister, is a major policy to reduce emissions. Second, to achieve long-term stability for humanity, we need to capture greenhouse gases at scale. A manageable future means bringing down the level in the atmosphere from 500ppm to approximately 350ppm. This means removing 10bn tons of greenhouse gases per year even to the end of the century. Third, how do we buy time so that our manageable civilization isn't destroyed before we reach the 350ppm threshold? To achieve that, we need to repair those parts of the climate system that have headed towards irreversible change. How do we retain Arctic Sea ice through the Arctic summer as well as the winter? Fourth, we must develop resilience in every part of the world. But this varies by location. Along coastlines, rising sea levels is an enormous challenge. For the whole world, food is also a major challenge: if we look at the third biggest rice producer in the world, Vietnam, the whole country is close to sea level. By mid-century, 80% of the country will be under seawater at least once a year. We're looking at massive potential loss of rice production and all sorts of challenges on a short timeline.

This is why the group that I run is called the Climate Crisis Advisory Group. This is a global crisis. So, I would take all of that to Keir Starmer and say what you must do, Prime Minister, is what Tony Blair did. And that is, do what you think every country should do. And then we're in a powerful position to persuade other countries to do it as well.

**Another area of your expertise is the energy transition. How effective do you think policies like the European Green Deal are? What further steps should be taken?**

*To get the market operating, you first must put government regulatory systems in place to allow it to compete with the mature fossil fuel industries.*

The EU Green deal is a continuation of policies since 2000. It was haphazard at that point, but it is important to understand that Britain, from 1997 onwards, put an obligation on electricity utilities to produce a certain percentage of their electricity from renewable sources. That percentage was increased every couple of years, with penalties if energy companies failed to meet targets. The utilities did this without complaint as they simply passed the costs on to the consumer.

The cost of renewable energy then was about ten times higher than it is now. But other European nations like Germany, Italy, and Spain followed suit. So, we had a number of European nations following this process and thereby creating an artificial market for renewables to produce electricity. As this artificial market has grown in volume, it has pulled renewable energy prices down dramatically.

Even in Britain, solar energy is cheaper than installing new fossil-fuel based energy systems. In terms of wind power, Britons seemed to get fed up with wind turbines construction on land, so we built turbines in the North Sea. You would think that would be much more expensive, but the outcome is the reverse. The UK brought over the engineers who were working with the fossil fuel industry in the North Sea to assist with wind turbine construction. These marine engineers knew how to use shipping to transport the components to each of these turbines. It meant that we could build the turbines with the longest blades in the world. Therefore, Britain has the most efficient turbines in the world - it turns out that it is cheaper than any other form of electricity.

To get the market operating, you first must put government regulatory systems in place to allow it to compete with the mature fossil fuel industries. But once you've got that in place you no longer need any form of subsidy. That's why the International Energy Agency is indicating that the most cost-effective new form of electricity production in most parts of

the world is now renewable energy.

In terms of further steps following the EU Green Deal, we need to deliver all the alternative technologies to fossil fuel technology. For example, electric vehicles. China is in the lead on electric vehicles: 30% of vehicles on Chinese roads are electric and China is producing photovoltaics for solar energy production for themselves and for virtually the whole world. Their product is extremely good, very difficult to compete with, and cheap. This could inspire the EU.

**You have emphasized the role of indigenous people in the climate crisis, both in terms of the impacts they face and the knowledge that indigenous peoples possess about climate mitigation and adaptation. How can we ensure that climate action is equitable so that vulnerable populations, such as indigenous communities, are not left behind in the climate transition?**

These people have been marginalized in every part of the world throughout our colonial history. Whether it is Australia's Aboriginal people or the Khoisan people in South Africa who live in the Kalahari Desert, wherever you go these people have been marginalized. In the North Pole, the Sámi and Inuit people have lived for thousands of years on the permafrost region. These people, still today, do not have rights to the lands they live on.

We are still very short of being equitable to indigenous people, and indigenous people have a cultural advantage to offer us. These are people who learn to live with their natural surroundings. It is a desecration to spoil those natural surroundings because that is what creates their ability to live. Our global economic system regards us as apart from nature, not a part of nature. We have put no value on what our ecosystems essentially deliver for us. And without the ecosystems, we come to an end. There is an important aspect of the cultural attribution of indigenous people that we must learn from: how do we learn that we are a part of nature?

Daoism is a philosophy of the Chinese people that is still taught in Chinese schools. An important part of Daoism is that one should care for nature. The Chinese Communist Party, which changed its constitution

when Mao Zedong died and introduced market principles, have changed it again to introduce a new principle, eco-civilization. This principle is defined as managing ecosystems as well as our human well-being with equal importance. This is a huge step forward. Because there is no afterlife in Chinese philosophy, they have the longest view into the future of any of our civilizations. Chinese people are happy to talk about the next 1,000 years, but we seem to be unable to look forward more than 50 years into the future. There is much that we can learn from this Chinese philosophy.

**You have proposed 4Rs to tackle the climate crisis - rapid emissions cuts, removing atmospheric carbon, repairing the Arctic, and greater resilience. What strategic plan would you present for moving ahead with adjusting for climate action?**

The strategic plan must adapt because times are changing. You might have come across Mission Innovation, a plan I developed with several economists in the UK because I felt that the COP process, with 197 nations negotiating an agreement, will tend always to go the Lowest Common Denominator. Mission Innovation tried to reverse that process by inviting countries to join if they believed in committing about \$30bn per year to technologies in the post-fossil fuel world.

In the two-year runup to the COP in 2016, I made 96 official country visits. Wherever I was, I raised the option for countries to join Mission Innovation voluntarily. 22 heads of governments, representing 75% of global GDP, committed themselves to the \$30bn a year target. We need willing nations to step up and make the strategic commitments that are required to take us forward in the 21st century.

Mission Innovation continues alongside the United Nations. The UN is critically important as it is proper democracy to have each nation represented in the decision-making. But if those nations include Russia, Saudi Arabia, and other change-resistant oil-producers, we will never reach the right decision. However, if we get other countries to come together with a coherent strategy for a manageable future, I believe that everyone else would fall into place.

That's my idealistic strategic approach, but there is something more

challenging. We have an economic system where greed is seen as valuable. Recent analysis shows that the top 5 wealthiest people have doubled their wealth since 2020 while the world is impoverished at the other end of the spectrum. We must move towards an economic system in which we understand there is the public good. The public good includes ecosystems, but also education, health, and everything that gives us a reasonable capacity to live. Then the market system can operate in the rest of the sphere. We must move ourselves into a much fairer world.

**As the scientific understanding of climate change becomes clearer, we have witnessed a rise in climate change denial and disinformation, particularly in the United States. What would you prescribe for tackling these false narratives?**

The fossil fuel lobby is very powerful in the United States and there is evidence that they have been spending more than \$1bn per year on this exercise of trying to explain that climate change is nonsense. The impacts of climate change are more severe, yet they are still successful. The fossil fuel lobby has had an enormous influence around the world. I have been fighting the official negotiators from the United States, who I feel were representing the fossil fuel lobby, until President Obama's second term.

Tackling climate change denial is only possible if there is greater public understanding of the nature of the crisis that we are in. The science community began putting this challenge to the world with Jim Hansen who, in 1988, spoke to a Senate Committee before the loss and damage from climate change that we experience today.

The accuracy of scientific predictions has improved over the years, with thousands of scientists dedicating themselves to the cause. Still, we are up against these lobbies. More information needs to get out there from those who do understand. That was the reason I set up the Climate Crisis Advisory Group, comprised of 16 members from 10 nations who represent the best of climate scientists. Over the past two-and-a-half years we have released 20 reports and in July last year we reached about 1 billion people. We're not doing too badly, but we must do much better.





**Sir David King** was the permanent Special Representative for Climate Change from September 2013 until March 2017. Sir David was previously the Government's Chief Scientific Advisor from 2000 to 2007, during which time he raised awareness of the need for governments to act on climate change and was instrumental in creating the Energy Technologies Institute.

He also served as the Founding Director of the Smith School of Enterprise and Environment at Oxford; was Head of the Department of Chemistry at Cambridge University 1993-2000 and Master of Downing College at Cambridge 1995 -2000.

