

# **PEACE VERSUS JUSTICE: THE COMING EUROPEAN SPLIT OVER THE WAR IN UKRAINE**

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## **SUMMARY**

- In the first 100 days of Russia's war on Ukraine, European public opinion helped to solidify Europe's political response. But a new poll reveals that diverging public preferences could weaken this unity.
- ECFR's research shows that, while Europeans feel great solidarity with Ukraine and support sanctions against Russia, they are split about the long-term goals. They divide between a "Peace" camp (35 per cent of people) that wants the war to end as soon as possible, and a "Justice" camp that believes the more pressing goal is to punish Russia (22 per cent of people).
- In all countries, apart from Poland, the "Peace" camp is larger than the "Justice" camp. European citizens worry about the cost of economic sanctions and the threat of nuclear escalation. Unless something dramatically changes, they will oppose a long and protracted war. Only in Poland, Germany, Sweden, and Finland is there substantial public support for boosting military spending.
- Governments will need to find a new language to bridge the gap between these emerging camps, in order to strengthen European unity and avoid polarisation between and within countries. The key will be to present arms deliveries and sanctions as part of a defensive war.

# Introduction

In the weeks and months since the invasion of Ukraine, Europeans have surprised both Vladimir Putin – and themselves – by their unity and decisiveness. Post-heroic European societies outraged by Russia’s aggression, and mesmerised by Ukrainians’ valour, provided the motivating force for Europe’s unexpected turn. They inspired their governments to adopt change on a historic scale; they opened their homes to millions of Ukrainians; they demanded tough economic sanctions; and they forced Western companies to leave Russia as quickly as possible. While previous “European moments” were marked by the European flag mobilising people beyond the borders of the European Union (including in Ukraine), this time the Ukrainian flag mobilised people within the EU.

Europeans have discovered that they are a more serious force than they previously thought. Distinguished commentator Moises Naim has argued, “Europe discovered that it’s a superpower”. But, as the war approaches its fifth month, will European unity last? Or will cracks start to emerge between and within EU countries?

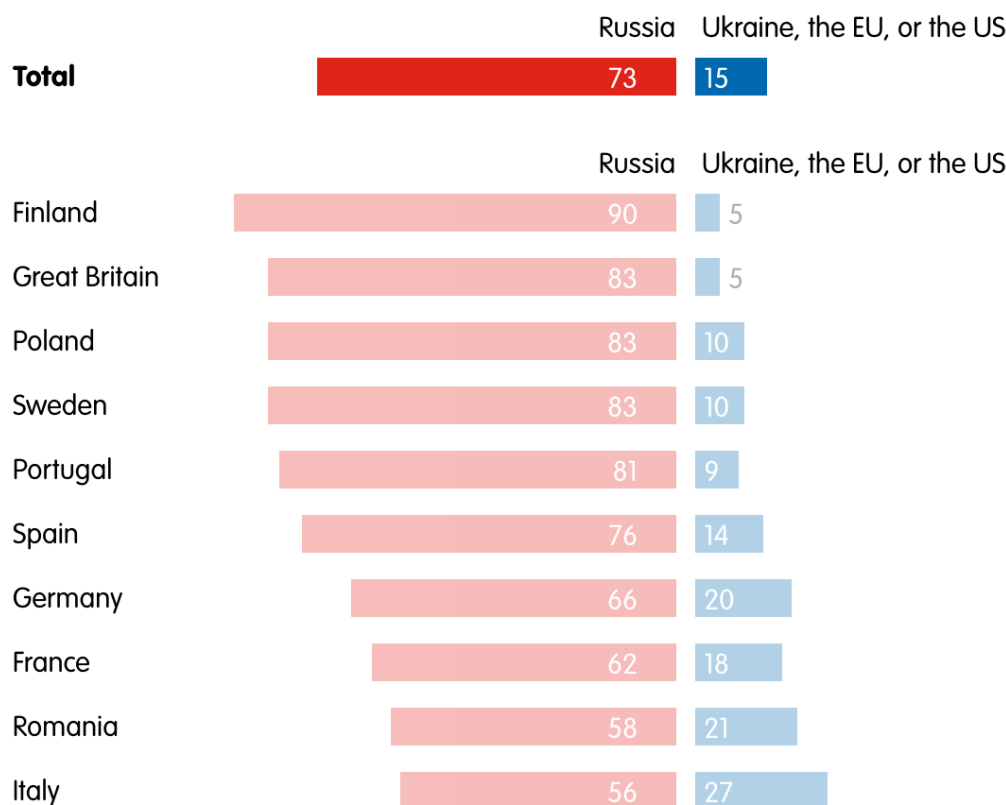
The European Council on Foreign Relations conducted a pan-European opinion poll across ten countries to find answers to these questions. The poll was conducted in mid-May – at a time when citizens had had a chance to absorb the shock of the invasion. The public debate was turning away from events on the battlefield and towards questions of how the conflict will end, as well as its impact on people’s lives, on their countries, and on the EU. It was also a moment when Europeans were becoming much more aware of the global economic and social consequences of the war: high inflation, and energy and food crises. This poll measures European publics’ resilience rather than just their anger at Putin’s war.

