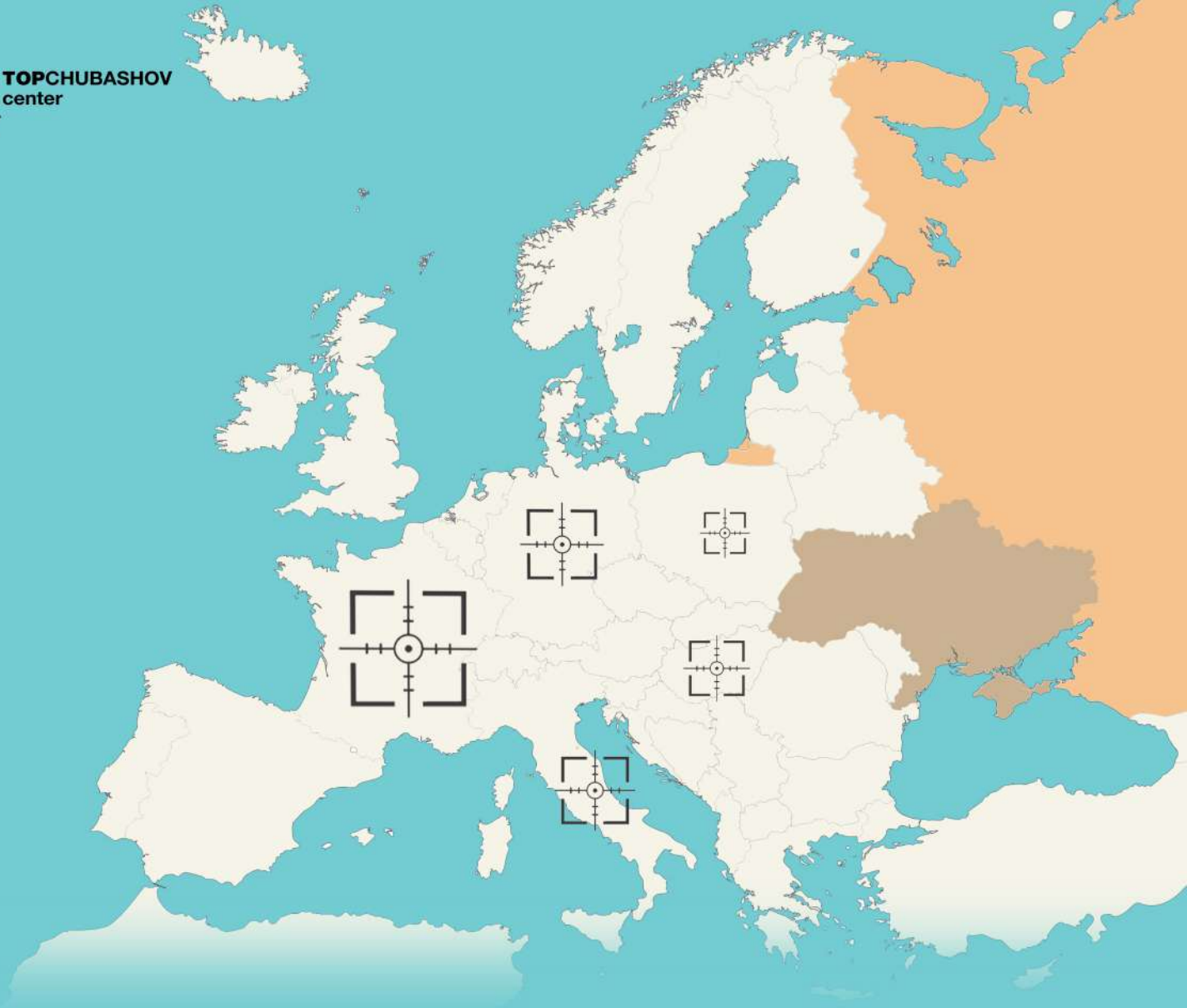




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EUROPE AND THE WAR IN UKRAINE: UNDERSTANDING POSITIONS AND EXPLORING CONTEXT

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Introduction

The war in Ukraine has elicited a spectrum of responses from European countries. At the onset of the conflict, a majority of these nations rallied in solidarity with Ukraine, expressing their support and concern. However, as the war progressed, we've observed a fracturing of this unity within some European countries. In certain instances, countries have deviated from their long-standing policies to support Ukraine, while others have made efforts to undermine a united European front for Ukraine. This report delves into the policies of five key European countries since the war's inception, providing comprehensive background information to understand and contextualise their positions. It also scrutinizes the internal political landscape of these countries, detailing the stances of their principal political parties. Additionally, it explores the refugee situation within these nations to shed light on the far-reaching impacts of the war. This analysis seeks to offer an in-depth understanding of Europe's reaction to the Ukrainian crisis, its repercussions on regional politics, and potential future stances of these countries towards Ukraine.

This report examines five European countries' policies on the war in Ukraine: Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, and France. These countries represent a mix of major powers and neighbours of Ukraine, with varying degrees of interests and risks in the conflict.

Germany

Despite its historical amicability with Russia, Germany has been compelled to revise its stance multiple times following Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine led Germany to renounce its enduring policy of refraining from arms supply to warring nations, and it has since been actively backing Ukraine. Nevertheless, the internal situation in Germany continues to be intricate.

Germany has traditionally adopted a policy of "Wandel durch Handel" (literally, "Change through Trade") towards Russia. A key advocate of this policy was Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who served two terms as Germany's Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, from 2004 to 2009 and again from 2013 to 2017. He currently holds the position of President of Germany. In 2007, Steinmeier penned an article arguing that fostering economic interdependence with Russia would draw the country closer to the EU and stimulate changes in its domestic policies, particularly concerning human rights and democracy.¹ However, this policy started to falter in 2008 following Russia's invasion of Georgia. Despite this setback, Steinmeier persisted in his support for a partnership with Russia. In line with this policy, Germany completed the construction of the Nord Stream 1 pipeline in November 2011. The concept for the pipeline was initially proposed in 1997, but construction only commenced in 2010.

¹ Steinmeier, F.-W. (2007). Verflechtung und Integration: Die neue Phase der Ostpolitik der EU. *Internationale Politik*. Retrieved from <https://internationalepolitik.de/de/verflechtung-und-integration>

In 2014, when Russia invaded Crimea, then-Chancellor Angela Merkel cautioned Russia that the invasion would inflict “massive damage to Russia, economically and politically”.² However, a year later, Merkel endorsed the deal to construct Nord Stream 2.³ Despite this, Germany was instrumental in efforts to curb Russian interference in Ukraine in 2014. Merkel spearheaded the Normandy format meetings aimed at resolving the Russo-Ukrainian war, which subsequently led to the establishment of the Minsk process.⁴ Germany also condemned Moscow’s actions and asserted that “the territorial integrity of Ukraine cannot be called into question”.⁵ Conversely, Germany ruled out the possibility of arming Ukraine, as it contravened their policy against sending weapons to conflict zones.⁶

In the weeks preceding Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Germany was heavily criticised for its refusal to arm Ukraine, despite Russia amassing over 100,000 troops and military equipment on Ukraine’s border. Germany also denied Estonia’s request to send its own German howitzers to Ukraine, opting instead to dispatch 5,000 helmets and a field hospital.⁷ On the same day, Chancellor Scholz expressed opposition to excluding Russia from the SWIFT international payment system, suggesting that this measure could be implemented at later stages of the war.⁸ However, two days later, Germany dramatically altered its stance and reversed its long-standing policy against arming conflict zones, agreeing to send 1,000 anti-tank weapons and 500 Stinger anti-aircraft defence systems to Ukraine.⁹ On 27 February, Scholz delivered a historic speech to the Bundestag, Germany’s lower house of parliament. He referred to the Russian attack as a “Zeitenwende” (literally, “times-turn”), signifying a turning point. In this landmark speech, the Chancellor announced a €100 billion modernisation of Germany’s armed forces in response to the threat posed by Russia to the European peace structure. He also pledged that defence spending would surpass 2% of GDP in accordance with Germany’s NATO membership obligations—a

² Brown, S., & Chambers, M. (2014, March 13). *Merkel warns Russia of 'massive damage' if it persists*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-merkel-idUSBREA2C0HC20140313>

³ Knight, B. (2021, July 23). *The history of Nord Stream*. Retrieved from Deutsche Welle: <https://www.dw.com/en/the-history-of-nord-stream/a-58618313>

⁴ Lohsen, A., & Morcos, P. (2022, February 9). *Understanding the Normandy Format and Its Relation to the Current Standoff with Russia*. Retrieved from Center for Strategic and International Studies: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/understanding-normandy-format-and-its-relation-current-standoff-russia>

⁵ Brown, S., & Chambers, M. (2014)

⁶ Siddi, M. (2015, February 18). German foreign policy towards Russia in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis: A new Ostpolitik? *Europe-Asia Studies*, 68(4), 6-8.