Sir David has published over 500 papers on science and policy, for which he has received numerous awards, and holds 22 Honorary Degrees from universities around the world. Elected a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1991, a Foreign Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 2002 and knighted in 2003, Sir David was also made an Officier of the French Legion d'Honneur in 2009, for work which has contributed to responding to the climate and energy challenge.

# Using Technology to Address Climate Change: Exaggerated Expectations?

Interview with Dr. Duncan McLaren  
University of California, Los Angeles, United States

**The United Nations defines Net Zero as ‘...cutting greenhouse gas emissions to as close to zero as possible, with any remaining emissions re-absorbed from the atmosphere, by oceans and forests for instance.’ You’ve written there are many versions of Net Zero. Would you explain, including any ramifications related to them?**

The UN definition of net zero is one of the less problematic ones in circulation. However, it still leaves a lot of wriggle room, and the formal language of climate COP decisions remains even vaguer. I’d highlight three issues.

First, there is both constructive and tendentious debate over how ‘close to zero’ we can get, and which residual emissions are legitimate. Nitrous oxides from fertilizers and methane from rice paddies are genuinely hard to eliminate. Shipping, industrial chemicals, steel and cement might still generate significant emissions in 2050 even if the further spread of zero-carbon options can be anticipated. Air travel is typically seen as hard to abate, but one can question whether its rapid expansion is ‘essential’. And even though decarbonization of both power generation and surface transportation seems inevitable, both oil corporations and petro-states are claiming that net zero is somehow compatible with substantial continued fossil fuel exploitation and consumption, effectively and falsely implying that much fossil fuel use is impossible to eliminate.

Second, definitions of net zero as a *state* say nothing about the *pathway* to that state. Cumulative emissions are what matter for the end temperature. The difference between digging coal and pumping oil until, say, 2049, and then suddenly shutting off the taps; and cutting emissions as fast and as soon as possible from 2023 is huge in terms of net climate

impact. At a global scale, this would easily make the difference between stabilizing temperatures well below 2°C and as close to 1.5°C as possible, and blowing well past even the 2°C guardrail.

Third, there is also huge uncertainty over how much carbon removal might be practical, just and sustainable, and in what forms. Absorption by oceans and forests sounds pretty innocuous, but these ‘natural sinks’ are already overloaded, and the implications uncertain. Biological carbon removal methods compete for land, while engineered ones would compete for renewable energy. If residual emissions can be cut by 90-95%, there might be sustainable and just removals able to take up the slack. This would imply maybe 2.5-5 gigatons per year of additional, anthropogenic removals of CO<sub>2</sub>. But at present it seems many states and businesses expect 20% or more of current emissions to continue at net-zero, implying more than 10 Gt pa of removals just to balance continuing emissions. Achieving such levels of removals – if even possible - would likely impose high costs, environmental harms, and multiple injustices.

So *how* we define and pursue net-zero matters intensely for sustainability and justice. As I argue in my paper with Chris Armstrong, we need a rapid descent to a tight convergence with minimal residual emissions and minimal counterbalancing removals. That could spare some sustainable Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR) capacity to work on ‘drawdown’ – to return atmospheric Greenhouse Gas (GHG) concentrations to long-term safe levels, and ensure no subsequent temperature increases.

**What do you consider common myths, if any, concerning the use of tech/renewal energy and nature-based solutions to address decarbonization?**

There is a widespread problem of over-reliance on speculative technical responses – a broad political commitment, in Western countries at least, to market-led innovation policy which devalues and discourages, rather than facilitating behavioral and life-style changes.

There is a widespread problem of over-reliance on speculative technical responses – a broad political commitment, in Western countries at least, to market-led innovation policy which devalues and discourages, rather than facilitating, behavioral and life-style changes. Epitomized by actors such as Bill Gates, this Silicon Valley ideology leads both to delays in deploying existing technologies, and a delusional belief in the prospect of future technologies such as AI, fusion power, and geoengineering to address climate crisis. Having said that, a similar form of ‘magical thinking’ can often be seen amongst climate activists who tend to overestimate the potential of behavioral change and of so-called ‘nature based solutions’ like restoration of habitats such as forests, peatlands, and sea-grass beds. In my view, the scale and urgency of the climate challenge can only be addressed through radical systemic change. Cultural shifts can be widespread and rapid, but not unless incentives, messaging, technologies, and infrastructures are all aligned. Technology, behavior change, and nature-based measures can all contribute to the systemic transformation we need, but if the underlying system continues to rely on promoting growth and consumption, none of them will be enough ... and at present, technological measures in particular risk generating rebound effects or delays to systemic change that make matters worse.

A particularly worrying example of the problem is carbon capture and storage (CCS). As an end-of-pipe addition to power generation and some industrial carbon sources, it has been promised for decades, defending continued development and use of fossil fuels. Major corporations and petrostates still use promises of CCS as a smokescreen for continued fossil exploitation. Activists rightly label it a false solution and a

technology of procrastination. Yet in a transformed political economy, it could play a valuable transitional role in speeding decarbonisation of industries such as cement and chemicals. The polarised debate over CCS is spreading now to carbon dioxide removal (CDR) technologies. Essential for counterbalancing otherwise recalcitrant residuals such as emissions of nitrous oxide from fertilizer use, or methane from rice paddies, companies such as Occidental, and states such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE are making exaggerated claims about CDR as a means to resist the phase-out of fossil fuels. My past research has calculated that if such promises of CDR are taken seriously, but fail to deliver, this could result in up to 1.4°C additional global heating.. The wisest approach would be to aim for real zero emissions, while also working to develop CDR as a supplementary tool – not a substitute for mitigation.

**Some advocate the development of solar geoengineering to reflect a portion of sunlight away from the earth or increase solar radiation escaping away from the Earth to cool it. What are your thoughts on the realistic potential for it to curb climate change? Challenges and possible risks related to it?**

It would be fair to say that despite some promising modeling work using earth system models, no one knows whether solar geoengineering could help in practice, when considering the material, social, and political context. There are just so many uncertainties in the projected effects (such as uneven impacts on rainfall), the technical challenges in deployment, and particularly, in the security and geopolitical implications that make global agreement on solar geoengineering implausible. I've just attended the UN Environment Assembly, where countries couldn't even agree on how to gather information about solar geoengineering, never mind how to govern it! As a result, right now, I'd say that any claims about the possibility of using solar geoengineering should be discounted. As the recent Global Tipping Point review concluded: “We strongly caution against reliance on solar geoengineering ... or the expectation that this kind of approach will be available and politically acceptable in the future.” I worry that hopes pinned on such technologies simply fuel more delay in delivering systemic change to phase out fossil fuels and rapidly cut emissions (a problem called ‘mitigation deterrence’). There’s a case for doing more research, which could help reduce some of the uncertainties (while probably generating new ones) but it must be carefully regulated

and governed to minimize risks. Research based on idealized and implausible scenarios of deployment not only fuels delay, but also risks undermining the geopolitical agreement needed to build on the Paris Agreement and rapidly accelerate emissions cuts.

It's also clear that the market-led innovation model for climate action is entirely inappropriate for solar geoengineering and combines harmfully with ill-advised research. In 2023, a commercial US start-up, 'Make Sunsets', made headlines for trial releases of balloon-based geoengineering intended to justify marketing 'cooling credits' on voluntary carbon markets. The claims made by the company verged on the fraudulent, but they were apparently inspired by diverse pieces of academic research discussing the feasibility of such a dispersed launch mechanism, and possible 'exchange rates' for radiative forcing through greenhouse gases and reflective cooling. Even if such a project successfully delivered cooling, the mechanism of funding would mean that it automatically enabled continued emissions with an offsetting effect. In other words 'mitigation deterrence' would be inbuilt.

### **What roadmap would you propose to address climate mitigation and adaption?**

This is a very big question. But to suggest some broad strokes, the time for waiting and hoping for technological salvation is long past (if it were ever actually an option). Radical measures are essential in mitigation, adaptation, climate finance and carbon removal. Multilateral agreements and national policies should aim to deliver a suite of transformative approaches. A rapid phase out of fossil fuels. Transformation of agricultural systems to support low meat diets and regenerative agriculture techniques. Replanning and redesign of cities on the '15 minute principle' to dramatically cut needs for car use and ownership and to manage urban heat levels through better design and urban greening. Widespread habitat restoration led by local communities and Indigenous Peoples. Managed retreat in the face of rising sea levels. Reversal of global financial flows to deliver massively increased finance for clean energy, urban transit, forest protection, and adaptation on fair terms, including large sums in the form of reparations for past extractivism, and for ongoing loss and damage. Technology transfer on preferential and patent free-terms for carbon removal, clean energy and other essential

technologies. Industrial policies designed to rapidly grow essential industries, if necessary, within the public sector. And, research into safe, just and sustainable ways to use global or regional cooling techniques (e.g., for protection of vulnerable coral reefs).

