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# A Geopolitical Caesura: Rethinking the Future of European Security

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Europe is experiencing its third geopolitical caesura in the space of less than ten years: in 2014, Russia violated international law and shook the very foundations of the Charter of Paris when it annexed Crimea. Two years later, in 2016, Donald Trump moved into the White House. With unprecedented candour, he called into question the Euro-Atlantic security partnership based on solidarity. He attached the condition of »fair burden sharing« to the reliability of security policy on the part of the US vis-à-vis Europe. A few months later, at the end of June 2016, a majority of UK citizens voted to take Europe's largest military power out of the European Union (EU). Since 24 February 2022, a war has been raging in Europe – one that Russia is waging against Ukraine. Since then, there has been no doubt in Europe about Moscow's obvious revisionism. It quickly became clear to the EU Member States that they would have to change their view of their own defence policy. But how can the EU27 manage to improve their military capabilities in a coordinated manner? The recent discord between Berlin and Paris over the Future Combat Air System (FCAS) project, which was launched in 2017, has shown how difficult it continues to be, even for close partners, to share sensitive military data. And what other foreign and security policy instruments must the EU now strengthen in order to restore and guarantee security in Europe on a permanent basis? Germany and France should try to better meet the expectations of their EU partners in Eastern and Central Europe, above all Poland. Russia's war against Ukraine could pose an opportunity for the Weimar Triangle countries to revive their cooperation.

## Europe's security policy since 24 February 2022: a watershed moment

The EU, NATO and their Member States responded quickly and resolutely to Russia's aggression. They pledged their unconditional support to Ukraine. On both sides of the Atlantic, sanctions of historic dimensions were adopted against Russia. Ukraine receives financial, humanitarian and military aid from the West to help it win the war.

Sanctions in addition to military capabilities have been at the heart of the immediate European response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine. The Europeans in particular recognised early on that targeted economic sanctions are important and effective as a foreign and security policy instrument, but that they are not enough by themselves. The increase in the importance of military capabilities in Europe since 24 February 2022 is correspondingly enormous. On 27 February 2022, Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced a »watershed« for the Federal Republic of Germany. The Bundeswehr was endowed with a special fund of 100 billion euro as part of this. »It is clear that we must invest much more in the security of our country. In order to protect our freedom and our democracy.« said Scholz. »The goal is a powerful, cutting-edge, progressive Bundeswehr that can be relied upon to protect us.« Nearly all European countries have increased their defence budgets since the war began. In France, the Ministry of Defence is looking into moving to a war economy. Paris has also revised its statement that NATO is »brain dead« while Finland and Sweden have given up their neutrality to become members of Alliance.

Within the space of just a few days, the EU Member States had rewritten their »Strategic Compass«, one that they had been working on since the summer of 2020. Against the backdrop of the war, they set out to enable the EU to act independently by 2025. Brussels is trying to get the Member States to step up their cooperation in arms policy with the help of new financial instruments. Nevertheless, defence cooperation between Member States remains a problem child: France and Poland are not part of the European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI) initiated by Germany, for instance. The longer the war lasts, the more the promise to support Ukraine in the long term reveals the limited capabilities of European countries. NATO expanded its military presence on the Alliance's eastern flank and agreed to transition to a New Force Model (NFM) in the course of 2023. The declared aim is to create a pool of 300,000 troops in a high state of readiness (as opposed to some 40,000 today).

### **Enlargement as a security policy instrument**

In addition, the US interpretation that a geopolitical era is dawning in which democracies will (once again) have to stand up to autocracies has also prevailed in Europe. In the EU, this has led to a revival of EU accession policy – once Brussels' most transformative security policy instrument. In order to closely link Ukraine and Moldova, and also the countries of the Western Balkans on their (long) road to full membership, France's President Emmanuel Macron has proposed the establishment of a European Political Community.

### **Caesura – response – fraying**

The responses to the previous caesuras often frayed the longer the conflict lasted. In 2014, for example, Berlin waved goodbye to its policy of a modernisation partnership with Russia, but remained dependent on the Kremlin for energy under the misguided assumption that this would enable it to secure Russia's willingness to cooperate and its interest in stability. Paris watered down European policy in 2018 when it called for a new approach to Russia and opened up to greater exchange with the country. Finally, Poland

urged a (comparatively) tougher stance against Russia. In the wake of Donald Trump's election and Brexit, France pursued a vision of »strategic autonomy« for Europe. Berlin pushed initiatives to make European armed forces more compatible in terms of organisation and equipment, but nevertheless considered the idea of European strategic autonomy to be an »illusion«. Like its partners in Central and Eastern Europe, it pointed to the deterrent capability of the Atlantic Alliance, which could not be replaced by anything.