⁷ Westendarp, L. (2022, January 28). *Latvia blasts Germany's 'immoral and hypocritical' relationship with Russia and China*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/latvia-germany-immoral-relationship-russia-china/>

⁸ Burchard, H. v. (2022, February 24). *Germany's Olaf Scholz opposes inclusion of SWIFT in Russia sanctions for now*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/germanys-scholz-opposes-inclusion-of-swift-in-russia-sanctions/>

⁹ Herszenhorn, D. M., Bayer, L., & Burchard, H. (2022, February 26). *Germany to send Ukraine weapons in historic shift on military aid*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/ukraine-war-russia-germany-still-blocking-arms-supplies/>

position that Germany had traditionally opposed.¹⁰ On the same day, Germany agreed with its Western partners to remove Russia from the SWIFT system.¹¹

The initial consignment of heavy weaponry to the Ukrainian military arrived on 26 April, featuring Gepard tanks equipped with anti-aircraft weapons.¹² On 6 May, the German Defence Minister declared that Germany would supply Ukraine with seven self-propelled howitzers, another category of heavy weapon.¹³ During this period, Scholz was criticised by his European counterparts and Ukraine for neither visiting Ukraine nor providing sufficient military arms.¹⁴ In response to these critiques, Germany escalated its military aid on 1 June by announcing it would dispatch modern air defence missiles and radar systems, including the IRIS-T SLM air defence system.¹⁵

In April 2022, when German President Steinmeier wanted to visit Ukraine, his request was declined by the Ukrainian President Zelenskyy because of Steinmeier's past policies of rapprochement with Russia and his former close association with Sergey Lavrov, the Russian foreign minister. Steinmeier was quoted on 12 April as saying, "I was prepared to go but that apparently wasn't wanted in Kyiv and I have accepted this".¹⁶ Months after this incident, Steinmeier was granted permission to visit Ukraine on 25 October, where he affirmed that his country "will continue to support Ukraine, economically, politically and also militarily".¹⁷

On 29 August 2022, during a speech at Charles University in Prague, Scholz declared that Germany would back Ukraine "for as long as it takes" and advocated for the eventual inclusion of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia in the European Union.¹⁸ However, the domestic situation was less clear-cut. The "traffic light coalition", a political alliance of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the Free Democratic Party (FDP), and The Greens that has governed Germany since 2021, has experienced internal disagreements over their approach to the war in Ukraine. A majority of

¹⁰ Bundesregierung. (2022, February 27). *Policy statement by Olaf Scholz, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany and Member of the German Bundestag, 27 February 2022 in Berlin*. Retrieved from Bundesregierung: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/search/policy-statement-by-olaf-scholz-chancellor-of-the-federal-republic-of-germany-and-member-of-the-german-bundestag-27-february-2022-in-berlin-2008378>

¹¹ Reuters. (2022, February 27). *Germany and Western allies agree cutting Russia out of SWIFT*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/germany-western-allies-agree-cutting-russia-out-swift-2022-02-26/>

¹² Al Jazeera. (2022, April 26). *Germany to deliver Gepard anti-aircraft tanks to Ukraine*. Retrieved from Al Jazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/26/germany-to-supply-ukraine-with-heavy-weaponry-for-first-time>

¹³ RFE/RL. (2022, May 6). *Germany Steps Up Weapons Aid To Ukraine As Zelenskiy Urges Scholz To Visit Kyiv*. Retrieved from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-germany-supplying-howitzers-antiaircraft/31837562.html>

¹⁴ Burchard, H., Gehrke, L., & Karnitschnig, M. (2022, May 27). *Olaf Scholz's Ukrainian tank battle*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-olaf-scholz-ukraine-tank-military-support-conundrum/>

¹⁵ Burchard, H. v. (2022, June 1). *Germany to supply Ukraine with air defense and radar systems*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-supply-ukraine-air-defense-radar-system-olaf-scholz/>

¹⁶ Wieder, T. (2022, April 14). *German president cancels Kyiv visit plans as Ukraine says he is not welcome*. Retrieved from Le Monde: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/04/14/german-president-cancels-kyiv-visit-plans-as-ukraine-says-he-is-not-welcome_5980533_4.html

¹⁷ Fiedler, T. (2022, October 25). *German President Steinmeier arrives in Kyiv (at last)*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/frank-walter-steinmeier-ukraine-war-kyiv-visit-german-president/>

¹⁸ Siebold, S., & Hovet, J. (2022, August 29). *Germany's Scholz pledges to support Ukraine "for as long as it takes"*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germanys-scholz-we-will-keep-up-support-ukraine-long-it-takes-2022-08-29/>

the centre-left SDP members perceive the invasion as a proxy war between Russia and the U.S., advocating for an arms embargo and urging Ukraine to negotiate without preconditions. Conversely, The Greens and the liberal FDP strongly support arming the Ukrainians.¹⁹ Other significant parties in Germany also display divergent views. The main opposition group, the centre-right Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Christian Social Union bloc, supports Ukraine and uses this issue to attempt to divide the ruling coalition based on their stance on Ukraine.²⁰ The CDU, to which former Chancellor Angela Merkel belonged, advocates arming Ukraine and believes that facilitating Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia's path to EU membership is "in Germany's interest".²¹ In January 2023, the party called on the government to supply more weapons to Ukraine.²² The Left, a democratic socialist party holding 39 out of 736 seats in the Bundestag, is divided on the issue. Sahra Wagenknecht's faction within the party opposed sanctions against Russia. In October 2023, Wagenknecht announced plans to form a new left-wing party that opposed sanctions against Russia and Germany's arm supplies to Ukraine.²³ Lars Klingbeil, leader of another major party in Germany, the Social Democratic Party (SPD), which current Chancellor Olaf Scholz belongs to, visited Kyiv in March 2023 to express support for Ukraine. The aim of the meeting was to "talk to many people in Ukraine and see what further support we can provide," said Klingbeil.²⁴ The co-chair of another major party, "Alliance 90/The Greens," also visited Ukraine in 2021 to show support for the country. In August 2023, the co-leader of the party urged the government to promptly deliver Taurus missiles to Ukraine, a decision on which Olaf Scholz was reportedly undecided.²⁵

Distinct from all other major parties in Germany is the radical right Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) party. This party supports Russia, opposes all sanctions against Russia, and declared in 2019 that the conflict in Ukraine is an internal issue and that Germany should abstain from involvement. In September 2022, major news outlets reported that five AfD politicians intended to visit parts of eastern Ukraine under Russian control. However, the AfD leadership claimed they were unaware of the trip and stated it was unofficial.²⁶

¹⁹ Schwarz, K.-P. (2023, January 17). *Understanding Germany's half-hearted support of Ukraine*. Retrieved from GIS Reports: <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/germany-russia-ukraine/>

²⁰ Rinaldi, G., & Burchard, H. (2023, January 23). *German government faces growing rift over Scholz's reluctance to send Ukraine tanks*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/olaf-scholz-leopard-tank-ukraine-reluctance-causes-growing-rifts-in-german-ruling-coalition/>

²¹ *German CDU party: opening EU path to Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia "in Germany's interest"*. (2023, October 8). Retrieved from Agenda.ge: <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2022/2235>

²² *German opposition demands that "stubborn chancellor" provides tanks to Ukraine*. (2023, January 13). Retrieved from Ukrainska Pravda: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/01/13/7384699/>

²³ *New left-wing German political party headed by Sahra Wagenknecht could draw votes from far-right AfD* (2023, October 23). Retrieved from Euronews: <https://www.euronews.com/2023/10/23/new-left-wing-german-political-party-headed-by-sahra-wagenknecht-could-draw-votes-from-far>

²⁴ *Leaders of Germany's Social Democratic Party arrive in Kyiv to discuss further support*. (2023, March 6). Retrieved from Rubryka: <https://rubryka.com/en/2023/03/06/do-kyyeva-prybuly-lidery-sotsial-demokratychnoyi-partiyi-nimechchyny/>

²⁵ *Leader of German Greens supports speedy delivery of Taurus missiles to Ukraine*. (2023, August 16). Retrieved from Ukrainska Pravda: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2023/08/16/7415780/>

²⁶ Connolly, K. (2022, September 20). *Far-right German politicians accused of pro-Putin 'propaganda trip'*. Retrieved from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/20/far-right-german-politicians-accused-of-pro-putin-propaganda-trip>

Since the war, Germany has spent approximately €22 billion in aid to Ukraine as of July 2023.²⁷ In February 2023, Marcel Fratzscher, the leader of the German Institute for Economic Research, stated that the conflict in Ukraine has inflicted a financial burden of approximately €100 billion (\$107 billion) on the German economy. This figure represents roughly 2.5% of Germany's GDP. The German Chamber of Industry and Commerce reported that the overall economic impact equates to a wealth reduction of approximately €2,000 (\$2,143) per person in Germany.²⁸

According to a survey conducted by Kantar Public in August 2022, 80% of Germans feared the war in Ukraine extending into neighbouring states; 69% were apprehensive about Russia using nuclear weapons; 72% generally felt threatened by Russia; and 52% desired the German government to maintain its cautious approach to the conflict. Among the 41% of respondents who favoured a stronger presence, 65% advocated for more diplomacy, while only 14% supported increased military aid and 13% called for more financial commitment. Over two-thirds of respondents opposed Germany's leading role in the military field, a stance that Social Democratic Defence Minister Christine Lambrecht deemed inevitable. The survey results varied significantly between East and West Germany. In the East, only 31% wanted Germany to adopt a more confrontational approach towards Russia, compared to 47% in the West. Furthermore, 34% of East Germans believed that German support for Ukraine was "too much", while only 18% of West Germans agreed. When asked about an increase in NATO troops, 62% in Western Germany and 29% in Eastern Germany concurred. In Western Germany, 63% preferred to fulfil alliance obligations in the event of an attack, compared to a relatively lower 36% in Eastern Germany.²⁹ In another poll conducted in March 2023, 47% of Germans expressed support for military aid to Ukraine. Additionally, 43% of Germans believed that the sanctions against Russia were insufficient, while 33% thought they were at an appropriate level. A significant majority, 73%, believed that Ukraine should primarily decide when to enter negotiations with Russia. Moreover, 54% of Germans disagreed with the idea that Ukraine needs to cede territories to Russia to end the war. Voters from almost all parties concurred on this, with the exception of AfD supporters, where 64% stated that Ukraine needed to cede territories to end the war.³⁰ However, according to a poll conducted in August 2023, a majority of Germans (52%) opposed providing Ukraine with long-range Taurus missiles, which Kyiv had requested.³¹

Despite the disparities, Germany has maintained open borders for Ukrainian refugees. As of January 2023, Germany was accommodating over a million Ukrainian refugees,³² resulting in a

²⁷ Kinkartz, S. (2023, September 9). *How war in Ukraine impacted Germany's budget*. Retrieved from Deutsche Welle: <https://www.dw.com/en/how-war-in-ukraine-impacted-germanys-budget/a-66762462>

²⁸ Nia, O. T. (2023, February 23). *1 year on: How Ukraine war has changed Germany*. Retrieved from Anadolu Agency: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/1-year-on-how-ukraine-war-has-changed-germany/2828955>

²⁹ Schwarz, K.-P. (2023)

³⁰ Ehni, V. E. (2023, March 2). *Mehrheit der Deutschen stimmt Waffenlieferungen zu*. Retrieved from tagesschau: <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend/deutschlandtrend-3313.html>

³¹ *Mehrheit gegen "Taurus"-Lieferung an Ukraine*. (2023, August 18). Retrieved from tagesschau: <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend/deutschlandtrend-3390.html>

³² ReliefWeb. (2023, January 13). *Refugees from Ukraine in Europe (January 2023 Snapshot) - European Countries Implement Temporary Protection Schemes to Respond*. Retrieved from ReliefWeb: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/refugees-ukraine-europe-january-2023-snapshot-european-countries-implement-temporary-protection-schemes-respond>

1.3% increase in Germany's population.³³ Almost half of these refugees expressed their intention to remain in Germany as of July. Furthermore, 18% of these refugees had secured employment in Germany, potentially benefiting the German labour market, which is grappling with a shortage of skilled workers.³⁴

Germany has exhibited reluctance in dispatching weapons to Ukraine and continues to show hesitation in supplying weapons such as the Taurus missiles, which Ukraine has been requesting for months. However, the importance of Germany reversing its longstanding policy of not arming parties engaged in conflicts should not be underestimated. Despite this transformation, it is improbable that we will witness a significant increase in the quantity of weapons delivered from Germany to Ukraine, given the slow progress of Ukraine's counteroffensive operations.