In terms of carbon budgets, the heavy lifting will have to be done by mitigation, reducing global emissions by over 90%. The power sector will need to be carbon free. Surface transport will be largely electric powered, but with a focus on shared transit rather than individual electric vehicles. Buildings will be heated and cooled with zero-carbon electricity. Agriculture will have residual emissions, notably from fertilizer, but reduced animal raising will mean less methane, and agricultural land management will incorporate carbon removal techniques such as enhanced weathering and agroforestry. Heavy industry will also likely have residual emissions, counterbalanced by the deployment of engineered carbon removal techniques. Together forms of carbon removal at maximum might be equivalent to 10% or so of today's emissions. Further climate impacts remain inevitable, and thus deals on finance for adaptation and loss and damage will be critical, as will improved freedom of movement for those in the most vulnerable locations.

Underpinning all of these is a case for systemic transformation in the global political economy to ensure that climate measures work to empower, not further burden, disadvantaged, precarious, and vulnerable groups in both the global South and global North. This requires international alliance building between progressive actors to resist and reverse the current trends towards authoritarian, anti-environmental populism and nationalism, and instead to extend action on decolonization and climate justice. As the recent report on global tipping points concluded, in the face of tipping events that will impact climates for millennia, the only reasonable responses are those which drive social transformation towards radical emissions reduction. And delivering such responses starts with global climate justice.



**Duncan McLaren** is a Postdoctoral Climate Intervention Fellow in Environmental Law and Policy at UCLA School of Law. His research lies in climate politics and governance, especially with respect to geoengineering technologies and interventions. He previously worked as a Research Fellow and Professor in Practice at Lancaster University (UK) focusing on the security politics of climate engineering, and on governance of net-zero and the role of carbon removal techniques.

He received his first class B.A. in Geography from Cambridge University (UK), and also holds Master's degrees in Environmental Policy (University of London) and Business Administration (Cambridge). He worked for many years in environmental advocacy, most recently as Chief Executive of Friends of the Earth Scotland from 2003 to 2011. His Ph.D. at Lancaster University examined the justice implications of climate geoengineering.

Dr. McLaren's publications on climate politics, environmental justice, sustainable cities and more include books with Routledge/Earthscan and MIT Press, and papers in *Nature Climate Change*, *Global Policy*, *Energy Research & Social Science*, and *Anthropocene Review*, among others. His personal research website can be found at [www.duncanmclaren.net](http://www.duncanmclaren.net).





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# Critical Minerals for the Energy Transition

Interview with Olivia Lazard  
Carnegie Europe, United Kingdom

**Minerals such as lithium, cobalt, and nickel are critical to renewable energy technologies. With this, however, are potential ecological impacts. Would you discuss environmental issues that can arise from the extraction through the distribution process?**

The current thinking is that, to decouple our economies from fossils, we need to recouple with mineral extraction. In order to create a clean tech architecture including solar panels, batteries, and grids, we need minerals such as copper, lithium, graphite, and manganese. There are many different supply chains involved in this, as opposed to supply chains of the fossil fuels era, mostly composed of coal, gas, and oil.

This new era means dozens of different supply chains, requiring different types of extraction according to the reserve qualities and reserve specifications, and eventually, with the minerals assembled into clean tech. For the moment, there are a number of clean tech being created on the back of mines that have already existed for a few decades. Based on projections from the International Energy Agency and others, to meet the necessary ore volume requirements for the energy transition, there needs to be exponential growth of mining projects and the capability to process these minerals.

There is no single agreement about how many mines are necessary

We are at a juncture in human and planetary history where we need to understand the energy transition against a backdrop of larger issues.

for what type of energy transition scenario. There are some people, particularly in Europe, who argue for demand reduction scenarios. An example of this is less extraction of lithium, but with a fairly constant extraction of copper, because it's a really difficult mineral to substitute. However, looking at projections, for example, from benchmark minerals for battery-related demand, we may be headed towards a 300-plus number of mines we need to create within the next decade or fifteen years. It is rather unclear that the finance is there for the growth of mining projects. This is a danger in and of itself that needs to be tackled very quickly so as not to derail our energy transition, which is absolutely critical for a climate-safe future. But in order to finance the right projects, we need to shed some lights on potential risks associated to mining with modern planetary, ecological, and international security stakes.

What risks are those? Let's talk about a few of them. Traditionally, we've looked at the impact of mining from a fairly horizontal, static viewpoint. We examine the size of the open pit or the actual mine, the impact on water pumping or water pollution, and the impact on biodiversity. All of this leads to developing an outlook on the impacts of mining for the area of operation.

We are at a juncture in human and planetary history where we need to understand the energy transition against a backdrop of larger issues. Not only organizing a new energy transition, but we're coupling that energy transition with a digital and technological revolution, which opens up a fourth industrial horizon, or revolution. The latter is at the heart of systems rivalry, which is now escalating in war in some places. The green, digital, technological and military material, and energy requirements are all very heavy, particularly when they are extracted on a planet which is already



in a state of ecological overshoot and ecological exhaustion. This has implications in terms of the quantity of materials we aim to mine – the full picture of which is not clear as mentioned before. Shedding light on sectorial demand is really important today so as to prioritize and be more granular vis à vis resource allocation.

And here is another layer – it is not just how much to mine, but where exactly to mine. Some critical ecosystems around the globe simply can't stomach any type of anthropogenic activity today. If they lose their ecological integrity, they may set off tipping points or be associated to further biophysical imbalance. Those places need to be specifically identified. Otherwise, we run the risk of mining in several places across the world: in the deep seas, grasslands, rainforests, or water-stressed areas. This is going to have not just local impacts but if you take in the aggregate picture, it may actually amount to having very real impacts on the geophysics and biochemics of the planet.

This is what we're currently trying to analyze at the University of Exeter. The ecological costs of the energy transition have never been assessed. Neither the IPCC, the IPBES, nor any recognized institutional working group has ever looked into it. Our group is not only examining the footprint from a local perspective on a planet that is already in ecological sensitivity and planetary boundary overshoot but also looking at the aggregate picture of the energy transition. We are facing a situation where we need to be both fast in terms of how we accelerate towards the decarbonization era, but also be astute and agile as to how we do it from an economic, ecological, social, and political perspective.

**You have expressed concern about potential conflict, instability, and security issues surrounding some states with large deposits of key minerals for renewal energy. Would you expand?**

We're dealing with a very dynamic situation because there's a lot of interest around critical minerals at the moment, lots of exploration, and new scientific discoveries about where potential or expanded reserves are located. A lot of quality deposits are located in countries of the so-called Global South, including Latin America, Africa, and Central Asia. In addition, there are areas such as the deep seas and the Arctic, which is

increasingly being considered an opening area for countries that have access to it as a result of melting ice caps.

When you look at the implications of terrestrial reserves within the Global South, some countries are better positioned to handle global competition between China, Russia, the US, Europe, Middle Eastern countries, and others. For example, the current wave of investment going to Latin American countries such as Chile, Argentina, and Peru, countries that have been at the heart of an extractive set of industrial waves over the last 200 years. They have built competencies that are a bit more developed in terms of how to handle the consequences of extraction and how to partially handle some of the political and social pressures related to them.

This does not mean there are no problems. Indigenous communities are particularly concerned about the future of extraction. But, for example, if you look at Chile's decision to nationalize the copper industry decades ago and now to replicate the model for the lithium industry, its apparent that there is an ability to invest in the mining and extractive sector with a set of governance and policies designed to try to limit the pressures of industrial activities. At the very least, efforts to organize a socio-economic distribution system exist around them, however contested they may be.

