



# Vienna Peace and Security Talks 2022

## The Shifting Ground of European Security

*Conference Report  
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October 9-10, 2022

*The conference was held on October 9-10, 2022. The workshops took place under the Chatham House Rule. They were attended by a variety of stakeholders from multilateral institutions, academia, and think tanks. Different views and arguments expressed at the conference do not necessarily reflect the views of the organizing institutions. The panel discussion was open to the public. Its recording, along with other conference materials can be accessed at [www.iipvienna.com/ps-talks-2022](http://www.iipvienna.com/ps-talks-2022)*

## Context

The European security architecture is in a deep crisis. Russia's unprovoked attack on a sovereign state in Europe has reshaped the perceived Western-led international order. The conviction that large-scale wars between European states belong to the past has faded away.

NATO, which a few years ago was declared obsolete (Trump) or braindead (Macron), seems more attractive than ever before. With the future NATO accession of Finland and Sweden, Austria, Malta, Cyprus, and Ireland are the only EU member states that are not NATO members. The revitalization of NATO has also made clear – yet again – that the EU still depends on US capabilities and leadership. In this context, concepts like strategic autonomy appear outdated. Additionally, the EU often lacks the will or means to pursue its own foreign and security policy and leaves key decisions to individual member states.

An era of *realpolitik* has emerged, and the meaning and potential for multilateral action – for example, through the UN or the OSCE – must be reassessed. Many non-Western global players, including China and India, have refrained from taking a clear stance on the war in Ukraine so far. The outcome of the conflict will largely determine their behaviour and the future balance of power in the coming world order.

The downward spiral in the European security architecture is also reflected in the crisis of the OSCE. As a result of the confrontation between Russia and its allies and Western states, OSCE decision mechanisms have been left nearly paralysed. As of October 2022, the organization still does not have a budget for the year. OSCE participating states are thus unable to achieve the necessary consensus even when it comes to decisions of minor importance. What remains from the vision of a common security architecture from Lisbon to Vladivostok?

This conference aimed to gather insights into the interests and motivations of the actors central to European security. It also sought to analyze the necessary conditions for the development of a serious critical dialogue. For its part, such a dialogue is one of the basic prerequisites for the constructive solution processes of numerous regional and global conflicts and crises.

## Workshop 1: New (Dis-)Order in the European Security Architecture?

### *New security realities in Europe*

*In the following paragraph the different strands of the debate are presented for the sake of completeness in chronological order.*

As a result of Russia's attack on Ukraine, the European security order is now dominated by the

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doctrine of deterrence. This will probably lead to an arms race for both conventional and nuclear weapons. The discussion on disarmament is becoming more and more irrelevant today. Although the fighting in Ukraine is still ongoing, we are moving toward a cold war. This is evident in the absence of any interest among key actors to engage in negotiations, with all track-one negotiations currently suspended. Furthermore, dialogue is perceived as a concession to Russia. This situation begs the question whether dialogue remains a viable diplomatic tool. The

longer and the bloodier the ‘hot’ phase of the war, the more severe the cold war will be. Nevertheless, the concept of a ‘cold war’ is not to be understood as an existential conflict between two models of society: the issue today is instead a particular iteration of Russian imperialism.

With Russia’s annexation of four regions of Ukraine, it is unclear whether the West is in an open war with Russia. Yet, one way or another (depending on how things play out on the battlefield) Ukraine is going to be integrated into the Western defense system. The accession track to the EU has initiated this process. If Ukraine is successful on the battlefield, NATO membership could be back on the table. But, even if not, some mini-lateral system consisting of the US, Poland, and Ukraine – with Germany strongly encouraged to participate – might be created.

Russia would prefer to fight as far to the west as possible, but the next conflict might actually reach Russian territory. Especially with the NATO accession of Finland and Sweden, the transatlantic alliance will move dangerously close to the Russian naval nuclear deterrent. However, the nuclear situation will stay asymmetric; therefore, a NATO nuclear mission remains highly unlikely.

