

Four years of war:
*Ukraine has held
the line. It is time
for Europe to
secure the future.*



Table of contents

Introduction	3
Building Resilience: mental health and Ukraine's future Elizabeth Kuiper	4
Ukraine's agency must guide any ceasefire Iana Maisuradze	5
Ukraine's survival must not be conditioned by the EU's industrial policy Juraj Majcin	6
A renewed choice for Europe Almut Möller	7
Europe must further raise its game Amanda Paul	8
What is Europe really defending? Corina Stratulat	9
Delivering certainty in Ukraine's EU accession Svitlana Taran	10

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / DISCLAIMER

The support the European Policy Centre receives for its ongoing operations, or specifically for its publications, does not constitute an endorsement of their contents, which reflect the views of the authors only. Supporters and partners cannot be held responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained therein.

Introduction

Four years ago, Russia launched its brutal full-scale invasion of Ukraine, initiating the most destructive war in Europe since 1945. This act of unprovoked aggression sought to subjugate a sovereign state, overturn the principles of territorial integrity and challenge the foundations of the European security order. Instead, it has met determined Ukrainian resistance and sustained, though increasingly strained, solidarity from Europe and other countries around the world.

The human and territorial toll remains severe. The [United Nations records](#) more than 15,000 civilian deaths, 41,000 injuries, and 10 million displacements since February 2022. Strikes on critical infrastructure have left millions to [endure subzero temperatures](#) during the country's worst winter in years

At the same time, receding US support, including repeated suspensions of military aid, and the lack of any breakthrough in the recent trilateral talks in Geneva have left Kyiv to navigate an increasingly complex landscape of military, economic and diplomatic pressures. The stop-start nature of aid also places greater pressure on Europe to bolster support for Ukraine – or potentially wake up and find Russia at its borders.

This compendium marks the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion by documenting ongoing aggression, evolving European support and the resilience of a nation under siege. It offers both reflection and analysis on a war that continues to shape the future of Europe and beyond.



PHOTO BY: PRESIDENT.GOV.UA

Building Resilience: mental health and Ukraine's future



Elizabeth Kuiper, Associate Director and Head of the Health and Societal Resilience Programme



PHOTO BY: YURIY DYACHYSHYN / AFP

As we enter the fifth year of Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine's fight is for Europe's security and its own societal and democratic resilience. The Ukrainian people demonstrate extraordinary bravery while enduring a significant burden impacting their health and mental well-being. Accelerating Ukraine's EU accession would create an opportunity to reform its healthcare system and establish a long-term vision beyond the war.

Since February 2022, 2,591 attacks on Ukraine's healthcare system have been documented, including 1,389 hospitals and clinics damaged or destroyed and at least 359 health workers killed. Between 2024 to 2025, documented incidents surged almost 50%, underscoring Russia's systematic effort to demoralise Ukraine.

Strengthening health services and enhancing societal resilience are vital not only for winning the war, but to secure Ukraine's recovery and European future.

Constant exposure to violence significantly heightens the risk of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) across society, affecting soldiers, veterans, former prisoners of war, and civilians, including women and children. Among combat-exposed Ukrainian soldiers, 45.9% [have been diagnosed](#) with PTSD, 21.5% with complex PTSD and 34.4% with major depression. World Health Organization (WHO) analysis indicates that 70% of Ukrainians report experiencing mental health issues and chronic stress.

At the same time, disinformation surrounding mental health in Ukraine is a key component of Russia's hybrid warfare, including false claims that attribute the rise of mental illness in Ukraine to the Ukrainian authorities. Countering such claims requires structural reform and effort [build back better](#) Ukraine's healthcare system.

While the EU is already providing critical support, considering Ukraine's future membership in the EU, much remains to be done regarding patient care, workforce training, mental health research and the integration of mental health into primary care. Strengthening health services and enhancing societal resilience are vital not only for winning the war, but to secure Ukraine's recovery and European future.

Ukraine's agency must guide any ceasefire



Iana Maisuradze,
Policy Analyst

Four years into Russia's full-scale, illegal and unjustified invasion, Ukraine continues to resist, even as it becomes harder by the day. Russia's conduct has shown little regard for humanitarian norms – from the abduction of Ukrainian children to the systematic targeting of infrastructure that leaves civilians facing winter without heating or electricity.

As ceasefire talks become more frequent, serious and conditional, no breakthrough is in sight. As resistance grows more costly, Ukraine's agency must remain central. No external actor can decide the terms of a ceasefire on Ukraine's behalf – not the EU, not the United States and certainly not Russia. Europe's influence over any peace settlement will depend on its ability to align internally and support Ukraine's sovereign decision-making. From a European perspective, safeguarding Ukraine's agency is both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity.

Any ceasefire must be credible and genuinely aimed at stopping the war, rather than freezing the conflict. It should carefully consider what happens to the current occupied territories, what kind of administrative boundaries would be placed, whether voting rights can be delivered for Ukrainian citizens under occupation and how displaced citizens can return to their homes. These issues will outlast the ceasefire and shape Ukraine's long-term stability.