Outside of countries that are substantially better equipped institutionally, you have more fragile countries. Let's look at Madagascar. It is a country that is a bit of an aberration in terms of socioeconomic development because, in 2024, its absolute poverty levels remain at about 80% for the national average in terms of population. It has a high level of multi-dimensional fragility from governance, ecological, and socio-economic perspectives. The relationship to governance is very fraught with a lot of difficulties related to both levels of development but also with the way there's been capture within the government. In their 2018 election, for example, several presidential candidates were supported by Russian oligarchs. This included the current president, Mr. Rajoelina, as well as the former president. This means that when some candidates are supported by foreign forces, it flips the accountability relationship. Presidents who are elected nationals thanks to foreign influence and support are not accountable to their population, but to foreign forces that

have a specific agenda in mind. Around the same time as the presidential election happened, the only national mine in Madagascar, a chromite mine called Kraoma, had two important quarries and reserves sold to Russian companies. Those companies are said to have connections with the Wagner universe, the mercenary company that has been active in other parts of Africa in providing securitized services to African political figures, exploring mineral resources etc. This company is now known to have served as direct foreign policy arm of the Kremlin, in spite of previous narratives denying links between the company and the central Russian power.

This is an interesting case because it demonstrates there are geopolitical forces actively invested within a number of extractive supply chains related to the energy and digital transition. It's not just for purely business reasons. When looking at the energy or technological transition, there is a geopolitical component concerning a potential struggle over the balance of power. That creates different dynamics from an international perspective because there are competition arcs between big geopolitical blocks, such as the US and China or Europe and Russia.

The competition can take place over a number of different things. Part of that is the supply chain from extraction to processing to export. This provides the ability to control different assets that will become particularly useful in the future as there is a transition toward a decarbonization era. Different meta-models are created in terms of what are the societal models that these different blocks of fighting for, what they are using the critical minerals for, and what is in the geopolitical proposition attached to that. In other words, critical mineral supply chains are part of a rivalry of systems and a systems of rivalry. They are both means of power competition, and they are instrumental to produce technologies that are transformative for how power will be exercised in the future. When you look at it from this lens, you realize as a result that critical mineral supply chains are a lens into a permeating geopolitical competition.

In some cases, this competition can produce or contribute to violence in countries of the Global South, which has geopolitical repercussions in return, and which has dramatic human consequences. There are some countries where pre-existing levels of fragility or conflict may run the risk

of being protracted or worsened as a result of the energy transition rather than solved as part of the energy transition, or new forms of violence may be created.

Ukraine, for example, is a country that is particularly endowed with minerals. There may be some links between the natural mineral endowment of Ukraine and the war of aggression that Russia launched against it. The conflict began about six months after a strategic partnership was struck between the EU and Ukraine for the industrial transition related to the energy transition. What we're observing right now is essentially a world in the process of re-metabolization in terms of economic power, geopolitics, and international relations. This will result in a different kind of international fabric on the other side of the energy and digital transition.

### **A major player in rare minerals acquisition is China. Do you have any concerns that its efforts and actions could prove problematic?**

Again, it's a moving picture. China originally had a natural endowment in earth reserves of very good quality. On the back of these reserves and the extraction potential, they gained knowledge across the supply chain: improving processing, improving manufacturing, and improving technologies. China is a mind-boggling force when it comes to the installation of clean tech, not just within the country, but also the export potential China has within the energy transition. So, that's not a concern. This is a great public good that China is providing the world. They had a vision years ago that has allowed them to become a first-mover in the energy transition.

However, there are concerns about what China is projecting in terms of power capacity on the back of its geoeconomic capacity. There have been cases starting in 2010 where China was in a position to, and willing to, weaponize supply chains for political gains. The first time this happened was in a dispute between China and Japan.

This behavior has continued over the last few years, although it's important to note that China is partly responding to what it perceives as aggressive behavior coming from the US. China has restricted exports

of germanium and gallium which are important for clean technologies as well as military equipment. There is a capacity for China to weaponize supply chains that are essential for critical industries from clean tech to digital to military capacities across the world. This ensures that dependencies around critical supply chains can potentially be used to quiet some criticisms over issues like Taiwan, Hong Kong, the treatment of dissidents who decided to leave China and become vocal against it, or the treatment of Uyghurs within China.

If the weaponization of supply chains by China is extrapolated over time, it creates a precedent for matters that may become increasingly strategically problematic. Economic interdependencies that were the backbone of the so-called peace dividend for decades are now being used as a chip in a rather concerning escalation of competition. This is turning into systems rivalry and there are a lot of question marks about what systems rivalry leads to in terms of international norms, human rights regimes, tech-enabled political control, or other forms of violence. Again, to qualify this point fully, China may have demonstrated cases where its attitude towards human rights is concerning, but China is not the only country doing so. This is the problem with systems rivalry – actors engage in a race to the bottom, which eventually leads to closing down spaces that are essential for the establishment of humane, balances and effective political-economic institutions. This is of great concern at a moment when climate change comes at humanity with a rage, and necessitates intelligent collective responses.

Weaponization of supply chains is also the result of competition that, over time, can rise to a strategic level and touch on types of war. Human security, international security, and international stability then suffer as a whole because of behaviors that create a race to the bottom. A degradation of the geopolitical order eventually may lead to war, human rights offenses, and grave international offenses on all sides. In the worst of cases, it may lead to returns of totalitarianism – something Europeans are unfortunately all too familiar with, and should therefore dedicate their most intense efforts to fighting.

**What policies and guidelines do you recommend for balancing decarbonization efforts with possible pitfalls encountered through the process of obtaining needed renewable energy minerals?**

Initial efforts should be concerned with how we conceptualize, assess, and qualify ecological costs of the energy transition-fourth industrial revolution. For the very first time, this allows us to shed some light on the fundamental tensions that exist in planetary security. The framework of planetary boundaries and the rates of climate change acceleration demand reducing energy and material consumption of the world, particularly in the Global North countries. This would work to reduce the global planetary energy imbalance and start tackling climate change and other types of ecological overshoots at the source.

If we only follow the planetary framework, we have to completely reorganize a relationship to energy and therefore, the type of economic modeling that we follow. This is technically based on the grow and expand model. Many supporting the growth model claim we're becoming more efficient year by year with energy and economic productivity. The expand model brings a different aspect, that even if we become more efficient, we actually keep on expanding spatially and, in terms of our overall consumption of energy, rather than reducing it in line with planetary boundaries. This is part of what we call the Jevons paradox: if you become more efficient at something, you use more of that something. Efficiency gains are therefore outweighed by overall use of the technology or behavior at hand.

Taking into account these planetary security aspects, if we were really serious, we would go on a trajectory to rein in global material and energy-related economic footprints. The problem is that, within the international framework that we have, the grow and expand model is related to how the balance of power is dynamically moving over time and is somewhat maintained. Therefore, how international security, however brittle, can be created. This necessitates more extraction, more use of energy, more growth and expansion of national and domestic economies, and the global economy as a whole.

So, shedding light on this fundamental tension and the security paradigm shift that needs to happen is the very first step. That's why our group at the University of Exeter want to provide insight on the ecological cost of the fourth industrial revolution and initiate geopolitical literacy over these ecological costs.

Then, from the planetary perspective, there is the question of whether or not we can determine and legally protect regions in the world that really shouldn't be touched, mined, or expanded however great the quality of the ore is or however great the soil quality is for agricultural purposes. The lifeline of humanity depends on places such as the Congo basin, the Amazon basin, and the deep seas. Certain places in these ecosystems are too fragile to disturb, and too important to lose – this goes for all of us humans living on the planet – regardless of our nationality or belief system.

Beyond ecological and planetary security conditions, supply chains need to be diversified at extraction and processing levels. And the beautiful thing here is that supply chain reorganization with countries of the global south provide a direct link to discuss climate and ecological security, economic diversification, research and technological partnerships, energy interdependency partnerships, etc. The strategic partnerships that a number of Global North countries discuss with Global South countries are a new entry point to reinvent collective security. The energy and digital transitions are both a risk and opportunity. What's important is to identify what risks may manifest and how, and how to establish prevention and management plans around them in a way that creates mutually reinforcing conditions for international security in a climate disrupted age, and an age of planetary risks.