In time, NATO’s profile as a defense alliance will have to change. The related discussion within NATO is just starting, with suggestions ranging from focusing on advanced conventional strike capabilities that can attack targets in Russia to non-military means of deterrence. In this respect, the changing nature of Russia-Belarus relations and Belarus’ agency will also be important, given Belarus’ critical strategic location.

#### *The war in Ukraine and Russia’s place in the new security order*

The war in Ukraine will not end in a clear victory for either side any time soon. The most likely scenario is a protracted conflict that will drag on for years, and the groundwork for this possibility is already being laid. The defense industry believes that it is worth investing into capabilities that were lost in the 1990s due to the so-called peace-dividend. Russia, for its part, seems ready to spend 50% of its GDP to rebuild its military.

The current Russian leadership is convinced that there is an inevitable existential war with NATO coming soon. As long as these individuals remain in power, war will continue. Therefore, the war might end with the end of the current government in Russia.

According to some experts, the end of Putin’s regime could be closer than is commonly assumed. Nevertheless, a range of new escalations – even a nuclear crisis – are still possible. The partial military mobilization declared in September undermined the main pillar of Putin’s power – namely, that citizens can disengage from political life while their economic wellbeing is taken care of. Putin still tries to proceed carefully, avoiding the mobilization of groups that are most resistant.

***The potential fall of the Putin regime in Russia could produce enormous instability in the region, but it looks increasingly inevitable.***

The potential fall of the Putin regime in Russia could produce enormous instability in the region, but it looks increasingly inevitable. The foundations of the Russian state are currently being undone, with challenges posed to its previous monopoly on violence (private armies with combat experience are proliferating), its centralized nature (private armies will primarily return to remote regions, creating a potential source of destabilization), and its economic model (the reliance on exports to key partners in the West is

over). Furthermore, Russia's clout in the South Caucasus and Central Asia is diminishing, evidenced by the recent episode of war between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (both CSTO members), as well as Armenia's search for security guarantees from the US and France rather than Russia.

While the future of Russia's domestic political developments looks unclear, there is a sufficient base for a different (republican) political system. The war is only supported by its most direct beneficiaries – namely, the minority of hawks in the political elite. It is not supported by the young, the educated, the poor, or urban populations, even though most Russians remain indifferent to it.

### *The EU in the new security order*

Now is the moment for the EU to clearly position itself vis-à-vis the current changes in the international system. It is concerning that EU integration is currently being driven by the war and not by other factors. The EU's values-based approach is applicable inside the EU, but beyond its borders, an interest-based approach dominates.

China is an important player to address. There is no transatlantic agreement on China. The US

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sees China through a deterrence lens, while the EU sees China through a regulation lens. The EU needs to cooperate with Central Asian countries, as they are a bridge to China. A values-based approach in Central Asia would not be applicable, as it could hinder cooperation with China.

There is a need to acknowledge the existing dilemmas: on one hand the indivisibility of security, on the other hand the freedom to choose one's own alliances. The concepts of the indivisibility of security and cooperative security have been weaponized, and their new meaning must be clarified. In addition, the privatization of outer space is a major risk for security.

### *Recommendations for the EU*

- Consolidate the West: Continue and accelerate the EU integration process, including in the Western Balkans.
- Keep channels of communication open (misperceptions are common in war times). Find venues to organize track-two talks on the expert level where policy options can be explored.
- Engage with non-military elites in Russia who are more receptive to negotiations.
- Compartmentalize issues. There are no military solutions to transnational threats (e.g. terrorism or climate change). We need to work with everyone, including Russia, on issues where common interests exist.
- The search for a place for Russia in a new security order needs to start now. To save the whole region from collapse (including Eastern Europe and Central Asia), the Russian public must be offered a guarantee that they will not be isolated, as otherwise it will reproduce the current situation.
- Enhance strategic communication with the rest of the world, including China, India, and Central Asia.