Hungary

Since gaining independence in 1991, Ukraine's relationship with Hungary has been complex, stemming from various disputes. Prior to his re-election as Prime Minister in 2010, Viktor Orbán was a strong advocate for a Ukraine leaning towards Europe. As a member of the opposition, he criticised NATO's decision not to admit Ukraine and Georgia to the military alliance during the 2008 summit in Bucharest. However, following his re-election, his stance underwent a significant shift. This change is largely attributed to the treatment of the substantial Hungarian minority residing in Zakarpattia, a western Ukrainian region bordering Hungary.³⁵

The disputes regarding the treatment of ethnic Hungarians primarily stem from Ukraine's laws on minority languages. The repeal of Ukraine's 2012 Law on the Principles of the State Language Policy, also known as the "Kolesnychenko-Kivalov language law", sparked concerns in Hungary. This law had acknowledged Hungarian as a regional language in Berehove, the cultural hub for Hungarians in Ukraine. The Hungarian Foreign Ministry expressed serious concerns about the repeal of the law, stating that it "could call into question the commitment of the new Ukrainian administration towards democracy".³⁶

Further disputes emerged in 2017 when Ukraine enacted the Education Law, mandating that Ukrainian be the language of instruction in state schools from the fifth grade onwards. This effectively prohibited education in minority languages at basic and upper secondary levels, except

³³ AP. (2023, June 20). *Ukrainian refugees helped push German population up 1.3% last year*. Retrieved from Associated Press: <https://apnews.com/article/germany-population-increase-https://apnews.com/article/germany-population-increase-ukrainian-refugees-8b222a57a3c3d270238b867a15cb1ee4>

³⁴ Reuters. (2023, July 12). *Close to half of Ukrainian refugees in Germany hope to stay*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/close-half-ukrainian-refugees-germany-plan-stay-2023-07-12/>

³⁵ Verseck, K. (2022, December 12). *Hungary: What's Viktor Orbán's problem with Ukraine?* Retrieved from Deutsche Welle: <https://www.dw.com/en/hungary-whats-viktor-orbans-problem-with-ukraine/a-64063750>

³⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2014, February 25). *Repealing the language law could question Ukraine's democratic commitment*. Retrieved from Website of the Hungarian Government: <https://2010-2014.kormany.hu/en/ministry-of-foreign-affairs/news/repealing-the-language-law-could-question-ukraine-s-democratic-commitment>

as a separate subject. The law elicited strong reactions in Hungary, as well as several other countries including Romania, Russia, and Poland. The Hungarian Foreign Minister, Péter Szijjártó, stated that the issue had led to the worst deterioration in relations between their countries since the collapse of the Soviet Union.³⁷ He vowed to “block all steps within the European Union that would represent a step forward in Ukraine’s European integration process”.³⁸ Since then, Hungary has vetoed NATO cooperation with Ukraine on multiple occasions.

In 2019, Ukraine enacted the law “On Protecting the Functioning of the Ukrainian Language as the State Language”, which mandated the use of the Ukrainian language in several key public sectors. This law also incensed Hungary, leading Szijjártó to declare the law as “unacceptable” and “part of [then-Ukrainian President Petro] Poroshenko’s anti-Hungarian policy”.³⁹ According to the British journalist William Natrass, writing for Politico, while Hungarians perceive Russia as having historically harmed Hungary, with these laws, Ukraine is now seen as wronging Hungarians in the present.⁴⁰

Relations between Hungary and Ukraine were further strained in 2014 when Orbán delivered a speech advocating for autonomy, collective rights, and dual citizenship for Hungarians residing in Ukraine. This speech was given shortly after Russia’s annexation of Crimea, leading Ukraine to accuse Orbán of inciting separatism.⁴¹ In 2018, a leaked video surfaced showing Hungarian Ukrainians being granted Hungarian citizenship at Hungary’s consulate in Berehove, violating Ukrainian law and widening the diplomatic rift between the two countries.⁴²

When Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022, Hungary was quick to condemn Russia, stating: “With our EU and NATO allies, we condemn Russia’s military attack”. However, Orbán added that Hungary must stay out of the military conflict, which meant that sending either troops or military equipment to Ukraine was “out of the question, though we will, of course, provide humanitarian aid”.⁴³ Since then, Orbán has declined to supply Ukraine with military equipment or permit their transport across the Hungarian-Ukrainian border.⁴⁴

³⁷ Prentice, A. (2017, December 8). *Criticism of Ukraine’s language law justified: rights body*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-language/criticism-of-ukraines-language-law-justified-rights-body-idUSKBN1E227K>

³⁸ RFE/RL. (2017, September 26). *Hungary Threatens ‘Pain’ For Ukraine Over Controversial Language Law*. Retrieved from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-hungary-language-law-eu-pain/28758760.html>

³⁹ Béni, A. (2019, April 26). *Hungarian foreign minister: Ukraine’s language law ‘unacceptable’*. Retrieved from Daily News Hungary: <https://dailynewshungary.com/hungarian-foreign-minister-ukraines-language-law-unacceptable/>

⁴⁰ Natrass, W. (2022, September 15). *Hungary’s ‘pro-Russia’ stance was inevitable*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-pro-russia-stance-inevitable/>

⁴¹ Verseck (2022)

⁴² Arunyan, A. (2018, October 11). *How Hungary and Ukraine fell out over a passport scandal*. Retrieved from openDemocracy: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/how-kyiv-and-budapest-fell-out-over-zakarpattya/>

⁴³ MTI-Hungary Today. (2022, February 24). *PM Orbán: “Together with Our EU and NATO Allies, We Condemn Russia’s Military Attack”*. Retrieved from Hungary Today: <https://hungarytoday.hu/orban-russia-attack-condems-aggression/>

⁴⁴ RFE/RL. (2022, April 6). *Hungary’s Foreign Ministry Summons Ukraine’s Ambassador Over ‘Offensive Comments’*. Retrieved from Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty: <https://www.rferl.org/a/hungary-ukraine-war-russia-comments-invasion/31788562.html>

Since the war, Hungary has also maintained favourable relations with Russia. These relations are largely due to Hungary's dependence on Russia for its energy, which is significantly greater than that of its European partners, with around 80% of its gas being imported from the Russian company Gazprom.⁴⁵ This has played a crucial role in shaping Hungarian politics on the Ukraine war and is the primary reason why Hungary agreed in April 2022 to pay for Russian gas using the Russian Ruble, diverging from the European Union's stance.⁴⁶ In August of the previous year, Hungary signed a gas agreement with Gazprom to receive up to an additional 5.8 million cubic meters of gas per day in addition to the existing contract quantity.⁴⁷ In April 2023, Hungary signed new agreements with Gazprom to ensure its continued access to Russian energy.⁴⁸ These dealings are related to why Orbán has frequently criticised the EU's sanctions against Russia, claiming that they have been ineffective and have harmed the economies of European countries more than Russia's economy. However, he has always endorsed them in the end.

A notable incident occurred in June 2022 when Hungary refused to approve a new batch of EU sanctions against Russia because among the list of sanctioned individuals was the Russian Orthodox Church Patriarch, Kirill of Moscow. Orbán demanded that Kirill be removed from the list in exchange for approving the sanctions, citing respect for religious freedom. A day later, the EU removed Kirill from the list and the sanctions package successfully passed a few days later. This, however, worsened Hungary's relations with the EU, with a diplomat describing Hungary's move as a "hostage policy".⁴⁹

Orbán has also blocked EU aid to Ukraine several times. On 6 December 2022, Hungary vetoed an 18-billion-euro EU financial aid package to Ukraine. Orbán explained that the veto had nothing to do with Ukraine aid but rather with how the EU should be managed, adding that he did not believe providing aid in the manner his allies desired was the best solution and that "if we continue to go down the road towards a debt community, we will not be able to turn back". Most observers, however, believe that the move was done to blackmail EU into dropping its demands for anti-corruption reforms in the country, whose deadline had been extended to 19 December earlier that year and if not implemented, would strip Hungary of billions of euros it would gain from EU.⁵⁰

In a similar incident on 16 May 2023, Hungary blocked a batch of military support for Ukraine provided by the European Peace Facility. A Hungarian government spokesman explained the move

⁴⁵ Preussen, W. (2022, August 31). *Hungary signs new gas deal with Gazprom*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/hungary-signs-deal-with-gazprom-over-additional-gas/>

⁴⁶ Than, K., Szakacs, G., & Chestney, N. (2022, April 7). *Breaking ranks with EU, Hungary says ready to pay for Russian gas in roubles*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-working-solution-pay-russian-gas-may-foreign-minister-2022-04-06/>

⁴⁷ Preussen (2022)

⁴⁸ Reuters. (2023, April 11). *Hungary agrees on option for more Russian gas shipments, oil transit fees*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/hungary-agrees-option-more-russian-gas-shipments-oil-transit-fees-2023-04-11/>

⁴⁹ Liboreiro, J., Koutsokosta, E., & Murray, S. (2022, June 2). *Patriarch Kirill excluded from EU sanctions after Hungary's objection*. Retrieved from Euronews: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/06/02/patriarch-kirill-excluded-from-eu-sanctions-after-hungary-s-objection>