The rationale behind the project we started at Exeter is to illuminate this narrative. Then we have to start reckoning with the fact that we're now entering uncharted territory when it comes to security. All countries in the world may eventually reckon with the fact that we may need to have an international negotiation over energy and material extraction. This will especially be the case if climate disruptions start destabilizing the global economy and international security system, while at the same time, clean tech deployment fail to materialize in time and with safe extracting conditions at the basecamp of supply chains.

That is a new progress line that offers a different type of scenario compared to the race to the bottom scenario, which is still a possibility. But on the other side of this race to the bottom, we have little information about what it may look like. By undertaking the fourth industrial

revolution, which says that its goal is to solve the climate crisis and herald the new era in terms of economic intervention, we may very well accelerate the climate crisis below ecological services out of boundaries and provisioning for the stability of complex human civilizations. We may create extensive and unprecedented levels of human suffering in quantitative and qualitative terms. We may also create a world in which geopolitics function in a zero-sum competition game over climate niches.

This is a very dystopian future. Before we reach that, we still have a very small window of opportunity. If we start tackling the root problems and face up with the reality of security dilemmas, which have existed forever in the history of international relations, then we may start evolving into a different type of global governance system. This is about managing relationships between countries or regions, which are themselves changing but also managing those relationships and our relationship with the planet.

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# Need for a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty

Interview with Tzeborah Berman  
Chair, Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative

## What are your impressions of COP28, held in Dubai last year?

In a lot of ways, COP 28 was both historic and completely inadequate for what we need to address the severity of the climate crisis. One of the reasons I think that this COP was historic is that for the first time, the conversation on fossil fuels was dragged center stage in the climate negotiations. It almost seems crazy that it was the first time we are having a real conversation about fossil fuel phase out at a COP. But it was the first time.

My first COP was in Bali. I talked to decision-makers about how we need to constrain the production of oil. People treated me like I was crazy. Many decision-makers, academics, and ministers said, 'Fossil fuel production is not a climate issue, we only deal with emissions.' That is the same reaction to the conversation even one year ago. So, this COP represented a historic shift in the climate policy discussion, a recognition that fossil fuels are the primary cause of the climate crisis. Also, acknowledgment that by just focusing on emissions reduction and refusing to address the need to phase out the production of fossil fuels and plan for how we phase out fossil fuels, we were not getting to the heart of the problem.

COP 28 opened up a huge conversation and we're starting to see the benefits. Now it's harder for nation-states that don't want to take ambitious action or companies who refuse to ensure absolute emissions and production decline to hide behind concepts of net zero or modeling that includes overestimation of technologies to reduce emissions. New questions are being asked of fossil fuel decision-makers that don't leave them as much room to hide: 'Are you going to increase the production of

oil, gas, and coal? When are you going to decline it? What's the timeline of the phase out?'

## As the 2015 Paris Agreement is an international treaty on climate change, you have been a proponent of a similar, fossil fuels treaty among nations. What would such a treaty entail?

It's shocking that the Paris Agreement doesn't include the words oil, gas, coal, or fossil fuels. We know that they are responsible for 86% of emissions trapped in our atmosphere today and causing an increase in fires, floods, and extreme weather. Yet, there aren't mechanisms to constrain the production of fossil fuels in the Paris Agreement. Just as most climate policies for the last thirty years, it focuses just on the demand side, not on the supply side. There are almost no other global issues in history where we would only look at the demand and not the supply in trying to address the problems. For example, consider tobacco, CFCs, and the Montreal Protocol.

The Paris Agreement has a commitment from nation-states to meet a scientific target of limiting global average temperature increase to 1.5 degrees (C). It has significant mechanisms to help and encourage

*The fossil fuel treaty would have agreements to stop expansion everywhere. Secondly, it would have mechanisms inside of it to manage the wind-down of fossil fuel production. The third pillar of the treaty is fast-tracking solutions to ensure a just transition is equitable and fair.*

countries to reduce emissions, but it doesn't include ways for countries to collaborate in reducing production. That's what the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty would do and act as a complementary initiative to the Paris Agreement.

The treaty would basically do three things. First, it would have agreements inside of it for countries to stop the expansion of fossil fuel production. Currently, we're not only unsuccessful in reducing fossil fuel production, we're growing it. We're on track to produce 110% more oil, gas, and coal than we could ever burn under a 1.5-degree scenario. Every day we spend billions of dollars to extract more fossil fuel sources that we know we can't use if we want to meet our climate targets. The fossil fuel treaty would have agreements to stop expansion everywhere. Secondly, it would have mechanisms inside of it to manage the wind-down of fossil fuel production. The third pillar of the treaty is fast-tracking solutions to ensure a just transition is equitable and fair. That's the key.

Currently, who decides who's going to produce fossil fuels? The markets do. There's no justice or equity baked into the markets. The fossil fuel treaty would have agreements between countries about who gets to produce what fossil fuels and how much over what period of time.

The majority of oil and gas planned expansion for the next five years globally is in the United States. However, the U.S. has already benefited greatly from the production of fossil fuels and has contributed greatly to the climate crisis that we're in. If the United States takes up most of that carbon budget, that means other countries can't produce fossil fuels and their economies don't get to benefit from that.

The even bigger problem is that every country wants to be the last barrel sold. They know we need to use less and we need to produce less but they're all racing to produce more. For example, countries are drilling for more oil just to feed their debt. Ecuador is drilling for more oil in the heart of the Amazon not because they want that oil, not because they don't believe in climate change, but because they don't have a choice because they need to feed their debt.

The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty could have debt forgiveness included in some agreements to keep carbon in the ground. There

could be trade agreements between countries to alleviate the economic pressure that leads to more fossil fuel production. Those are some of the mechanisms that we're looking at within a fossil fuel treaty.

To summarize, the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty would be an agreement between nation-states to stop the expansion and manage the wind-down of fossil fuels in a way that is equitable and fair.

**You have been a long-time activist for environmentalism and the progression of green energy, not only dealing with governments but corporations as well. What major issues have you encountered to promote the control of fossil fuel production?**

When I started in this work, I was pretty naive about the influence of the fossil fuel industry. I had experiences over the previous decade of my career working in forest conservation creating agreements with people within the forest and logging industries. In that work, I discovered that many who worked on the other side of the issue got into forestry because they loved forests. I found unlikely allies in them and was able to create agreements that were very strong because they included environmentalists and scientists in industry. When I started working on climate change and fossil fuels, I approached it in the same way. I met with the CEOs and senior management of oil companies to try and understand why they weren't they reading the climate science. What was their plan?

I found some good people in the fossil fuel industry who are stuck in bad systems. However, what I underestimated was the power of the fossil fuel industry in trying to influence policy to maintain their profit margins. These are the most profitable companies in history. The fossil fuel industry has made \$2 billion a day every day for the last fifty years. Right now, the fossil fuel industry, despite having the most profitable companies on the planet, is receiving the most handouts from governments.

The IMF reported last year that \$7 trillion in subsidies went to fossil fuel companies. That's the \$13 million a minute in taxpayer money going to the fossil fuel companies in subsidies. There is a powerful incentive to maintain that profit margin from a very small percentage of people on the planet. They justify it by saying they know the world has to use less

fossil fuels, but as long as the world is using fossil fuels, it might as well be theirs. Each one of them is trying to produce more and get more of the marketplace at the moment in history when we need to be producing less.

We now have solutions in renewable energy and electrification to replace fossil fuels. However, our policies are constantly being weakened in large part by the influence of the fossil fuel industry. We've seen that over and over again in academic studies and lawsuits that are happening around the world. The oil and gas companies knew about climate change fifty years ago and knew their products were the cause of it. They hid that. They denied it. They funded denial. They delayed the implementation of policy. They continue to do that through their influence every day.

We saw that at COP 28, where the majority of countries supported a fossil fuel phase out and stronger language in the text than what we got. But the countries who stand to benefit the most from production, who all had oil and gas executives on their national delegations, are the ones who fought to weaken the language to ensure that it didn't call for a decline in fossil fuel production and ensure the language continued to recognize the role of transition fuels, which is just a way of getting social acceptability to the continued expansion of gas and LNG.

When I started working on the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, what I discovered is that many treaties have been developed by a coalition of the willing, a small group of countries who wanted to have a very high bar in the rules and regulations that developed the treaty using voting rules that ensured the treaty would be binding by linking it to trade agreements and tax agreements and other mechanisms for it to be binding.

The Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty is designed on that basis. Right now, we have 12 countries that have endorsed it and more are going to join this year. That group of countries will be a high ambition group, a block of nations that will design rules necessary to stop the expansion of fossil fuels and manage a wind-down. Even though some of the bigger countries, like the US and Saudi Arabia, may never join that treaty, what I learned from other treaties is when there is a high ambition group setting out strong standards, those standards can become a social norm in foreign policy even for countries that never sign. For example, the US

never signed the prohibition on nuclear weapons or the landmines treaty, but they stopped stockpiling them because it became unacceptable. You can't keep growing fossil fuel projects and say you're a climate leader. That's what we want to happen with the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty.

One of the weaknesses of COP 28 in Dubai, and the COP process as a whole, is that it's designed to be a consensus of the countries that stand to benefit from the status quo. With the rules right now, consensus must be gained from 190 countries to change the process. Thirty years ago, Saudi Arabia, in the climate negotiations, made sure that the process for the Conference of Parties, the United Nations Climate Change Negotiation, would be one of consensus and not one of voting. They did that because if it's a consensus process, then any country, even a major fossil fuel developing country like Saudi Arabia, can stop an agreement from moving forward. The result is, that for thirty years, climate negotiations have reflected the lowest common denominator, the weakest agreement. Moreover, the treaty is non-binding. I recently had this conversation with former Vice President Al Gore who's proposing that the COP rules change.

The fossil fuel industry's influence on our political decision-makers, their ability to weaken and delay climate policy at a national level and an international level, is the greatest barrier today to the security of the planet.

### **How would you characterize the current state of renewable energy?**

Exciting. Technology is growing far faster than anyone expected it to be. There have been more technological advances in the last couple of years than there have been in the last twenty. Renewable energy today is cheaper. It's cheaper than at any other time in our history. It's far cheaper than fossil fuels. It is also now available at scale around the world.

Of course, there are other major technological breakthroughs that we hope will continue to happen and need to happen. We can't currently replace 100% of the uses of fossil fuels, but we can get pretty close. A lot of people will look at renewable energy, electrification, and technology



for battery storage and say, 'We still have problems with air travel.' But air travel is only 2% of global emissions. If we implement the renewable energy potential that we have, which is massive, many studies say that we have the potential to almost achieve 100% renewable energy globally. By implementing those systems and developing the infrastructure to support those systems, then we could replace almost all of our fossil fuel use today.

The problem is that the atmosphere doesn't care if we build a solar farm. Ultimately, what the atmosphere cares about is whether or not we're reducing the amount of carbon that's going into the atmosphere and getting trapped there. Even though we are producing more and more renewable energy and related infrastructure every day, and see more commitments to renewable energy and infrastructure, unless we agree to reduce fossil fuels, the benefits from green technology are not going to save us. That's why it's essential that as we build renewable energy and infrastructure for electrification, we are simultaneously stopping the expansion of fossil fuel production and infrastructure, winding it down, and decommissioning it.

### **What can the average person do to positively impact climate change efforts and green energy?**

To get involved. I invite people to make the fossil fuel treaty their own. It's an idea and the reason it's picking up traction around the world is because hundreds of thousands of people are figuring out how they can engage with it. People should write to their prime ministers, presidents, and members of government. People are organizing teachers and scientists to support the fossil fuel treaty. They're getting their city councils to pass motions.

In fact, California just passed a motion. We have no staff there. That happened because a group of individuals rallied around the idea and just did it. This is a movement that is growing around the world in churches, cities, and states, and it is forcing decision-makers to address this critical and urgent issue of constraining fossil fuel production and putting all of our efforts into building that clean energy and renewable energy. That's critical because, over the years, we have come to see ourselves

more as consumers than as citizens. We are told that our job is just to buy a bike instead of a car or save up for a Prius or a Tesla or put on a sweater and turn down heating. There is no question that there are things we can change in our lifestyle and we should do everything we can to live sustainably but we need to see ourselves as citizens and not just as consumers.

Our elected officials work for us. It's more important for people to pick up the phone and call their elected member of parliament, call the office of their elected official, write a letter, or organize petitions than it is for people to worry about whether or not they should be eating bananas or wine with a large carbon footprint. The idea of the personal carbon footprint is an idea made famous by BP twenty years ago. The oil company has wanted us to feel guilty about our fossil fuel use and for the onus to be on us instead of them for producing the products.

I think the most important thing that people can do today is to organize in their communities to make sure their elected officials know that they want them to act on constraining fossil fuels and climate change, and that it's important to them. Our politicians will spend time on the issues they think voters care about and that's why it's up to us to make sure they know we care about this.



**Tzeborah Berman** BA, MES, LLD (honoris causa) has been designing advocacy campaigns and advising governments for over 30 years. She is the International Program Director at Stand.earth and the Chair and Founder of the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative. Tzeborah publishes and speaks widely on fossil fuels and climate change. She is the author of *This Crazy Time: Living Our Environmental Challenge*, published by Random House.

For six years she was the Executive Director of the Tarsands Network Strategy tasked with developing strategies for pipeline and tarsands campaigns and related grant dockets for philanthropic foundations. She has also held positions advising the British Columbia government and in Alberta Co-Chairing the Oil Sands Advisory Working Group tasked with making recommendations to implement climate change policy in the oilsands.

Dr. Berman holds an honorary doctorate from the University of British Columbia and was an adjunct professor at York University for 5 years. In 2019 she was awarded the Climate Breakthrough Award of \$2 million dollars to develop a bold new global climate strategy and in 2021 she gave a widely viewed **TED Talk** presenting the case for a global treaty to phase out fossil fuels.

# Challenges to Adopt Clean Innovations

Interview with Dr. Gbemi Oluleye  
Imperial College London, United Kingdom

**An outcome of COP28 was an agreement to transition from fossil fuels energy systems and achieve Net Zero by 2050. What are your thoughts on the agreement?**

Transitioning away from fossil fuels is a pragmatic step toward reducing global demand for these resources. While specifying a percentage reduction in fossil fuel demand by each country would have been more impactful, I believe this agreement sets a positive direction. Before committing to a complete phase-out of fossil fuels, it's essential to evaluate the impact of reducing demand. If we can agree on demand reduction, the phase-out process may happen organically.

**Would you highlight how the timelines for clean innovations from demonstration to market saturation can be shortened?**

One of the challenges of decarbonization is the sluggish adoption of clean innovations, especially in hard-to-abate sectors such as iron and steel, chemicals, refining, petrochemicals, cement, shipping, aviation, and heavy-duty transport. These sectors collectively account for over 30% of global emissions and are also responsible for manufacturing clean innovations to decarbonize the rest of the economy. These clean innovations encompass low-carbon hydrogen, clean hydrogen, synthetic fuels, carbon capture utilization and storage, direct air capture, bio-based fuels and feedstock, and fuel cells. The slow uptake can be attributed to the high investment costs, which affect affordability. While many of these clean innovations have been successfully demonstrated at scale, they lack the demand-pull necessary to achieve market saturation. At market saturation, they would attain cost parity with alternative fossil-fuel-based options. Without sufficient demand-pull, they risk falling into

an "innovation valley of death." Although supply-push efforts have been crucial in reaching the demonstration stage, the benefits of learning by innovation have not sufficiently driven down costs. Therefore, there is a need to leverage the benefits of learning by doing, economies of scale, and diffusion of innovation through interventions that generate the necessary demand-pull to reduce costs. These interventions can be both internal, such as energy efficiency measures like process integration and industrial demand flexibility, and external, such as government policies and private capital. To expedite the timeline to achieve market saturation, it is essential to maximize the system's value from internal interventions and implement policy interventions that de-risk investment in these clean innovations, ultimately paving the way for private capital accessibility.

**While renewable energy costs such as solar and wind are dropping, financial considerations continue to be stumbling blocks to fully address decarbonization efforts in other sectors and for other technologies. What can we learn from solar and wind?**

There are several lessons to be learned from solar and wind energy. First, solar and wind technologies have received support for over 40 years through various interventions related to both supply-push and demand-pull simultaneously. The second lesson is that costs have

*... there is a need to leverage the benefits of learning by doing, economies of scale, and diffusion of innovation through interventions that generate the necessary demand-pull to reduce costs.*

decreased as capacity has increased, indicating that cost reductions from experience and economies of scale have outweighed those from learning through innovation. However, for other sectors and technologies, we do not have the luxury of 40 years of trial and error. We have less than 26 years to achieve market saturation. Therefore, there is a pressing need for intelligent and robust interventions informed by the lessons learned from solar and wind energy. There is a need to leverage the successes and challenges of solar and wind to inform our approach to decarbonizing other sectors effectively and efficiently.