The approximately 8,000 people polled came from across Europe. The countries surveyed were Poland and Romania – frontline, traditionally Russia-sceptic, states in central Europe; France, Germany, and Italy – large western European states that previously earned reputations as *Russlandverstehers* (“Russia understanders”); Portugal and Spain – southern European states that have in the past generally been less involved in Russia policy; Finland and Sweden – northern European states that are applying for NATO membership as a result of the invasion; and Great Britain.

The findings of the poll suggest that European public opinion is shifting, and that the toughest days may lie ahead. The resilience of European democracies will mostly depend on the capacity of governments to sustain public support for policies that will ultimately bring pain to different social groups. This will force governments to balance the pursuit of European unity behind pressure on Moscow with opinions that diverge both inside and among member states. The survey reveals a growing gap between the stated positions of many European governments and the public mood in their countries. The big looming divide

is between those who want to end the war as quickly as possible and those who want to carry on fighting until Russia has been defeated.

## Who is mainly responsible for the outbreak of the war in Ukraine? In per cent



Available options included 'Russia', 'US', 'EU', 'Ukraine', as well as 'None of these' and 'Don't know' (the latter two not shown in the chart). Overall, 2% responded 'None of these' and 10% said 'Don't know'.

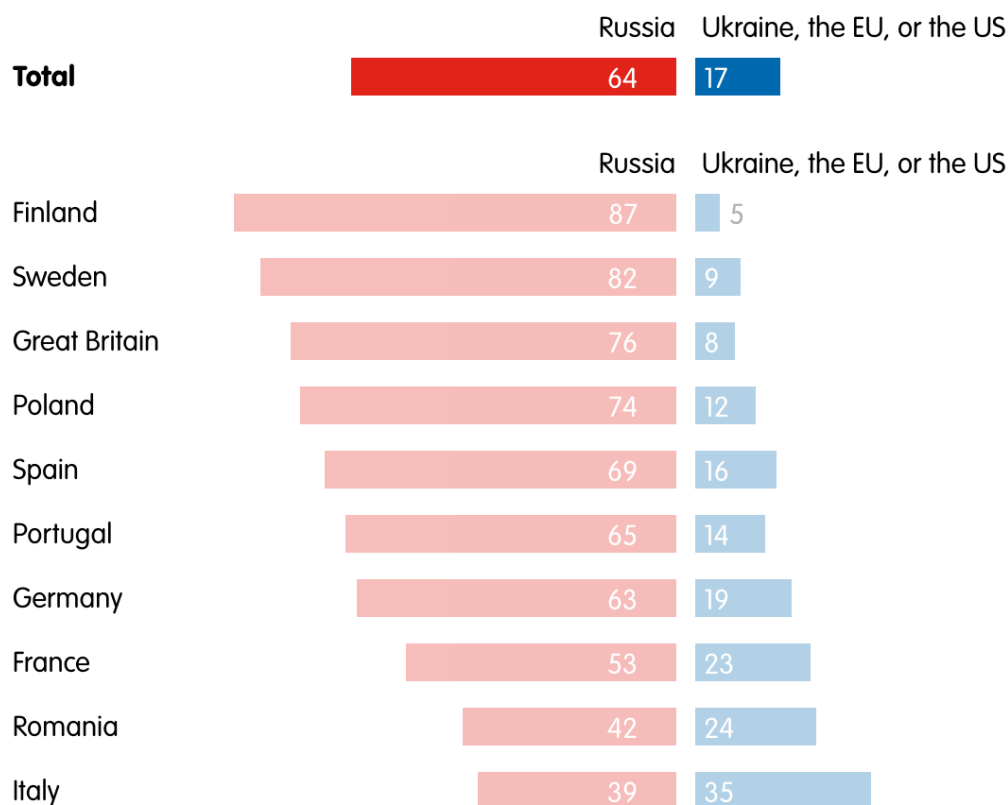
Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