⁵⁰ Casert, R. (2022, December 6). *Hungary blocks EU Ukraine aid, deepening rift with Brussels*. Retrieved from Associated Press: <https://apnews.com/article/europe-business-hungary-budapest-viktor-orban-6bdcc94f8db8e5a9ca0b26cf1c3b7157>

by saying that Hungary disagrees with the EU using the European Peace Facility “solely with regard to Ukraine as this does not allow sufficient funds to be channeled to promote the EU’s interests in other areas”, giving the Balkans and North Africa as examples of other areas that the money could instead be directed towards.⁵¹

After winning the parliamentary elections on 3 April 2022, Orbán criticized Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy and EU bureaucrats, calling them “opponents” that he had to overcome in order to win.⁵² Two days later, Zelenskyy said in his speech that Orbán would have to choose between Russia and the “other world”, suggesting that the Hungarian leader feared Russia.⁵³ The next day, Hungary summoned the Ukrainian ambassador to Budapest over what it described as offensive comments from Kyiv. Szijjártó made a statement saying that it is “time for Ukrainian leaders to stop their insults directed at Hungary and acknowledge the will of the Hungarian people”, referring to the re-election of Orbán. He echoed Orbán’s stance on the war by adding that “this is not our war, so we want to and will stay out of it”.⁵⁴

U.S. ambassador to Hungary, David Pressman said on 12 April 2023 that the “Hungarian government continues to maintain close relations with Russia and supports the Russian war machine in various economic ways” and imposed sanctions on the Budapest-based International Investment Bank with ties to Russia and three of its directors.⁵⁵ In May of the same year, Ukraine had blacklisted the largest commercial bank of Hungary, OTP Bank as an “international sponsor” of Ukraine war. OTP rejected the allegations and the listing sparked fierce backlash from Hungarian officials, further deteriorating the Hungarian-Ukrainian relations. Szijjártó called the listing “scandalous and unacceptable” and said Hungary would continue to block EU military support to Ukraine until Ukraine removes OTP from the list. Despite the reaction, Ukraine has not removed OTP from the list, even when it removed five Greek companies on 21 June.⁵⁶ As a result, Hungary once again blocked a tranche of EU off-budget military support for Ukraine, citing the listing of OTP as the reason. “We are ready to change our mind if the Ukrainians put an end to the

⁵¹ Reuters. (2023, May 16). *Hungary blocks next tranche of EU off-budget military support for Ukraine*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungary-blocks-next-tranche-eu-off-budget-military-support-ukraine-2023-05-16/>

⁵² Picheta, R., & Bardi, B. (2022, April 4). *Viktor Orban, Hungary’s authoritarian leader and key Putin ally, calls Zelensky an ‘opponent’ after winning reelection*. Retrieved from CNN: <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/03/europe/hungary-election-results-viktor-orban-intl/index.html>

⁵³ Reuters. (2022, April 5). *Zelenskiy: Hungary’s Orban will have to choose between Russia and ‘other world’*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/zelenskiy-hungarys-orban-will-have-choose-between-russia-other-world-2022-04-05/>

⁵⁴ Reuters. (2022, April 6). *Hungary’s foreign ministry summons Ukrainian envoy over ‘insults’*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/hungarys-foreign-ministry-summons-ukrainian-ambassador-2022-04-06/>

⁵⁵ Gosling, T. (2023, April 14). *Hungary’s loyalties tested as Russia’s war in Ukraine grinds on*. Retrieved from Al Jazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/4/14/hungarys-loyalties-tested-as-russias-war-in-ukraine-grinds-on>

⁵⁶ Liboreiro, J. (2023, June 21). *Ukraine suspends listing of five Greek companies as ‘war sponsors’ but maintains Hungary’s OTP Bank*. Retrieved from Euronews: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/06/21/ukraine-suspends-listing-of-five-greek-companies-as-war-sponsors-but-maintains-hungarys-ot>

ridiculous, lying state whereby OTP, the biggest Hungarian bank, is on the list of the international sponsors of war”, Szijjártó stated.⁵⁷

Orbán does not believe that a Ukrainian victory is possible and has blamed the EU for prolonging the war by sanctioning Russia and providing military assistance to Ukraine. During an annual address on 18 February 2023, he stated that “the West didn’t isolate the conflict but elevated it to a pan-European level”, a move he didn’t agree with. He added that “the war in Ukraine is not a conflict between the armies of good and evil, but between two Slavic countries that are fighting against one another. This is their war, not ours”.⁵⁸ On 27 June 2023, in an interview with the German daily Bild, Orbán stated that he believed that “Ukraine was no longer a sovereign state” and any potential peace settlement of the conflict in the country would depend largely on the United States, and not on Ukraine itself. According to him, the idea that Ukraine “will be able to win this war against Russia” is an “incorrect understanding of the situation”. He added that a return to the negotiating table was imperative.⁵⁹

Despite the icy relations, Hungary has kept its borders open for Ukrainian refugees fleeing from the war. A ReliefWeb report from 20 June 2023 stated that approximately 4.2 million Ukrainians had entered Hungary since the beginning of the war. Although the majority continued their journey further into Europe, around 36,000 applied for temporary protection in Hungary as of 3 March 2023. As of 31 January 2023, 5,000 Ukrainian children were attending Hungarian public schools.⁶⁰

To better understand the situation, we should examine the political landscape within Hungary in relation to Ukraine. A coalition partner of the ruling party, primarily considered a satellite party of Fidesz, is the Christian Democratic People’s Party (CDPP). This party holds views on Ukraine that are similar to those of Fidesz. On 14 September 2023, Zsolt Semjén, the leader of the CDPP, stated, “Until the fate of the [Hungarian] minority [in Ukraine] is settled with a guarantee, there can be no talk of any kind of European Union or NATO accession.” He also expressed his belief that Hungarians are “more indigenous” to Transcarpathia than Ukrainians.⁶¹ In February 2023, the CDPP and Fidesz jointly proposed a parliamentary resolution commemorating the one-year anniversary of the start of the Russian invasion. The resolution largely discussed the negative consequences of the war, noting that “Europe is in a day of war” and condemning Russia’s military aggression. However, parts of the resolution denounced the economic sanctions adopted by the EU against Russia as unhelpful. The resolution also highlighted the negative impact of the war on

⁵⁷ Reuters. (2023, June 26). *Hungary blocks next tranche of EU off-budget military support for Ukraine*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/article/hungary-ukraine-epf-idINS8N36801R>

⁵⁸ Spike, J. (2023, February 18). *Hungary’s Orbán accuses EU of prolonging war in Ukraine*. Retrieved from Associated Press: <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-politics-government-european-union-viktor-orban-a404e437593bddf9b0e8b23482f2872e>

⁵⁹ TASS. (2023, June 27). *Ukraine no longer sovereign state, says Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán*. Retrieved from TASS: <https://tass.com/world/1639401>

⁶⁰ ReliefWeb. (2023, June 20). *Advocacy Messages on Access to Education for Refugees from Ukraine in Hungary - June 15, 2023*. Retrieved from ReliefWeb: <https://reliefweb.int/report/hungary/advocacy-messages-access-education-refugees-ukraine-hungary-june-15-2023>

⁶¹ B., Á. (2023, September 14). *Semjén Zsolt: Ha az ukránok kérik, tíz perc alatt írok egy olyan törvénymódosítót, ami összhangban van mindennel*. Retrieved from Népszava: https://nepszava.hu/3208764_semjen-zsolt-karpataljai-magyarok-ukrajna

the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia and added that delivering lethal weapons to Ukraine only delays peace.⁶²

The largest opposition party in the country, the Democratic Coalition, holds a contrasting view. In April 2023, the party leader, Ferenc Gyurcsány, expressed that the cause of the war lies in the Russian leadership and that the only solution to the problem is the total isolation of the Russian leadership.⁶³ Leaders of another major opposition party, the Momentum Movement, visited Ukraine in November 2022 to show their support for Ukraine, becoming the first Hungarian parliamentary delegation to do so. The party also supports Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO.⁶⁴ The conservative nationalist Jobbik party, which had pursued a pro-Russian policy for years, reversed its stance after the Russian invasion. Its leader, Márton Gyöngyösi, had participated as an observer in the 2014 referendum in Donetsk and Luhansk and was subsequently banned from Ukraine. In a 2022 interview, he apologized to Ukraine, admitting that it was a "mistake to side with the Russians at that time." He went on to say that he fully supports Ukraine today.⁶⁵

A poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in October 2023 indicates that only 33% of Hungarians perceive Russia as a "major military threat to neighbouring countries." Additionally, 48% of respondents expressed the view that economic sanctions on Russia should be decreased, while 34% wanted the sanctions to remain at its current level, without an increase.⁶⁶

If the current trend persists, it's unlikely that we'll see any significant changes in Hungary's official stance towards Ukraine. The parties composing the "United for Hungary" opposition coalition mostly support Ukraine and want the government to take harsher stance against Russia. However, the opposition suffered a major loss against the Fidesz-CDPP alliance in the 2022 parliamentary elections, gaining only 34% of the votes, with Orban getting 54%. So a government change in the near future is unlikely. We are more likely to see Orban adopt a harsher stance against Ukraine as support for the war wanes in the rest of the EU. The only way for Ukraine to bolster Hungarian support for its cause would be to grant additional rights to the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia, a matter about which the Hungarian leading alliance parties are very sensitive.