## Workshop 2: Geopolitical EU – an Illusion?

*What is left of the geopolitical EU after the invasion of Ukraine?*

In the most basic sense, geopolitics means that borders define foreign and security policy. This is an unknown approach for the EU, as it was built on the idea of enlargement and projecting its values and interests beyond its borders without harming its own social or economic system. The EU is not used to projecting power beyond its borders, with the notable exceptions of EU Member State France's operations in Mali or European support for NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia. Therefore, at the EU's border, a potential security-democracy dilemma arises, since there is a tension between using EU political power to reach an objective and the normative framework that the EU is based upon. This dilemma must be debated internally, or otherwise the tension will result in indecisiveness. In this sense, the decision-making process that requires a compromise of 27 member states – while being the basis of consensus inside the union – puts the EU at a competitive disadvantage internationally.

***The EU was built on the idea of enlargement, it is not used to projecting power at its borders.***

The transatlantic security and defence link has been strengthened with the invasion of Ukraine. It has become clear that the necessary condition for Ukraine to sustain the war is the support of the US, with the Franco-German approach of reaching out to Russia having failed completely. Finland and Sweden have decided to join NATO because the EU's CSDP was not sufficient to provide for their security. This demonstrates that security guarantees for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of European countries are provided by the US, not from France or Germany. The narrative about the EU's strategic sovereignty and autonomy has proven unsuccessful, although this concept was never articulated around defending other states but rather reclaiming the EU's sovereignty from external actors, especially China (economic or technological sovereignty).

However, a US withdrawal from Europe resulting from the challenges in the Indo-Pacific remains a possibility. The US is no longer a reliable partner or guarantor for Europe. Even if Donald Trump does not come back to power, long term trends such as isolationism will continue. In this respect, Joe Biden is more of an exception. In addition, regional actors in the EU's neighbourhood will become more assertive. The EU will become a smaller player, with its global share of GDP projected to shrink from 20% to 9%. Therefore, the EU should concentrate on smaller things that can be done and are in its vital interest.

When it comes to support for Ukraine, the best that the EU can do is mobilize funding. However, it is uncertain whether it will be able to meet the demand. Currently, Ukraine is projected to need over EUR 80 billion a year. To compare, Poland – the largest recipient of European funds inside the EU – received approximately EUR 11,5 billion. In this sense, what value would EU membership have for Ukraine, apart from the symbolism? And would it even be technically possible? The EU needs to integrate Ukraine but must find a roadmap that all member states can agree upon.

### *China in the EU and the European Neighbourhood*

Chinese experts see the enactment of the 'Geopolitical Commission' as a response to the EU's fragility. The EU model is premised on the US as its security provider, Russia as its energy supplier, and China as its main trading partner. Within China, the EU is perceived as being at

risk of being marginalized due to the China-US global competition and unable to do anything about Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Xi Jinping has explicitly supported the EU's goal of strategic autonomy, arguing that European security should be kept in European hands. China hopes that the EU could serve as a counterweight to balance US influence. Whether the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment is ratified will serve as a touchstone on whether the EU has autonomy.

The EU is expected to become more protectionist and move against Chinese companies. It is also expected to become more sensitive to Chinese influence in the Western Balkans and Africa, developing new instruments to offset Chinese influence. Further, the EU is expected to become more geopolitical in the Indo-Pacific, in addition to challenging China on human rights. There will be a global competition where China will become the EU's target.

***While cooperation with the EAEU is over, the EU should consider engaging with EUAEU members other than Russia.***

The unintended consequences of sanctions against Russia have affected the EU's neighbourhood. Countries in the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe are dependent on the Russian market in terms of labour migration and trade. In addition, these countries have increasingly relied on China, with the EU's trade share decreasing everywhere apart from Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan in recent years. China's share has increased, including in EU-associated Georgia and Ukraine. While cooperation with

the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is over, the EU should consider engaging with EUAEU members other than Russia.