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## Europe after Russia's invasion

Europeans are not divided over whom to blame for the war – three-quarters say Russia is responsible for the conflict. Nor are they divided over who represents the major obstacle to peace – two-thirds point to Russia. The sole exception to this is Italy, where citizens' opinions are closely balanced over whether Ukraine and the West are not the bigger obstacle.

## Which country constitutes the biggest obstacle to peace between Russia and Ukraine? In per cent



Available options included 'Russia', 'US', 'EU', 'Ukraine', as well as 'None of these' and 'Don't know' (the latter two not shown in the chart). Overall, 7% responded 'None of these' and 12% said 'Don't know'.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

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Overall, Europeans do not hesitate about which side they are on: they want Ukraine to prevail. And they are ready to help it defend itself.

Moreover, ECFR's new poll shows that most Europeans are ready to demonstrate solidarity with Ukraine, in the form of providing economic assistance, sending arms, supporting Ukrainian membership of the EU, and accepting refugees. At the same time, they also back tough measures against Russia, including applying economic sanctions, ending fossil fuel imports, and deploying troops to eastern Europe (but not to Ukraine itself).

### Would you support or oppose the EU in accepting more Ukrainian refugees in your country? In per cent



Compare: Economic aid Sanctions Fossil fuel import Arms supply No-fly zone Troops NATO accession NATO troops EU accession

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**i** This chart is interactive. Click on it to see it in your browser.

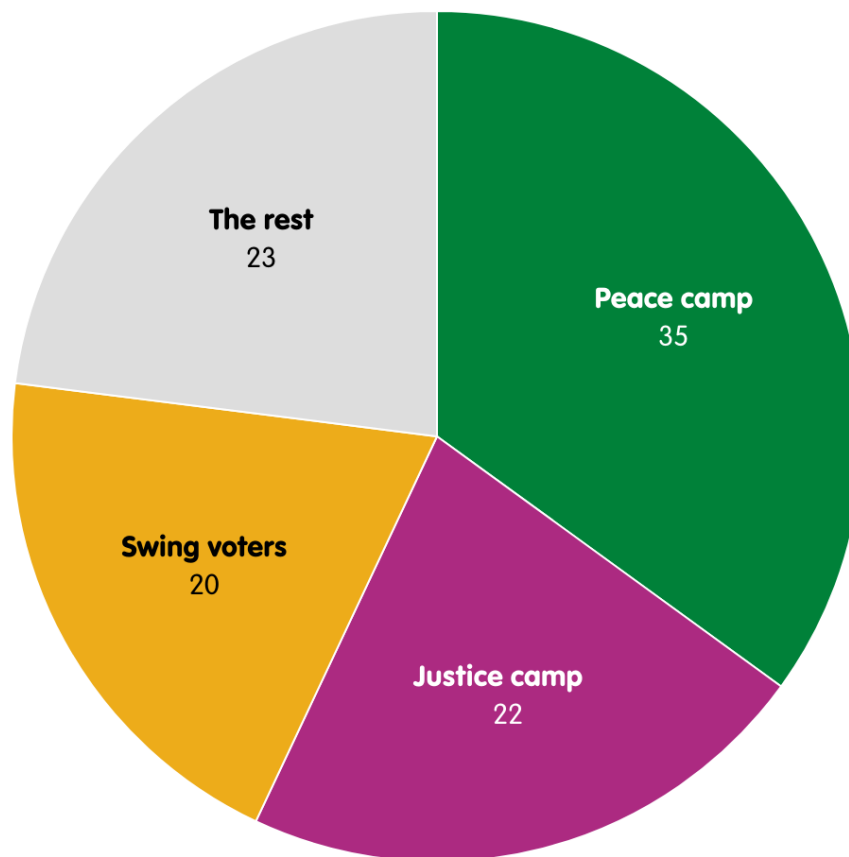
But, although Europeans blame Russia for the war and hope for a Ukrainian victory, European states and societies are divided about how they see the war ending.