⁶² *Békepárti határozati javaslatot nyújtott be a Fidesz és a KDNP a háború egyéves évfordulójára.* (2023, February 28). Retrieved from BARANYA COUNTY NEWS PORTAL: <https://www.bama.hu/orszag-vilag/2023/02/bekeparti-hatarozati-javaslatot-nyujtott-be-a-fidesz-es-a-kdnp-a-haboru-egyev-es-evfordulojara>

⁶³ Kéfer, A. (2023, April 25). *Gyurcsány Ferenc rájött, hogyan érhetne véget a háború.* Retrieved from index.hu: <https://index.hu/belfold/2023/04/25/gyurcsany-ferenc-dk-ukrajna-oroszorszag-orosz-ukran-konfliktus-haboru-beke/>

⁶⁴ Sándor, N. M. (2022, November 27). *Mit csináltak a Momentum képviselői Ukrajnában?* Retrieved from index.hu: <https://index.hu/belfold/2022/11/27/momentum-mozgalom-ukrajna-haboru-gelencser-ferenc-ellenzek/>

⁶⁵ *Gyöngyösi Márton bocsánatot kért Ukrajnától a 2014-es donyecki népszavazáson betöltött szerepe miatt.* (2022, December 4). Retrieved from mandiner: <https://mandiner.hu/kulfold/2022/12/kulfold-gyongyosi-marton-donyeck-nepszavazas-2015-ukrajna-haboru-oroszorszag>

⁶⁶ Fagan, M., Clancy, L., Gubbala, S., & Austin, S. (2023, October 2). *Poles and Hungarians Differ Over Views of Russia and the U.S.* Retrieved from Pew Research Center: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2023/10/02/roles-and-hungarians-differ-over-views-of-russia-and-the-us/>

Italy

Traditionally, Ukraine and Italy relations have been defined by trade and investments. Like other countries in Europe, Italy also maintained close relations with Russia. During the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest, Italy was one of the countries that opposed the ascension of Ukraine and Georgia into the military alliance, fearing that this would deteriorate the country's relations with Russia without any real security benefits to NATO.⁶⁷ Despite Russia's annexation of Crimea, the bond between Russia and Italy persisted, with continued economic collaboration, particularly in the energy sector.⁶⁸

On the day Ukraine was invaded, Italy's then-Prime Minister, Mario Draghi, summoned the Russian ambassador to the country. Draghi condemned the invasion, describing it as an "unjustified and unprovoked aggression". He added that Italy was "close to the Ukrainian people and institutions in this drastic moment". The Italy foreign ministry released a statement calling the attack "extremely serious" and "a clear and distinct violation of international law".⁶⁹

In an interview in May 2022, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov expressed surprise at the Italian condemnation and active support for Ukraine, stating "Italy is in the front row among those who not only adopt anti-Russian sanctions but also undertakes all initiatives in this regard. Unfortunately, at the beginning it was a surprise".⁷⁰ Draghi stated in an interview in December 2022 that "Italy's position on the war was probably stronger and more assertive than many observers expected". He noted the past strong ties between Italy and Russia but added that "we could not remain impassive in the face of unprovoked aggression", referring to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. "In Russia they probably counted on our ambiguity, which instead did not exist, and this explains the angry and disjointed reaction of some Russian diplomats", Draghi stated.⁷¹

Italy was initially hesitant to sanction Russia, especially in the energy sector since Italy imported most of its gas from Russia.⁷² On 5 April 2022, however, Draghi approved the latest EU sanctions, which included a ban on Russian coal imports and Russian ships docking at ports of EU countries.

⁶⁷ De Maio, G., & Sartori, N. (2018, November). *Le relazioni tra Italia e*. Retrieved from [parlamento.it: https://www.parlamento.it/application/xmanager/projects/parlamento/file/repository/affariinternazionali/osservatorio/approfondimenti/PI0144_App.pdf](https://www.parlamento.it/application/xmanager/projects/parlamento/file/repository/affariinternazionali/osservatorio/approfondimenti/PI0144_App.pdf)

⁶⁸ Mikhelidze, N. (2019, April 16). Italy and Russia: New Alignment or More of the Same? *Instituto Affari Internazionali*. Retrieved from <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/italy-and-russia-new-alignment-or-more-same>

⁶⁹ AFP - Agence France Presse. (2022, February 22). *Italy Condemns Russia's Attack As 'Unjustified'*. Retrieved from Barron's: <https://www.barrons.com/news/italy-pm-condemns-russia-s-attack-as-unjustified-and-unjustifiable-01645684507>

⁷⁰ TGC24. (2022, May 1). *Lavrov in esclusiva su "Zona Bianca": "Russia non ha mai smesso dialogo per evitare Guerra Mondiale" / "L'Italia in prima fila contro di noi, una sorpresa negativa"*. Retrieved from TGC24: https://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/mondo/lavrov-in-esclusiva-su-zona-bianca-russia-non-ha-mai-smesso-dialogo-per-evitare-guerra-mondiale_49548127-202202k.shtml

⁷¹ Polito, A. (2022, December 24). *Draghi: «L'Italia ha dimostrato di farcela. Serve coesione e dialogo»*. Retrieved from Corriere Della Sera: https://www.corriere.it/politica/22_dicembre_24/mario-draghi-intervista-463ee9fe-82f8-11ed-a908-044c2789a441.shtml

⁷² Reuters. (2022, February 18). *Any EU sanctions on Russia should not hit energy -Draghi*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/any-eu-sanctions-russia-should-not-hit-energy-draghi-2022-02-18/>

Vladimir Putin “must answer for their actions”, Draghi was quoted as saying on the same day when questioned about the sanctions.⁷³

Following the invasion, Italy adopted the policy of minimising its dependence on Russian energy. In a March 2023 speech, Minister of Economic Development of Italy, Adolfo Urso, stated that Italy’s reliance on Russian gas had dropped from 40 percent in 2020 to 16 percent in 2022 and was planned to drop to 0 percent by 2024, as Italy made new energy deals with countries like Algeria, Azerbaijan, and Libya.⁷⁴

Italy also supported Ukraine’s EU ascension and was the first major EU member to do so, according to Draghi.⁷⁵ In June 2022, Draghi, along with French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Scholz, visited Kyiv as a “a message of European unity toward Ukrainians” as described by Macron.⁷⁶ Here, too, Draghi reiterated his support for Ukraine’s EU membership, which was repeated by Macron and Scholz. On 23 June, a few days after the visit, Ukraine was granted candidate status for full membership in the EU by the European Council.⁷⁷

In October 2022, Draghi was replaced by a new coalition government led by Giorgia Meloni as Prime Minister. Despite ideological differences with Draghi, Meloni announced her full support for Ukraine, stating that “peace can be achieved by supporting Ukraine [...] it is the only chance we have for the two sides to negotiate”. Her coalition allies, however, aren’t as supportive of Ukraine. Silvio Berlusconi, the former Prime Minister of Italy and the founder of the Forza Italia political party, who was also a long-time friend of Putin, said in September 2022 that Putin was “pushed” into invading Ukraine with the goal of putting “decent people” to lead Ukraine.⁷⁸ In February 2023, he blamed Ukraine for the invasion and stated that he would not meet Zelenskyy if he was still Prime Minister.⁷⁹ Berlusconi died in June 2023 and was replaced by Antonio Tajani, who also serves as the Foreign Minister of Italy. In a visit to Kyiv on 2 October, Tajani proclaimed that Ukraine “can count on the Italian government’s support in its battle for freedom”.⁸⁰ Matteo Salvini, the deputy Prime Minister of Italy and the Federal Secretary of the Lega Nord party, a traditionally pro-Russian politician, questioned the Western sanctions against Russia in September

⁷³ Armellini, A. (2022, April 5). *Italy fully supports new EU sanctions on Russia*. Retrieved from Anadolu Agency: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/italy-fully-supports-new-eu-sanctions-on-russia/2556076>

⁷⁴ Pascale, F. (2023, March 21). *Italy free from Russian gas by year’s end says minister*. Retrieved from Euractiv: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/italy-free-from-russian-gas-by-years-end-says-minister/>

⁷⁵ Mikhelidze, N. (2023, February 24). *Italy’s Response to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine*. *Instituto Affari Internazionali*. Retrieved from <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/italys-response-russian-invasion-ukraine>

⁷⁶ Darmanin, J., Caulcutt, C., & Miller, C. (2022, June 16). *Macron, Scholz and Draghi meet Zelenskyy in Kyiv during historic visit*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/macron-scholz-draghi-kyiv-visit-zelenskyy-ukraine/>

⁷⁷ Mikhelidze (2023)

⁷⁸ Armellini, A. (2022, September 23). *Putin invaded to put 'decent people' in Kyiv, says Italy's Berlusconi*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-was-pushed-into-ukraine-war-says-italys-berlusconi-2022-09-23/>

⁷⁹ Reuters. (2023, February 12). *Italy's Berlusconi says he wouldn't seek meeting with Zelenskiy if PM*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italys-berlusconi-says-he-wouldnt-see-meeting-with-zelenskiy-if-pm-2023-02-12/>

⁸⁰ *Ukraine can count on Italy says Tajani in Kyiv*. (2023, October 2). Retrieved from Ansa.it: https://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2023/10/02/ukraine-can-count-on-italy-says-tajani-in-kyiv_12e76a4e-c92b-4144-96d3-9bc6c122dc0d.html

2022, saying that “would not want the sanctions to harm those who impose them more than those who are hit by them”.⁸¹ Both Forza Italia and Lega Nord nevertheless had voted in favour of arms supplies to Ukraine.⁸² One of the major opposition parties in the country, the Democratic Party, maintains a staunchly pro-Ukrainian stance. The newly elected party president, Elly Schlein, began her leadership by reassuring Western allies that her party stands with Kyiv.⁸³ Another significant party in Italy, the Five Star Movement, split in 2022 over Ukraine. The party leader, Giuseppe Conte, opposed Mario Draghi’s support for Ukraine, while Luigi di Maio, a party member and then-Foreign Minister, supported Draghi’s stance. As a result, di Maio left the party and took dozens of MPs with him.⁸⁴

On 22 March 2023, when responding to an MP who proposed ending support for Ukraine, Meloni gave a speech stating that ending support would be equivalent to endorsing the invasion of the country. “Let’s call it for what it is. If we stop, we will approve the invasion of Ukraine. I am not so hypocritical as to cover up the word ‘peace’ with the word ‘invasion’” she stated.⁸⁵ On 6 October, the Italian Defence Minister stated that the Italian government was running out of military equipment to send to Ukraine. However, Meloni pledged to support Ukraine as long as necessary, including its reconstruction, after meeting with Zelenskyy in Granada on the same day.⁸⁶