Ukraine and Europe should prepare for blurred lines and grey zones in the aftermath. Russia will likely continue its hybrid warfare tactics to ensure there is no peace even after the war ends. A ceasefire without credible security guarantees would invite renewed Russian attacks – not only against Ukraine, but potentially extending to the EU and NATO.

Any agreement must ask critical questions, anticipate counteractions and close foreseeable loopholes before it is signed.

A ceasefire without credible security guarantees would invite renewed Russian attacks – not only against Ukraine, but potentially extending to the EU and NATO.



PHOTO BY: IVAN SAMOILOV/AFP

Ukraine's survival must not be conditioned by the EU's industrial policy



Juraj Majcin,
Policy Analyst



PHOTO BY: CANVA

Rebuilding Europe's defence industrial base is a long-term strategic goal of the European Commission that will ultimately strengthen the Union's own security. However, long-term strategies require time – and time is precisely what Ukraine lacks.

As the war enters its fifth year, the human toll continues to rise. Civilian casualties increased by 26% in 2025, even as Russia remains far from any decisive victory. Moscow continues to bombard Ukrainian cities and systematically target energy infrastructure, leaving millions to endure freezing homes, blackouts and deliberate hardship each winter.

In this context, the EU's decision to provide a €90 billion loan to Ukraine is essential. Kyiv must keep the state functioning and sustain its military capacity to remain in the fight. Supporting Ukraine is also a direct investment in Europe's security, helping to keep Russian aggression as far as possible from EU and NATO borders.

Yet the conditionality attached to this assistance is deeply flawed. Requiring Ukraine to prioritise European arms manufacturers before turning to non-EU suppliers, notably the United States, may advance Brussels' industrial ambitions. In wartime, however, such restrictions are strategically unwise. Critical capabilities, from Patriot air defence interceptors to long-range strike systems, remain primarily available from the United States.

To close critical capability gaps, NATO established the Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List (PURL) mechanism, financed by European allies. Yet only about €4 billion of the €15 billion pledged annually has materialised. EU loan conditionality that restricts procurement highlights a misalignment between Europe's two core security institutions, the EU and NATO.

Allowing part of the EU's financial support to flow through PURL would speed urgently needed deliveries to Ukraine and demonstrate substantive EU–NATO cooperation. It would also reinforce Europe's ambition to build a stronger European pillar within NATO without constraining Ukraine's immediate defence needs.

Rebuilding Europe's defence industrial base is a long-term strategic goal of the European Commission that will ultimately strengthen the Union's own security.

A renewed choice for Europe



Almut Möller,

Director for European and Global Affairs and
Head of the Europe in World Programme

Four years after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, predictions that Europe would become mired in internal divisions and lose political stamina for its support for Ukraine have not materialised. True, Europeans are still not fully acting in line with their assessment that countering Russia's war is as much about their own security as it is about Ukraine's. Europe still needs to do more and act faster to be able to stand up to, and one day deter, today's and tomorrow's aggressors.

As Europeans move to rebuild their security order, leaders should radically embrace the new domestic room for manoeuvre that Trumpism has opened.

Yet there are no signs that Europe's leaders are abandoning Ukraine. [A majority of European citizens](#) continue to support both their own government's and the EU's measures in support of Ukraine. This is no small achievement.

One could have easily imagined support eroding over time, including among European electorates, particularly with a new US administration signalling greater interest in reviving economic ties with Russia than in re-stabilising the European security order.

The final judgement will be left to future historians. Still, it appears likely that the shift of US policy vis-à-vis liberal Europe and its joint institutions since the return of Donald Trump to the White House in 2025 has had a greater impact on Europeans taking their security seriously than Russia's war of aggression itself, or Putin's imposition of a state of non-peace on Europe.

Over the past year, Europeans have made headway in learning to see the world as it is rather than for what they wish it to be. But this late realisation has come at great cost – first and foremost to Ukrainians, but to the rest of Europe, too.

As Europeans move to rebuild their security order, leaders should radically embrace the new domestic room for manoeuvre that Trumpism has opened.



PHOTO BY: NATO

Europe must further raise its game



Amanda Paul,
Deputy Head of the Europe in the World
Programme and Senior Policy Analyst



PHOTO BY: BULENT KILIC / AFP

On the fourth anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Europe must face an uncomfortable truth: it is still not doing enough. While it has provided weapons, funding and refuge and adopted 19 sanctions packages against Russia, support has often arrived too slowly, in insufficient quantities or only after protracted political debate. A step change over the past year, reflected in higher European defence spending and the emergence of a Coalition of the Willing, has been driven by US President Donald Trump's decision to halt US military assistance to Ukraine and scale back commitments to European security.

