

# The Fate of Europe Will Be Decided in Ukraine

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*The European Union's support for Ukraine has been strong, united and resolute but major challenges lie ahead. Helping the war-torn country will require the EU member states to maintain unity and to make progress on a number of processes, write Anna Lundbladh and Hugo von Essen, analysts at the Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies.*

On the same day as Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, EU Heads of State and Government gathered in the European Council to condemn Moscow's blatant violation of the UN Charter. At the time, the EU decided to impose comprehensive sanctions on Russia. These sanctions have since been built on and expanded, and will eventually have a severe impact on the Russian economy.

The political, economic, military, financial and humanitarian support the EU has given Ukraine thus far is unprecedented. Since February 2022, its leaders have stressed that the EU will stand by Ukraine and its people for as long as it takes. With Russia showing no sign of backing down, however, the EU will have to hold on and hold out.

"The future of European security depends on the future of Ukraine. If Putin's war continues, the rest of Europe is at risk," writes Kurt Volker, former US ambassador to Kiev, in [an analysis for the Stockholm Centre for Eastern European Studies](#).

Prime Minister of Sweden Ulf Kristersson used the same tone when he received the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, in Stockholm in January. Kristersson said that a Ukrainian victory was existential for Europe, and that Ukraine's fate was also Europe's.

## **Military Aid: A Long-Term Investment**

Others argue that EU support for Ukraine should be seen as an investment in Europe's future, in terms of both common security and the economy. The longer military support is delayed, the higher the future costs and the greater the security implications for the whole of Europe. Western military support has been, and will continue to be, of enormous importance to Ukraine's military resistance in what amounts to a war of attrition.

At the same time, the protracted and vexing saga of whether Germany should send tanks to Ukraine – and allow other countries to send their German-made Leopard 2 tanks – clearly illustrates the caution surrounding military support. In Berlin, Washington and other capitals, there is a palpable fear that too much military support to Ukraine risks escalating the war and drawing in other countries, or might even lead to a nuclear war. There is little to suggest that these fears are justified, but the consequence is that military support is delivered too slowly, which only benefits Russia, and prolongs the war and the suffering.

Military support also includes training, logistics, and the provision of spare parts and, not least, sufficient ammunition. On the training side, the EU has initiated EUMAM Ukraine with the aim of training up to 30 000 soldiers, including tank crews.

## **How Will Russia Be Held to Account?**

It is well known that Russia's war of aggression and subsequent wide-ranging war crimes have caused immense suffering to the Ukrainian population, and been a humanitarian disaster that has displaced several million people. Russia must be held to account. If Moscow reaps any permanent benefits from the invasion, or is able to conclude that military force is the right way to achieve political goals, this risks undermining international law and, by extension, the security of the whole of Europe.

Work is currently under way to establish an international tribunal or court to hold Russia accountable for its crime of aggression against Ukraine, but there are many questions about what such a judicial body should look like. The International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, which can try cases of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, began its investigation back in March 2022 in close cooperation with Ukraine's judiciary. However, in this case, the ICC cannot try the act of aggression – Russia's very act itself of invading Ukraine – which makes the question of how to punish those responsible for the invasion highly topical.

Moreover, as the ICC is likely to focus on high-ranking individuals, others who have committed crimes against the laws of war are to be prosecuted in other ways, first and foremost in Ukraine under the country's own judicial system. The EU is supporting this through the EUAM advisory mission set up in 2014, which is now helping the Ukrainian authorities to investigate war crimes. Almost 70,000 suspected war crimes have already been registered, according to [Ukraine's Prosecutor General](#).

States that knowingly assist or contribute to violations of international law by another state are also responsible for that action, which means that the role of Belarus will also have to be investigated, as will that of Iran since the government in Tehran has supplied Russia with drones for use in Ukraine.

## Reconstruction and EU Membership

Winning the peace and rebuilding the country is what EU support is all about – creating a strong, democratic and prosperous Ukraine that is fully integrated into the EU. Ukraine presented its recovery plan in the summer of 2022 but it will cost far more than any single country, or even the EU member states collectively, could ever afford. Nonetheless, the EU has an opportunity, through increased and sustained support to Ukraine, to ensure that the country is in the best possible condition when reconstruction can begin. Reconstruction will need to be closely linked to Ukraine's EU accession process, which in itself will require a strong and united EU. The process began on 23 June when EU leaders took the historic decision to grant Ukraine and Moldova candidate status.

In the past, EU accession has been a long and complicated process in which candidate countries have tended to lose momentum and motivation for the often extensive reform required. The experience of the Western Balkans in particular shows that the process lacks a certain amount of credibility. For this reason, many experts now argue for a renewed, adapted and flexible accession process based on gradual EU integration. However, some member states, notably France and Germany, say they want EU reform before any further enlargement can be considered.

## Unity and Progress

The same clear dividing lines between similar constellations of EU member states recur on many issues concerning Ukraine. In most cases, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Czechia are the main driving forces, while Western European countries such as Germany and France are the brakes. The big challenge for the EU will therefore be how to move forward on the processes of military assistance, holding Russia to account, Ukraine's rapprochement with the EU and reconstruction while maintaining EU unity.

In this balancing act between unity and momentum, the Swedish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2023 has significant ability to influence the outcome. Although support for Ukraine is Sweden's top priority during its Presidency, Sweden has also taken on the role of honest broker between different European positions. While EU unity, which has remained relatively intact so far, is fundamental, it must not become an obstacle to helping Ukraine.

Spain takes over from Sweden in July. Although Ukraine will remain in focus, there is a real risk that the Spanish Presidency will look to Latin America rather than the EU's eastern edge. Next will be Belgium and then Hungary, both of which have been known to be anything but forward-leaning on issues related to Ukraine and Eastern Europe.

Sweden's presidency therefore comes at a critical time for Ukraine – and not just because of developments on the battlefield. In its role as broker, Sweden has an opportunity to pave the way for Ukraine's future as a free and democratic EU member state.

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