Because of the war, Italy experienced a surge in inflation, hitting 9% by the close of 2022. Prior to the conflict, Italian exports to Russia accounted for 1.5% of the total, valued at approximately 7.7 billion euros. Despite a decrease to 4.8 billion in 2022, this figure remains substantial in comparison to Italy’s European counterparts. This is largely because many Italian firms have chosen to remain in Russia, merely pausing their operations temporarily, which enables them to restart their assets and activities in the near future. Additionally, Moscow has initiated a series of triangulations with third countries, including Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, and Armenia, as a strategy to bypass sanctions imposed by Brussels.⁸⁷

The Italian public is one of the least supportive of Ukraine. A February 2023 poll by Corriere della Sera showed 45 percent of Italians polled were against sending weapons to Ukraine.⁸⁸ A May 2022

⁸¹ Roberts, H. (2022, September 4). *Italy’s Salvini says West should rethink sanctions for Russia*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/italys-salvini-says-west-should-rethink-sanctions-for-russia/>

⁸² Amante, A. (2023, March 21). *Italy’s Meloni ready to risk unpopularity over support for Ukraine*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italys-meloni-ready-risk-unpopularity-over-support-ukraine-2023-03-21/>

⁸³ *New leader of Italian Dems bolsters her pro-Ukraine stance*. (2023, April 19). Retrieved from Decode 39: <https://decode39.com/6526/schlein-democratic-party-ukraine-defence/>

⁸⁴ Wheeldon, T. (2022, June 26). *Five Star Movement split over Ukraine unsettles Italy’s ruling coalition*. Retrieved from France24: <https://www.france24.com/en/europe/20220626-five-star-movement-split-over-ukraine-unsettles-italy-s-ruling-coalition>

⁸⁵ The New Voice of Ukraine. (2023, March 24). *Italian PM in passionate defense of Rome’s enduring support for Ukraine*. Retrieved from Yahoo News: <https://news.yahoo.com/italian-pm-passionate-defense-rome-220700406.html>

⁸⁶ Pascale, F. (2023, October 6). *Italy confirms long-term support for Ukraine despite limited resources*. Retrieved from Euractiv: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/italy-confirms-long-term-support-for-ukraine-despite-limited-resources/>

⁸⁷ Sky Tg24 (2023, February 22). *Ucraina, quali sono stati gli effetti economici di un anno di guerra sull’Italia*. Retrieved from Sky Tg24: <https://tg24.sky.it/economia/2023/02/22/guerra-ucraina-italia>

⁸⁸ Amante (2023)

poll conducted by the European Council on Foreign Relations showed that more than 60 percent of Italians wanted Ukraine and Russia to immediately make peace, even if it meant Ukraine making concessions. Over one-quarter of Italians said they believed the U.S. was the biggest obstacle to peace and 20 percent believed the U.S. was to blame for the war, the largest percentage of all polled countries, which include Germany, the U.K., and France.⁸⁹

Like its allies, Italy has kept its borders open for Ukrainian refugees fleeing the war. As of February 2023, almost 200,000 Ukrainian refugees had crossed into Italy, with women and minors making up the majority. Italy supports the refugees with a monthly contribution of 300 Euros and an additional 150 for families with minors.⁹⁰

Despite having one of the least pro-Ukrainian publics in the EU, Italy's Meloni has emerged as one of Ukraine's most active supporters, dispelling pre-election speculations that she wouldn't support Ukraine. However, with the Defence Ministry indicating a depletion of its weapons stock and waning public support for Ukraine, it will be challenging for Meloni to maintain her current stance of unequivocally supporting Ukraine with everything it needs. Much depends on the progression of the war. A successful counteroffensive operation by Ukraine could likely bolster support for the country, making it easier for Meloni to continue her support.

Poland

Since Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, its relationship with Poland has been rocky. However, immediately after independence, the two countries enjoyed good relations. Poland was the first country to recognize Ukraine's independence. In 1996, both countries issued a declaration stating that the existence of an independent Ukraine promotes the consolidation of Poland's independence, just as the existence of an independent Poland promotes Ukraine's independence.⁹¹ During the 1990s, the primary emphasis in bilateral relations revolved largely around economic matters, trade affairs, and history.⁹² Poland was considered by Ukraine as one of its main partners in Europe.⁹³

After the October Revolution in Ukraine brought pro-Western forces to power, the relations between Poland and Ukraine strengthened even further. However, in 2014, Russia's invasion of Ukraine following the Maidan Revolution presented significant challenges for both Ukrainian and Polish authorities.⁹⁴ The revolution resulted in the ousting of Russian-backed president Viktor

⁸⁹ Krastev, I., & Leonard, M. (2022, June). Peace Versus Justice: The Coming European Split Over the War in Ukraine. *European Council on Foreign Relations*.

⁹⁰ Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale. (n.d.). *Italy in support of Ukraine*. Retrieved from [esteri.it: https://www.esteri.it/en/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/aree_geografiche/europa/litalia-a-sostegno-dellucraina/](https://www.esteri.it/en/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/aree_geografiche/europa/litalia-a-sostegno-dellucraina/)

⁹¹ Idem.

⁹² International Centre for Policy Studies. (2018). *Ukraine-Poland Relations*. Retrieved from International Centre for Policy Studies: https://icps.com.ua/assets/uploads/images/files/ua_pl_relations_icps.pdf

⁹³ Idem.

⁹⁴ Szeptycki, A. (2016, January). Poland-Ukraine Relations. *Revista UNISCI / UNISCI Journal*(40). Retrieved from <https://www.ucm.es/data/cont/media/www/pag-78913/UNISCIDP40-4AndrzejSzeptycki.pdf>

Yanukovich after he declined to sign an association agreement with the EU. Poland has been a staunch advocate of Ukraine's aspirations to become a member of the European Union and extended its support to Kyiv during the 2014 crisis. Despite this, relations between the two nations were strained after 2015 due to their divergent perspectives on their common past.⁹⁵

Poland and Ukraine have conflicting views on some historical events. One painful chapter in their history is the slaughter of Polish civilians in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in 1943-1944, which claimed up to 100,000 lives. After 1991, Poland raised this issue in bilateral talks, hoping that Ukraine would eventually address it. However, Ukraine has not condemned the UPA or shown much interest in this matter. The situation was further complicated by Ukraine's passage of decommunization legislation in April 2015, which allowed for the punishment of individuals who disputed the heroism of Ukrainian freedom fighters, including the UPA.⁹⁶

In 2016, the Polish parliament passed a unanimous resolution to recognize the Volhynia massacres as genocide. This decision was highly criticised in Ukraine. The historical disagreement between Poland and Ukraine deteriorated further in April 2017 when Ukraine imposed a prohibition on Polish exhumation activities in Volhynia and other regions within its territory. This move was officially justified as a retaliatory measure against the destruction of an unlawfully constructed UPA monument situated in a small village near the Polish-Ukrainian border.⁹⁷ However, in 2019, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy promised to resume the exhumation of Polish victims of the massacres in an effort to improve the country's relations with Poland.⁹⁸

Despite the differences in historical approaches, Warsaw's strategic posture towards Ukraine has remained largely consistent. The goals of Poland's foreign policy have not changed: to champion Ukraine's cause on the global stage, foster its democratisation and reform efforts, and endorse its integration with Europe. In essence, Ukraine has always been and continues to be the focal point of Poland's Eastern policy.⁹⁹

In 2020, Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania formed the Lublin Triangle, a regional alliance with the purpose of strengthening military, political, economic, and cultural cooperation between its members.¹⁰⁰ Before Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, as it amassed troops along the Ukrainian frontier, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki issued a statement on January 21st, urging European leaders to adopt a firm and unified position against Russia.

⁹⁵ Friedman, G., & Colibasanu, A. (2018, April 9). *Poland and Ukraine's Battle Over the Past*. Retrieved from Geopolitical Futures: <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/poland-ukraines-battle-past/>

⁹⁶ Kononczuk, W. (2018, May 23). *The Paradoxes of Polish-Ukrainian Relations*. Retrieved from Wilson Center: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/the-paradoxes-polish-ukrainian-relations>

⁹⁷ Idem.

⁹⁸ TVP World. (2019, August 29). *Ukrainian president to resume exhumation of Poles in Ukraine: report*. Retrieved from TVP World: <https://tvpworld.com/44143113/ukrainian-president-to-resume-exhumation-of-oles-in-ukraine-report>

⁹⁹ Idem.

¹⁰⁰ Shandra, A. (2020, July 29). *Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania create "Lublin Triangle," stirring memories of 17th century republic*. Retrieved from Euromaidan Press: <https://euromaidanpress.com/2020/07/29/ukraine-poland-and-lithuania-create-lublin-triangle-stirring-memories-of-17th-century-kingdom/>

Poland announced on 31 January that it would supply Ukraine with weapons, ammunition, and humanitarian aid.¹⁰¹ On 17 February, Ukraine, Poland, and the United Kingdom formed a trilateral pact to improve cyber security and energy security, as well as to counter disinformation.¹⁰² On the day of the Russian invasion on 24 February, the Polish parliament adopted a resolution condemning the Russian invasion.¹⁰³ The country also set up eight reception centers across its border with Ukraine to host the Ukrainian refugees.¹⁰⁴ Poland became one of the most active supporters of Ukraine throughout the invasion. The country not only became the second largest weapon supplier to Ukraine in 2022, supplying Ukraine with over \$1.6 billion worth of weapons,¹⁰⁵ but it has also played an instrumental role in forcing other European countries to ramp up their military support of Ukraine. For instance, Poland made great efforts to persuade Germany to provide Ukraine with tanks in January 2023.¹⁰⁶ In this year alone, Poland has supplied Ukraine with 14 fighter jets, 12 attack helicopters, almost a hundred tanks, 200 infantry fighting vehicles, 10 loitering munitions, 260 man portable air defence systems, as well as anti-aircraft guns, surface-to-air missile systems, and military vehicles.¹⁰⁷

Since the invasion, almost 15 million Ukrainian refugees crossed the border with Poland and almost a million of them decided to stay in Poland as of 17 June 2023.¹⁰⁸ They have joined almost two million refugees that arrived in Poland after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014.¹⁰⁹

The invasion and Poland's relentless support for Ukraine during it has drastically improved the relations between the two countries.¹¹⁰ Symbols of support for Ukraine and its people, such as flags and signs in shop windows, are common in the streets in Poland. However, despite the many signs of public support and the country's political backing for Ukraine, public opinion about the