*Recommendations for the EU:*

- Build on the EU's economic strengths; conclude further trade and investment agreements and spread standards.
- Eliminate vulnerabilities to China, diversifying and shifting business to Vietnam, India, etc.
- Invest in the EU's own defence capabilities; otherwise China will not take the EU seriously.
- Strengthen the European pillar within NATO while respecting the status of the neutrals; enhance institutional cooperation between the EU and NATO; and secure the EU border.
- Be clear in communicating to China that joint military exercises with Russia are not acceptable. This also concerns Turkey's potential membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.
- Channel more resources into economic engagement with the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Incentivize private companies to build roads in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, just as China does. EU companies would bring improved technical and environmental standards.

## Workshop 3: Thinking Beyond the New Cold War – from Helsinki to a New OSCE?

### *A place for the OSCE in a new security order?*

The OSCE has been in decline since 2008, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has further exacerbated this trend. The future of the OSCE seems bleak. Civil society actors and OSCE diplomats believe that a return to the Cold War model is inevitable for the organization. However, there is a firm conviction that there can be no OSCE without Russia. The threat of Russia leaving/being expelled from the OSCE is acute. Even if there is a mechanism in place allowing for temporary suspensions (as was applied to Yugoslavia in the 1990s), it is a slippery slope. If Russia is out of the OSCE, Belarus and Turkmenistan might follow.

The OSCE needs to be preserved for a more stable future after the war, even while the end is not yet in sight. We are at a point where the war in Ukraine is getting mixed with other conflicts and risks going beyond Ukraine's borders. The task for the OSCE in these times is to prevent the security dilemma from leading to further escalations.

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One way out of the security dilemma would be to reduce the current threat level. This suggests the concept of common security that is enshrined in the Helsinki Decalogue. However, it is impossible to restore the Helsinki spirit – as it was in the 1970s – here and now, as an institutional reform cannot solve the structural problems that the international system currently faces.

### *Recommendations:*

- At the current point, it is necessary to focus on preserving the remaining (few) 'islands of cooperation' within the OSCE. These include cooperation on cyber and ICT threats, support for civil society, and election observation and fact-finding missions. A recent innovation is the Ukraine support program – an extra-budgetary program that is not consensus-based. The Moscow mechanism provides the possibility to establish ad hoc missions of independent experts – another example of what is still possible to do within the OSCE.

### *On the EU's Neighbourhood: the Western Balkans and Belarus*

The EU's enlargement policy is currently in free fall. We must prevent it from becoming a securitizing mechanism, a cordon sanitaire between the EU and its neighbourhood. The principle of conditionality is no longer working, as evidenced by the unfair accession processes in the Western Balkans. Thus, in terms of quantifiable progress – as evidenced by reports prepared by the EU Commission – North Macedonia is not lagging behind Serbia or Montenegro. However, due to political factors, it received candidate status much later. If Moldova and Ukraine move faster with integration than North Macedonia, this will provoke further frustration and disappointment and demonstrate yet again that, instead of reforms and shared values, the enlargement process is driven by geopolitical considerations. While full membership in the EU is the strongest incentive for Western Balkan countries to reform, a phased-in integration process should be considered. If promises made to the Western Balkans are not kept, the EU risks losing its credibility in Ukraine and Moldova too. Nevertheless, EU

integration should not replace regional integration efforts inside the Western Balkans (through the Open Balkan and/or Berlin process). Both processes should run in parallel.

In the EU's eastern neighbourhood, Belarus also demands careful attention. The country seems to have failed a sovereignty test, as there is no elite that identifies the national interest or is ready to make compromises in order to preserve Belarus' statehood. It is not clear if Belarus will remain a sovereign state. The room for manoeuvre for the Lukashenka regime has diminished substantially, with its dependence on Russia as great as ever.

## **Public panel: Militarization for Peace? How the West deals with the crisis in wartime Europe**

Video recording and summary report available at: [www.iipvienna.com/ps-talks-2022](http://www.iipvienna.com/ps-talks-2022)

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