### **Are you optimistic about the future of clean innovations?**

I am optimistic about a future where clean innovations become irresistible and diffuse rapidly. Access to interventions that de-risk investment and increase demand-pull for these innovations will be crucial in driving their widespread adoption by both innovators and end-users.

**Gbemi Oluleye** is a Lecturer (Assistant Professor) at the Grantham Institute - Climate Change and the Environment, Imperial College London. She has built a unique expertise at the interface of engineering, economics, policy and innovation which she applies to develop participatory decision support frameworks to evaluate non-financial, financial, market-based policy, and efficiency and flexibility strategies to support clean innovation diffusion. She mainly focuses on clean innovations for decarbonizing heavy industry and heavy duty transport.



Dr. Oluleye received a BSc in Chemical Engineering from the Obafemi Awolowo University, Nigeria; MSc in Advanced Chemical Process Design at the University of Manchester and; PhD in Process Integration from the University of Manchester. She has worked as the lead researcher in a range of projects in both academia and industry, covering emerging strategies for decarbonising energy intensive industries, novel demand-driven business models to support uptake of technological solutions for industrial decarbonization, accelerating uptake of advanced waste heat and material recovery technologies in the energy intensive industry, efficient energy integrated solutions for manufacturing industries, integration of renewable energy technologies in small scale industry, hierarchical ordering of alternative technologies for some foundation industries, exploiting energy efficiency in a business model to support technology adoption, fabric integrated thermal storage for low carbon dwellings, quantifying distributed energy potential for the UK, commercialization of biogas fuelled solid oxide fuel cells in Europe, pathways to commercialization of clean industrial systems and renewable gas production in Europe.

# Winds of Change: How Populist Ideologies Shape Europe's Climate Future

Samyak Arun Bharthur  
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In the current European political milieu, a notable transformation is evident: the ascendance of populism. This trend, typified by a pervasive mistrust of the “elites” and a robust conviction in the “power of the people”, has become increasingly salient in the political narratives of various European nations. The existential menace of climate change, which demands immediate and comprehensive policy interventions, intersects intriguingly with the rise of populism, particularly in terms of its potential influence on the region's climate change strategies.

The populist upsurge has been propelled by a confluence of factors. Economic instability in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, apprehensions about immigration, and a perceived erosion of national sovereignty due to globalization and European integration have collectively engendered a burgeoning sense of alienation among certain segments of the European populace. These sentiments have been adeptly exploited by populist parties, who pledge to restore power to the ‘common people’. This is manifest in the recent proliferation of populist parties across the continent, including in The Netherlands, Hungary, Germany, the UK, France, and Austria.

According to the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the European Union's Copernicus Climate Change Service, Europe has been experiencing warming at a rate twice the global average since the 1980s. In 2022, the region's temperature was approximately 2.3°C above the pre-industrial average, which serves as the baseline for the Paris Agreement (United Nations, 2023). The year 2022 was the fifth warmest globally, and Europe witnessed its hottest summer, with temperatures rising more than twice the global average over the past three decades.

The last eight years have been the warmest on record (McGrath, 2023).

Populist parties in Europe exhibit two distinct stances towards climate change policies:

One stance posits that climate change policies are unjustly designed against countries that do not reap their benefits. While these parties recognize climate change and its associated perils, their rigid adherence to nationalist policies, either as a fundamental ideological tenet or simply due to the party's position, supersedes the dangers they acknowledge. They express overt criticism of international efforts to mitigate climate change, arguing that such efforts undermine their domestic industry and sovereignty and impose unfair penalties on businesses in their countries.

The other stance, arguably the most perilous in terms of climate change policies, is to outright deny climate change as a threat. Denial can range from a complete rejection of the scientific evidence supporting climate change to characterizing it as a “natural phenomenon” that is part of the Earth's millennia-long “cycle”.

Populists take pride in nationalist ideals and strive to establish a national identity where all working citizens unite against the notion of the controlling “elite”. They champion freedom from external influence and internal autonomy. However, these nationalist beliefs often overshadow any concern for climate change and its repercussions (Kulin et al., 2021). This is precisely where the problem lies, as climate change is not confined by borders, and anything less than a coordinated and dedicated international effort will likely exact a significant toll on humanity in the near future. Yet, ideology persists and intensifies, thereby effectively

*... The dichotomy between the “globalist elite” and the “common people” is accentuated by the approach towards climate change policies, which, given its contemporary relevance, holds a pivotal position in this debate.*

diminishing the importance of climate change as a pressing issue to address, or prioritizing capital and business gains/profits for the nation, which often contravenes policies designed to combat climate change.

The first faction, despite posing an obstacle to effective policymaking, may have a valid standpoint in their critique of the detrimental impacts that climate change policies have inflicted on their national industries and businesses. Viktor Orban, who dismissed climate policies as a “utopian fantasy,” harbors significant concerns about escalating energy prices in Hungary (Abnett & Strauss, 2021) (Than & Merriman, 2021), with additional worries about the country’s declining birth rates also taking precedence over climate policy (Martuscelli, 2023). Given that these parties acknowledge the perils of climate change, the task for policymakers and international bodies is to win them over. Incentives to comply with climate change policies could alleviate some of the burdens these policies have imposed on such nations.

The second faction presents a more formidable challenge. Constructive policy discussions can only be predicated on the mutual recognition of the problem among all parties involved. Imposing stricter penalties on nations that violate climate change regulations could deter the emission of harmful gases and the exploitation of natural resources.

However, effective change must target the root issue: the ideology that compels a hardline stance against the reality of climate change. The dichotomy between the “globalist elite” and the “common people” is accentuated by the approach towards climate change policies, which, given its contemporary relevance, holds a pivotal position in this debate. The issue is further complicated as those subscribing to anti-establishment ideologies and climate change denial also tend to endorse pseudoscientific claims (Jylhä & Hellmer, 2020).

As Markard (2018) observed, societal progression has moved beyond merely contemplating cleaner energy alternatives to actualizing them, thereby ushering in a host of cultural, scientific, and industrial changes, along with the accompanying politics. While these changes were anticipated, resistance to the lifestyle alterations brought about by energy transition has emerged (Buzogány & Mohamad-Klotzbach, 2021), thereby politicizing the issue of climate change policymaking. Moreover, an analysis of the online browsing histories of internet users from parts of Europe revealed a clear inclination among right-wing populists towards climate-sceptic content (2020). Thus, as Lockwood (2018) presciently predicted, the contemporary struggle against climate change is as much a battle of ideas as it is a technical and political challenge.

Individual measures can indeed be employed to mitigate climate change skepticism. Addressing an individual’s disbelief in climate change can be beneficial (Wong-Parodi & Feygina, 2020), yet the real challenge lies in scaling this up to encompass entire populations of countries and continents. This scale is necessary to achieve a noticeable and useful reduction in climate change denial, which could then lead to more responsible voting behaviors and, ultimately, broader acceptance of climate change policies. Despite these challenges, tackling climate change skepticism from an ideological standpoint may prove instrumental in shifting the discourse towards a more science-oriented perspective.

The economic implications of decarbonization must be more effectively understood, interpreted, and communicated to companies engaged in the fossil fuel industry across Europe. A compelling study by Mercure et al. (2021) revealed that fossil fuel importers stand to gain economically from adopting cleaner energy sources, while competitive exporters can profit by selling more fossil fuels. Conversely, uncompetitive producers are likely to face challenges due to stranded assets and inadequate investment in clean technologies. This underscores the importance of approaching the issue from a financial and business perspective. However, it is important to acknowledge that transitioning to clean energy involves changes to existing technological infrastructures, which necessitates time and expertise. While this may pose a potential obstacle for companies seeking to make this transition, it is nonetheless a temporary challenge that can be overcome with the right strategies and

resources.