¹⁰¹ Ukrinform. (2022, January 31). *Poland handing over defense aid to Ukraine – Duda's Office*. Retrieved from Ukrinform: <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-defense/3394872-poland-handing-over-defense-aid-to-ukraine-dudas-office.html>

¹⁰² Sprenger, S. (2022, February 18). *Ukraine, UK, Poland announce security pact amid heightened tensions*. Retrieved from DefenseNews: <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2022/02/17/ukraine-uk-poland-announce-security-pact-amid-heightened-tensions/>

¹⁰³ Radio Lublin. (2022, February 24). *Sejm przyjął przez aklamację oświadczenie potępiające rosyjską agresję na Ukrainę*. Retrieved from Radio Lublin: <https://radio.lublin.pl/2022/02/sejm-przyjal-przez-aklamacje-oswiadczenie-potepiajace-rosyjska-agresje-na-ukrajne/>

¹⁰⁴ Kość, W. (2022, February 24). *Poland prepares for flood of Ukrainian refugees*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-prepares-refugees-ukraine-war-russia/>

¹⁰⁵ Szopa, M. (2022, May 24). *Polish Weapons Defending Ukraine [ANALYSIS]*. Retrieved from Defence24: <https://defence24.com/industry/polish-weapons-defending-ukraine-analysis>

¹⁰⁶ Francis, D. (2023, January 28). *Poland is leading Europe's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine*. Retrieved from Atlantic Council: <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/poland-is-leading-europes-response-to-the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine/>

¹⁰⁷ Mitzer, S., & Oliemans, J. (2022, August 18). *The Kielbasa Connection: Polish Military Aid To Ukraine*. Retrieved from Oryx: <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2022/08/the-kielbasa-connection-polish-military.html>

¹⁰⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (n.d.). *Operational Data Portal: Ukraine Refugee Situation*. Retrieved from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

¹⁰⁹ The Conversation. (2023, August 1). *Ukraine war: what young Poles think about their nation's role – here's what our survey shows*. Retrieved from The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/ukraine-war-what-young-poles-think-about-their-nations-role-heres-what-our-survey-shows-209927>

¹¹⁰ Kozloff, N. (2022, May 27). *The Russian invasion has united Poland and Ukraine, two countries with a fractious history*. Retrieved from New Eastern Europe: <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2022/05/27/the-russian-invasion-has-united-poland-and-ukraine-two-countries-with-a-fractious-history/>

future role of Ukrainians in Poland has seen changes in 2023. While 83% of Poles wanted the Polish government to actively support Ukraine, the number has dropped to 64% in 2023, with the number of those who wish for Poland to stay neutral increasing to almost 34% from 16% in 2022. This change is in tandem with rising support for the extreme-right Konfederacja (Confederation) party, which holds an anti-Ukraine sentiment.¹¹¹ Support for the party doubled in the first half of 2023 to almost 10%, making it the third largest party in the country for the first time since its creation in 2019. The party has held anti-Ukrainian views since its creation, mostly due to historical reasons.¹¹² With the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party's approval ratings hovering at approximately 34%, which falls short of the threshold needed to establish a majority government, the party may have to enter into an alliance with the Confederation party to emerge victorious in the upcoming elections. Such a coalition would likely lead to a decrease in Poland's support for Ukraine.¹¹³

On September 21, Poland unexpectedly altered its approach and announced the cessation of weapon supplies to Ukraine. This decision was influenced by an escalating disagreement between the two nations over a provisional prohibition on Ukrainian grain imports. The embargo on Ukrainian grain was initially established earlier this year by multiple European Union countries, aiming to safeguard local farmers who were concerned about the potential impact of the low-priced Ukrainian grain on their livelihoods. The EU recently revealed plans to lift the ban last week. However, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia expressed their intention to resist this modification and maintain the existing restrictions.¹¹⁴ As of September 27, the two countries were in talks to resolve the dispute about the grain import ban.¹¹⁵

According to the Central Statistical Office of Poland, the conflict in Ukraine triggered a rise in Poland's inflation rate, reaching 13.9% annually in May 2022.¹¹⁶ Manufacturing businesses were the most impacted by the war. Most companies chose to cut back on capital expenditures due to the war in Ukraine, while even more opted to increase the prices of their products or services. A poll conducted by the Pew Research Center in February 2023 revealed that the war in Ukraine had varying degrees of impact on businesses: 24% of companies reported a strong impact, 36% indicated a moderate impact, and 40% described the impact as weak. Regardless of the size of the company, a significant majority agreed that the conflict influenced key areas of market operation, including the costs of doing business, business risk, and the prices of supply and investment goods. Industries such as culture, entertainment and recreation, information and communication, and

¹¹¹ The Conversation (2023).

¹¹² Alan-Lee, N. (2023, April 13). *Poland's Far-Right Advances on Anti-Ukraine Sentiment*. Retrieved from Center for European Policy Analysis: <https://cepa.org/article/polands-far-right-advances-on-anti-ukraine-sentiment/>

¹¹³ The Conversation (2023).

¹¹⁴ McCluskey, M., Knight, M., & Yeung, J. (2023, September 21). *Poland will stop providing weapons to Ukraine as dispute over grain imports deepens*. Retrieved from CNN: <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/09/20/europe/poland-ukraine-weapons-grain-intl-hnk/index.html>

¹¹⁵ Reuters. (2023, September 27). *Poland-Ukraine talks on track after grain import ban, Warsaw says*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/polish-minister-says-grain-talks-with-ukraine-are-track-2023-09-27/>

¹¹⁶ Money.pl. (2022, June 7). *Jaki wpływ na gospodarkę Polski ma wojna w Ukrainie?*. Retrieved from money.pl: <https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/jaki-wplyw-na-gospodarke-polski-ma-wojna-w-ukrainie-6777226370452128a.html>

entities providing professional, scientific, and technical activities in Poland were the least affected by the war.¹¹⁷

Poland's unexpected shift in attitude towards Ukraine makes future developments difficult to predict. However, the recent election results have ushered in a more liberal government that is likely to resume active support for Ukraine. At present, Poland is grappling with a refugee crisis, with nearly two million Ukrainian refugees residing there, leading to a housing shortage. The new government will need to address these issues, and it remains to be seen how this may influence their stance on the conflict in Ukraine.

France

When Russia first invaded Ukraine in 2014, France was among the first European countries to announce its non-participation in the G8 Summit in Sochi, scheduled to take place later that year. In reaction to the events, French President François Hollande called the events “exceptionally grave”, which “remind us of a time that we thought was passed, the time of military interferences, interventions and demonstrations.”¹¹⁸

Before the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, France actively tried to ease tensions between Ukraine and Russia and prevent the war. On 7 February, Macron visited Moscow for talks with Putin, and the following day he visited Kyiv to meet his counterpart.¹¹⁹

When Russia invaded, France took a strong position. On 24 February, Macron made a televised speech to the French nation where he stood in front of the French, European Union, and Ukrainian flags. In the speech, he said that the “the events of last night mark a turning point in the history of Europe” and that France “will respond to this act of war without weakness, with cold blood, determination and unity”. Jean-Yves Le Drian, the French Foreign Minister, had stated earlier that France intended to strengthen its backing of Ukraine in every possible way.¹²⁰ The following day, Macron agreed to dispatch military equipment and aid worth \$337 million to Ukraine. Concurrently, France resolved to freeze the assets of Russian officials within its borders. On the evening of February 24th, Macron engaged in a phone conversation with Putin, which he

¹¹⁷ Tomczak, M. (2023, May 27). *Jak wojna w Ukrainie wpłynęła na polskie firmy?*. Retrieved from Obserwator Finansowy: <https://www.obserwatorfinansowy.pl/tematyka/makroekonomia/trendy-gospodarcze/jak-wojna-w-ukrainie-wplynela-na-polskie-firmy/>

¹¹⁸ Tertrais, B. (2014, March 10). *France and the Ukraine Crisis: A Delicate Balancing Act*. Retrieved from European Leadership Network: <https://www.europeanleadershipnetwork.org/commentary/france-and-the-ukraine-crisis-a-delicate-balancing-act/>

¹¹⁹ Schifrin, N. (2022, February 8). *Why France is taking a leading role in the effort to ease tensions between Russia, Ukraine*. Retrieved from PBS: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/why-france-is-taking-a-leading-role-in-the-effort-to-ease-tensions-between-russia-ukraine>

¹²⁰ Reuters. (2022, February 24). *Macron: France will respond without weakness to Russia's "act of war" on Ukraine*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/frances-macron-calls-russia-end-military-actions-ukraine-2022-02-24/>

characterised as “candid, straightforward, and swift”, during which he implored Putin to cease all hostilities and engage in peace talks with Ukraine.¹²¹

Since then, France has delivered many military aid packages to Ukraine and trained Ukrainian soldiers. In October, France announced that it would train 2,000 Ukrainian soldiers.¹²² The same month, it delivered around 20 towed artillery and several military trucks to Ukraine. In November, France delivered two multiple rocket launchers and two surface-to air missile system batteries. Since 2023, it has sent at least forty armoured fighting vehicles, unknown number of SCALP air-launched cruise missiles, and one SAMP/T Battery in cooperation with Italy.¹²³ France also promised to train 6,000 Ukrainian soldiers in the first eight months of 2023.¹²⁴

In May 2022, Macron proposed the establishment of a “European political community” to facilitate closer collaboration with nations aspiring for EU membership. Catherine Colonna, the newly appointed Foreign Minister, informed journalists that the objective was to augment EU expansion by offering benefits to non-candidate nations and assisting those vying for EU membership in bolstering their bids. “The need of the hour is to expedite efforts for certain partners. The European political community seeks to rapidly fortify relations with all European nations in our vicinity”, she stated.¹²⁵

Macron’s stance, however, is not universally endorsed within France. In April 2022, Marine Le Pen, a French far-right politician, cautioned against dispatching weapons to Ukraine and advocated for a reconciliation between NATO and Russia.¹²⁶ On November 30th, La France Insoumise, a radical left party, and far-right MPs abstained from voting on a resolution in support of Ukraine. Parti Communiste Français, another radical left party, demanded a parliamentary debate on French weapon deliveries to Ukraine. Fabien Roussel, the party’s leader, wrote on the arms deliveries: “Parliament should have the chance to consider the consequences of such an escalation. Are we ready to assume the risk of going to war with Russia?”¹²⁷ The debate did not take place.¹²⁸ The