### **Rethinking the future of European security within the Weimar Triangle**

Russia cannot be part of the European security order for the time being. Not least because Germany and France have been at loggerheads either with each other or with their partners in the past with regard to future relations with Russia and the US, neither has been able to inject new impetus into European security. What is more, in Poland in particular, the UK's policy seems much more attractive, in which Russia is clearly seen as a threat, but the US is by no means perceived as a challenge to European security. At the same time, the war against Ukraine opens a window for the Weimar Triangle to take joint initiatives regarding the short-, medium- and long-term development of European security. The countries of the Weimar Triangle are united by the conviction that Ukraine must win the war and that it belongs in the EU. The shift in the balance of power towards Central and Northern Europe should also be favourable for the trilateral format. For a »Weimar Renaissance« to succeed, the following conditions must be met: Berlin and Paris must acknowledge that Russia cannot be part of a European security architecture for the time being. This admission must be accompanied by new initiatives on arms deliveries and the training of Ukrainian armed forces on Western capabilities. Ukraine will soon be dependent on these.

The future of the EU's arms policy depends on France and Germany. The two partners must also prove that European cooperation in arms policy works. Only in this way can their call for »more Europe« in security and defence policy be sustained. They must use their additional defence expenditure to create European

added value that is also interesting for the countries of East-Central Europe. In ongoing Franco-German armament projects (such as FCAS and Main Ground Combat System - MGCS), political leaders in Berlin and Paris must encourage the arms industry to reach swift compromises. In mid-November 2022, political pressure from Germany, France and Spain led to the launch of the next programme phase of the FCAS. Industrial companies from the three countries will now jointly test and develop the technologies for a flight demonstrator that will continue to lay the groundwork for the subsequent construction of the planned manned fighter jet in series production. If the bilateral projects fail, Europe's unity and independence in the defence industry will likewise falter. At the same time, Paris in particular must accept that EU Member States will equip themselves with »off the shelf« armaments. A »European weapon« is not only one that has been developed and manufactured in Europe. Military capabilities that European countries possess are also »European weapons«. From this concession, it could be possible for the Weimar Triangle to develop an arms policy strategy for Europe that guarantees the independence and continuity of the European arms industry base and ensures that deficits are made up for in the short term by purchases on the market, thus ensuring Europe's defence capability in the short and long term.

**Weimar proposal for the future European Political Community.** Germany, France and Poland should enter into an open exchange on how the EU sanctions against Russia can be maintained beyond 2022 and on how Ukraine's accession to the EU can be accelerated. In a new security policy, EU enlargement policy can no longer be seen as a transformative instrument but must become a geopolitical instrument. The Weimar Triangle countries should therefore shape the European Political Community in such a way that it enables accelerated (partial) membership by making a minimum level of conditionality a prerequisite for full membership.

**Security guarantees for Ukraine: a key objective of the Weimar Triangle.** Ukraine will only survive in the long term if it receives security guarantees. Poland, France and Germany should jointly work out a package of security guarantees for Ukraine. The solidarity

enshrined in Article 42.7 of the EU Treaty, charming because of its explicit vagueness, should be extended to Ukraine and complement the security guarantees of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. In addition, bilateral security agreements should be offered to the country. The framework for these could be worked out by the countries of the Weimar Triangle together with Kyiv.

**A trilateral push for an ambitious implementation of the EU Strategic Compass.** The EU has become more important as a foreign policy actor for smaller and medium-sized countries. It ensures that these countries, which have limited foreign policy resources (at least compared to France and Germany) do not lose sight of other crises and conflicts in the world. For this reason, Germany, France and Poland should push for an ambitious implementation of the EU Strategic Compass. If the EU and its Member States in particular look for new partners to meet their needs for energy and raw materials, they will also have to take an interest in their security and defence policy interests and concerns and become involved in them. Nevertheless, you must always ask yourself what your partner is willing to do. The three countries of the Weimar Triangle could also take on this cautionary role.

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### Genshagen Forum 2022

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