In conclusion, the interplay between populism and climate change in Europe is a multifaceted issue that demands immediate attention. The populist wave, with its diverse stances on climate change, has undeniably complicated the path towards crafting effective environmental policies, and gaining unanimous public approval for them. However, this challenge also presents an opportunity for introspection and innovation in our approach to policymaking, especially on the frontiers of ideology and identity. Moreover, the role of public engagement and education cannot be overstated. Fostering a scientifically literate society that understands the realities of climate change will be instrumental in shifting public opinion and political will. The future could see a reimagining of international cooperation, with climate change at the forefront. New alliances could be formed, old ones strengthened, and climate change could become a unifying global cause that transcends political ideologies. The fight against climate change, in the face of populism, is not just a technical or political challenge, but also a test of our adaptability, ingenuity, and commitment to safeguarding our planet.

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# Welfare States in Crisis: Is Going Green Compatible with Growth?

Elizabeth Ng Si Jie

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The World Meteorological Organization's (2023) latest prognosis is yet another rude awakening for growth-driven welfare states: there is a 66% chance of global warming temporarily exceeding 1.5°C by 2027. To avert the climate catastrophe, it is imperative that welfare states adopt a post-growth eco-social paradigm (Hvinden et al., 2022). However, this paradoxically threatens to unravel the virtuous circle sustaining welfare states' financial viability, inhibiting countries, especially developing ones, from pursuing socio-ecological sustainability. Nonetheless, since eco-social welfare states are inherently designed to embody sufficiency, it is possible to wean them off their growth dependency. More than a calculus of feasibility, balancing this eco-social-growth trilemma is a political choice — are societies willing to embrace sustainable forms of flourishing?

Fiscally, it seems impossible to decouple eco-social welfare states from future growth. The sustainability of welfare capitalism predicates on the virtuous circle set in motion by growth (Figure 1). Higher levels of economic activity stimulate full employment and income, which in turn generate tax revenue for public expenditure. Economic prosperity is hence a necessary precondition for adequate redistribution (Bailey, 2015). Conversely, a non-growing economy curtails investment in decarbonization (to 'green' the welfare state) and social protection for climate risks (to 'socialize' the environmental state) (Mandelli, 2022). This is evidenced by the global collapse of tax revenue during the 2008 Great Recession, which triggered austerity measures and benefit cuts.



Figure 1: Virtuous Circle Between Economic Growth and Welfare States (Hirvilammi, 2020)

Such supply-side constraints are aggravated by demand-side pressures of growing welfare needs amidst a just transition. Firstly, de-growth reduces income gained through employment, social contributions, and investments. States are thus forced to replace occupational welfare, as demands for out-of-work benefits (e.g., unemployment insurance) rises.

Moreover, the investment in eco-social welfare services (e.g., green education and energy-efficient healthcare) exacerbates Baumol's cost disease, since low-carbon technologies are often more labor-intensive (Stern et al., 2012). With perpetual productivity increases in the capital-intensive manufacturing sector and no (or fewer) productivity gains in the labor-intensive services sector, the relative cost of publicly-funded services accelerates as pay is likely to increase uniformly across sectors (Baumol, 1967). This financial squeeze traps governments in a trilemma:

For neoliberals, de-growth is counter-productive. Effective eco-social transition, they claim, requires capitalism's growth imperative as it ensures the vitality of market-based instruments such as carbon pricing. For climate deniers backed by powerful lobbyists, reducing growth dependence is too hefty a price to pay for a trivial environmental problem.

raise taxes (at the cost of increasing tax distortions), cut spending on services, or redistribute less. The latter two options amount to a welfare state retrenchment, which appears inexorable considering the Laffer bound – the upper limit in tax-income ratio (Andersen and Kreiner, 2015). Therefore, by shrinking fiscal capacity and increasing cost burden, less growth dependence is self-defeating. It precipitates welfare state atrophy, which further amplifies socio-environmental risks.

Given the current hostile political landscape, challenging the growth orthodoxy is deemed a chimera. For neoliberals, de-growth is counter-productive. Effective eco-social transition, they claim, requires capitalism's growth imperative as it ensures the vitality of market-based instruments such as carbon pricing. For climate deniers backed by powerful lobbyists, reducing growth dependence is too hefty a price to pay for a trivial environmental problem. The pervasiveness of such vested interests was spotlighted by the 117th US Congress, which had 139 elected officials discrediting evidence of human-induced climate change. In return, they received \$61 million in lifetime contributions from fossil fuel industries (Drennen and Hardin, 2021). Consequently, de-growth is unlikely to gain traction among policymakers who fear an erosion of political support.

Morally, de-growth appears antithetical to social justice. When the economic pie ceases to grow, one's share of income can only expand at the expense of another, fueling distributional conflicts. It is invidious to expect developing economies that are least polluting and most climate-vulnerable to forsake growth. Meanwhile, affluent countries could freely pursue industrialization while producing 79% of historical carbon emissions (Busch, 2015). The association of de-growth with

lower material standard of living also alienates the poor, who may only experience the benefits of eco-social welfare in the long-term.

Granted, the above economic path dependencies and socio-political dynamics diminish the feasibility of post-productivist, eco-social welfare states. Yet, it is a travesty to frame economic growth as a prerequisite for eco-social policies. The virtuous circle assumes that growth necessarily increases household income and employment. However, yawning income inequalities and productivity growth suggest otherwise. Since wealth accrues mainly to the top 10%, national income growth no longer translates into broad-based household income growth. With growth being driven primarily by increased labor productivity, the employment intensity of growth has dwindled. Within OECD, the correlation of GDP growth with employment rate and household income is only 0.34 and 0.37 respectively (OECD, 2020). As the virtuous circle disintegrates, welfare states will naturally abandon their growth obsession.

In fact, vis-à-vis socio-demographic factors, growth plays a marginal role in stabilizing welfare policies. Even with lower growth, countries such as France have higher social spending than the US. This can be attributed to racial animosity, which has made redistribution to poor ethnic minorities in the US deeply unpopular (Alesina et al., 2001).

Crucially, social-ecological states are intrinsically growth-independent; they rely on low-resource, relational, and preventive welfare provision. Firstly, to decouple well-being from consumption and resource use, eco-social policies redefine welfare as universal needs rather than individual desires. Public expenditure is hence targeted at meeting basic needs for current and future generations, instead of satisfying insatiable preferences. This justifies more progressive income and green taxes to finance minimum income schemes (Koch, 2018). For example, an ecological tax that shifts the tax burden from economic goods (e.g., income) to ecological bads (e.g., pollution) generates revenue surplus while redistributing the rights to use scarce environmental resources (Jackson, 2011). Such reforms allow for revenue recycling, which compensates for the tax losses in a steady-state economy. At the same time, they redress intersectional inequalities, reducing the need for excessive redistribution.

Secondly, eco-social policies reduce reliance on growth-led job creation by reimagining the nature of work. By looking beyond indicators such as GDP to measure success, sustainable welfare stimulates socially valuable work in caring economies and community economies. This lowers unemployment and guarantees a decent standard of living. For example, an eco-social participation income provides citizens with an 'exit option' from paid employment, encouraging them to engage in ecological and reproductive labor (Laruffa et al., 2021). This galvanizes a whole-of-society approach to co-creating and co-producing welfare. Such decentralized and relational welfare then eases demands on state-funded services, alleviating Baumol's cost pressures.

Thirdly, preventive eco-social policies create cost-savings, allowing future generations to provide more with less resources. By pre-emptively mutualizing environmental risks and downscaling ecological footprint, they prevent social problems from festering. Through green pension fund investments and low-carbon social housing, societies can reduce their future welfare bill.

Given sufficient political will, welfare states can free themselves from the tyranny of growth and pursue eco-social development. A distributive and regenerative economy dissociated from growth ensures that pre-distribution outcomes are more equitable. Therefore, even if post-growth inevitably causes welfare states to retreat, society's well-being will not be compromised. Ultimately, this is not merely a question of plausibility but necessity. Eco-social policies are by nature anti-growth, as growth encourages consumption and production beyond safe ecological boundaries. Crucially, secular economic stagnation portends that reliance on future growth is untenable. With societal tensions over climate refugees and intergenerational injustice intensifying demands for a renewed socio-ecological social contract, it is clear that welfare states cannot have their cake and eat it too. To unlock the socio-ecological synergy, society needs to first confront its self-destructive love affair with growth.

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