Europe has the resources to ramp up pressure on the Kremlin – and it must. With a combined GDP of more than \$22 trillion in 2025, the EU far outweighs Russia economically. The EU also retains the industrial base to expand defence production, including through closer integration with Ukraine's defence sector. Large-calibre ammunition and air defence remain urgent priorities. Allowing EU finance to procure crucial US systems through NATO's Prioritised Ukraine Requirements List (PURL), including vital Patriot air defence systems and interceptor missiles, is also critical for Kyiv.

Now that Europe is Ukraine's largest military, economic and humanitarian supporter, it should be fully engaged in the US-led ceasefire negotiations, shaping a unified peace strategy that reinforces Ukrainian sovereignty and long-term security. Yet, participation requires credibility. Europe must move beyond abstract discussions of security guarantees to concrete, binding commitments. This should include leading a Black Sea monitoring mission in cooperation with Türkiye once a ceasefire is agreed. Europe should also commit to accelerating Ukraine's EU accession.

The message must be clear: Russia cannot define the security debate.

While the EU has provided weapons, funding and refuge and adopted 19 sanctions packages against Russia, support has often arrived too slowly, in insufficient quantities or only after protracted political debate.

What is Europe really defending?



Corina Stratulat,
Associate Director and Head of the Politics
and Institutions Programme

Four years into Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine is still defending its sovereignty – at immense human cost.

Across Europe, the language of defence now dominates political life. Democracies defend themselves against authoritarians. Security is defended against chaos. Values are defended against erosion. In Brussels, defence has become more than a policy field; it is now a reflex.

Yet a harder question confronts the Union: Who is Europe defending – and for what kind of future?



PHOTO BY: CANVA

That cannot be our cause. The Union's structures were built for stability, not shock; for predictability, not permanent crisis. Preservation alone cannot substitute for purpose.

European integration has always advanced through adaptation and reform has come as the price of survival. Today, however, enlargement is postponed, governance reform deferred and decision-making paralysed to safeguard existing arrangements, even as they face growing strain.

If the EU is to honour Ukraine's struggle, it must defend something more ambitious than yesterday's equilibrium. It should defend its capacity to transform and act. That means widening and reforming in parallel, equipping the Union to function at scale.

It also means the EU must find its footing in a harsher geopolitical landscape. Partnership with the United States is indispensable; strategic dependence is not. A Union unwilling to assume greater responsibility for its security risks hollowing out the sovereignty it seeks to protect.

The choice is not between stability and change but between managed decline and purposeful renewal. Ukraine is fighting for the right to choose its future. The EU owes it – and itself – a future worth choosing.

**Yet a harder question confronts the Union:
Who is Europe defending – and for what
kind of future?**

Delivering certainty in Ukraine's EU accession



Svitlana Taran,
Policy Analyst

Achieving greater political certainty about Ukraine's European future has become crucial, particularly in the context of ongoing peace negotiations in which accelerating and securing Ukraine's EU membership is increasingly discussed as part of a broader US-EU plan to end the war. A clear accession perspective is essential to sustain Ukraine's reform momentum, investor confidence and reconstruction efforts.

For Kyiv, EU membership has long been framed as a condition for durable peace and a guarantee of sovereignty and democratic agency. Accession would significantly curtail Russia's ability to interfere politically or [undermine the legitimacy of Ukraine's institutions](#).

Vague formulations risk undermining certainty about Ukraine's European future. Substitute arrangements, such as enhanced pre-accession agreements, deeper association formats or European Economic Area (EEA)-style integration, may deliver economic benefits, but they risk prolonging geopolitical ambiguity. Such models could dilute the objective of full membership, dissipate political momentum and entrench Ukraine in a marginal and vulnerable position.

Reconciling geopolitical urgency with strict reform conditionality and the merit-based enlargement process will be politically demanding and may require innovative sequencing. [One option](#) would be to negotiate and sign an accession treaty whose entry into force is conditional upon the fulfilment of clearly defined reform benchmarks. Other proposals, such as '[reverse enlargement](#)', envisage granting membership status earlier while phasing in institutional rights and obligations. Any interim arrangement, however, must not crystallise into a permanent semi-membership status. They must be underpinned by strict safeguards and time-bound milestones.

Despite political and institutional complexity, the EU should find a way to provide Ukraine with stronger and clearer membership commitments.

Despite political and institutional complexity, the EU should provide Ukraine with stronger and clearer membership commitments. Doing so would reinforce the EU's strategic role in shaping Ukraine's long-term stability and the peace process, enhance geopolitical certainty and send a powerful deterrence signal.



PHOTO BY: CANVA

The **European Policy Centre** is an independent, not-for-profit think tank dedicated to fostering European integration through analysis and debate, supporting and challenging European decision-makers at all levels to make informed decisions based on sound evidence and analysis, and providing a platform for engaging partners, stakeholders and citizens in EU policymaking and in the debate about the future of Europe.

With the strategic
support of



King Baudouin
Foundation

Working together for a better society