¹²¹ Cook, C. (2022, February 25). *France to offer €300M worth of aid, military equipment to Ukraine*. Retrieved from Anadolu Agency: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/europe/france-to-offer-300m-worth-of-aid-military-equipment-to-ukraine/2515343>

¹²² Reuters. (2022, October 16). *France to train up to 2,000 Ukrainian soldiers, defence minister says*. Retrieved from Euronews: <https://www.euronews.com/2022/10/16/ukraine-crisis-france-arms>

¹²³ Mitzer, S., & Oliemans, J. (2022, July 13). *Arms For Ukraine: French Weapons Deliveries To Kyiv*. Retrieved from Oryx: <https://www.oryxspioenkop.com/2022/07/arms-for-ukraine-french-weapon.html>

¹²⁴ P., P.-L. (2023, August 13). *“Un foyer terroriste majeur à un jet de pierre de la Méditerranée”: entretien avec le ministre des Armées, Sébastien Lecornu, avant sa venue dans le Var ce lundi*. Retrieved from Var-Matin: <https://www.varmatin.com/defense/-un-foyer-terroriste-majeur-a-un-jet-de-pierre-de-la-mediterranee--866522>

¹²⁵ Irish, J. (2022, May 24). *France reassures Ukraine it will be part of European Union*. Retrieved from Reuters: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/france-reassures-ukraine-it-will-be-part-european-union-2022-05-24/>

¹²⁶ Associated Press. (2022, April 13). *France’s Le Pen warns against sending weapons to Ukraine*. Retrieved from Associated Press: <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-marine-le-pen-macron-moscow-d79b5ddd4fe93ebef39da900d99b22da>

¹²⁷ Carriat, J., Lamothe, J., & Cassini, S. (2023, January 31). *Ukraine arms deliveries: French opposition parties call for Parliament debate*. Retrieved from Le Monde: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/politics/article/2023/01/31/french-opposition-parties-call-for-parliament-debate-on-ukraine-arms-shipment_6013794_5.html

¹²⁸ Carriat, J. (2023, April 7). *War in Ukraine: The French left’s impossible consistency*. Retrieved from Le Monde: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/04/07/war-in-ukraine-the-french-left-s-impossible-consistency_6022080_4.html

National Rally, a far-right French party led by Le Pen, has adopted a pro-Russian stance on the Ukraine conflict since 2014. In an interview in February 2023, Le Pen blamed NATO and the United States for the conflict and opposed sanctions on Russia, arguing that they would disproportionately harm French businesses and workers. Similarly, the French far-left, represented by La France Insoumise and its leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon, also holds a friendly position towards Russia. The party is Eurosceptic and anti-NATO, with Mélenchon expressing his opposition to Ukraine becoming a NATO member in 2022, stating that “We have a duty to ensure that Ukraine does not join NATO so that the Russians do not feel threatened”.¹²⁹ In August 2023, Nicolas Sarkozy, the former French president, spoke in defense of Vladimir Putin and urged Ukraine to accept the Russian occupation of Crimea and other disputed territories. He also argued that Ukraine should not be allowed to join NATO or the European Union and should remain “neutral” to alleviate Russia’s concerns about being surrounded by “hostile neighbors”.¹³⁰

In May 2022, Macron’s statement that it was crucial to “never give in to the temptation to humiliate [Russia]” sparked controversy. Zelenskyy said that the remark was an attempt to offer Moscow a “way out”. Subsequently, during a trip to Kyiv, Macron clarified his statement, explaining that his remarks pertained to a period in the post-war when a fresh security framework for Europe would have to be negotiated.¹³¹ In May 2023, following Zelenskyy’s visit to Paris, France committed to providing additional military assistance to Ukraine, comprising light tanks, armored vehicles, and soldier training. In an official statement, France affirmed its “unwavering” support for Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity and pledged to continue its political, economic, humanitarian, and military aid “for as long as necessary”.¹³² In June, France intensified its support for Ukraine’s anticipated counter-offensive operation by delivering long-range SCALP missiles to the country.¹³³ In July, France again intensified its weapon deliveries, agreeing to send more long-range weapons to Ukraine.¹³⁴

The impact of the war on the French economy has been less severe compared to most European nations. French economist Agnès Bénassy-Quéré said in July 2022 stated that the most significant effect is tied to the surge in energy prices. It’s worth noting that gas prices had already escalated prior to the war due to Russia reducing its deliveries. While the war’s influence on oil imports was

¹²⁹ Ivaldi, G. (2023, March 4). *The impact of the Russia-Ukraine War on radical right-wing populism in France*. Retrieved from European Center for Populism Studies: <https://www.populismstudies.org/the-impact-of-the-russia-ukraine-war-on-radical-right-wing-populism-in-france/>

¹³⁰ Willsher, K. (2023, August 19). *‘Shameful’ Nicolas Sarkozy under fire for defending Putin*. Retrieved from The Guardian: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/aug/19/shameful-nicolas-sarkozy-under-fire-for-defending-putin>

¹³¹ France24. (2022, June 17). *Macron, Zelensky turn page on Russia 'humiliation' spat*. Retrieved from France24: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20220617-macron-zelensky-turn-page-on-russia-humiliation-spat>

¹³² Leicester, J., & Jordans, F. (2023, May 15). *France pledges more military aid as Ukraine’s Zelenskyy makes surprise Paris visit to meet Macron*. Retrieved from Associated Press: <https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-zelenskyy-france-macron-russia-f88abdcc52a92480454b3fe4b40fa75d>

¹³³ Al Jazeera. (2023, July 11). *What are France’s SCALP missiles, and how can they help Ukraine?* Retrieved from Al Jazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/11/what-are-frances-scalp-missiles-and-how-can-they-help-ukraine>

¹³⁴ Kayali, L., & von der Burchard, H. (2023, July 11). *France and Germany pledge more weapons for Ukraine*. Retrieved from Politico: <https://www.politico.eu/article/cruise-missiles-and-tanks-france-and-germany-send-more-weapons-to-ukraine-russia-war/>

minimal, gas posed a more challenging issue. “What Russia supplies to the European Union is only 5% of the world's supply, but most of this gas arrives via pipelines, not ships. This makes it more difficult to replace. As a result, gas prices have reacted tenfold, with a 600% year-on-year increase. However, we shouldn't play scare ourselves when analyzing how this price increase spreads throughout the economy. Some companies can replace gas with another energy source, and downstream their customers also have substitution options. So you can have a big impact locally, but less at the national level”, Bénassy-Quéré said.¹³⁵ Despite its promises to reduce Russian gas imports, an analysis by The Telegraph in November 2023 revealed that France was the third-largest buyer of Russian gas in 2023, trailing only Spain and China.¹³⁶

As of January 2023, about 120 thousand Ukrainian refugees had applied for protection in France. The relatively low number of refugees in France has been partly attributed to unclear instructions and information on official government websites, as well as low social support. An adult refugee in France receives only 306 Euros a month in social support and an additional 222 Euros for rent support, making for a total of 528 Euros a month. In contrast, this number would be 1,242 Euros in Germany. This is why most refugees choose countries like Germany over France for migration.¹³⁷

Despite his initial hesitance to take an active role in supporting Ukraine at the onset of the war, Macron has progressively increased his support for Ukraine over the past year. With a pledge of support ‘until victory’, France has emerged as one of Ukraine’s most significant allies in the West. This trend is expected to persist as France strives to further establish its role in the conflict. Moreover, France boasts one of the most pro-Ukrainian public sentiments within the EU, with 64% of French citizens advocating for Ukraine to continue the war until it reclaims all its territories, including Crimea. This public sentiment facilitates Macron’s policy of supporting Ukraine.

Conclusion

To conclude, the European Union countries showed unexpected unity in support for Ukraine at the start of the war, with almost all of them agreeing to impose heavy sanctions on Russia and to supply Ukraine with weapons. The only differing position from the countries we analysed in this report came from Hungary which, despite condemning Russia for the invasion, has openly continued its business dealings with Russia. This is starkly different from the position Poland has displayed during most of the war, where it came out as Ukraine’s top supporter in the European Union, even urging other countries to ramp up their military support for the country in several

¹³⁵ Guillemoles, A. (2022, July 7). *Olga in Paris – Why are there so few Ukrainian refugees in France?* Retrieved from La Croix: <https://www.la-croix.com/Economie/Guerre-Ukraine-comment-leconomie-francaise-reagit-elle-crise-2022-07-07-1201223903>

¹³⁶ Barnes, J. (2023, November 18). *EU's thirst for fuel hands Putin £5bn windfall.* Retrieved from The Telegraph: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2023/11/18/eu-sanctions-loophole-russia-gas-putin-moscow/>

¹³⁷ European Stability Initiative. (2023, February 14). *Olga in Paris – Why are there so few Ukrainian refugees in France?* Retrieved from European Stability Initiative: <https://www.esiweb.org/publications/olga-paris-why-are-there-so-few-ukrainian-refugees-france>

cases. One of these countries was Germany which was hesitant to actively support Ukraine in the first days of the war. Although it displayed a historic and significant shift in policy when it eventually decided to arm Ukraine, Germany's help has still been underwhelming, with it most recently refusing to supply Ukraine with Taurus missiles as Ukraine requested. Italy, on the other hand, has been very vocal in its support of Ukraine, even surprising many Russian diplomats with how vocal it was. This is despite the fact that it had the least pro-Ukrainian publics among the countries we analysed. Similarly, France played an active role in trying to prevent the war before it started and, despite not being very active during the first days of the war, it eventually ramped up its support for Ukraine, attempting to position itself as an active player in the conflict. Overall, however, we see support for Ukraine decreasing both in political circles and in public as the Ukrainian counteroffensive drags on with little success. All depends on yet another Ukrainian miracle. If it cannot recapture significant territory from Russia within the next year, we will likely see more and more countries pushing Ukraine to agree to a ceasefire, even if it means the country ceding its territories.