## Peace versus justice

In theory, all European governments concur that it is up to the Ukrainians to decide when to stop the war and to agree the shape of peace. But clear divisions emerge in the poll when voters choose between whether Europe should seek to end the war as soon as possible – even if it means Ukraine making concessions – or whether the most important goal is to punish Russia for its aggression and to restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine – even if such a road leads to protracted conflict and more human suffering.

## Size of Europe's different voter camps in response to Russia's war on Ukraine In per cent

■ Peace camp ■ Justice camp ■ Swing voters ■ The rest



Segmentation based on the analysis of responses to two questions. Detailed explanation in the methodology annexe.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

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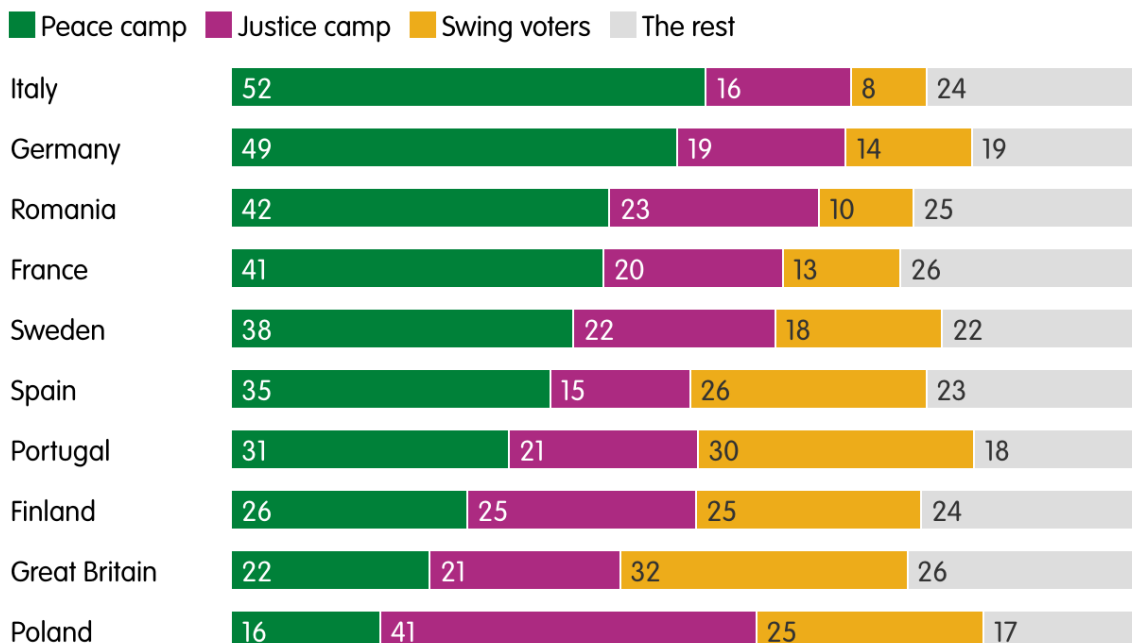
These results place Europeans into two opposing groups: a Peace camp and a Justice camp. Supporters of the Peace camp want peace now even at the cost of Ukrainian concessions to Russia. The Justice camp believes that only Russia's clear defeat can bring peace. This split runs through many countries – and between them. As the conflict in Ukraine turns into a long war of attrition, it risks becoming the key dividing line in Europe. And, unless political leaders handle this difference in standpoint carefully, it could spell the end for Europe's remarkable unity.

Across the ten countries surveyed, one-third (35 per cent) of respondents are in the Peace camp and one-fifth (22 per cent) belong to the Justice camp. A further one-fifth (20 per cent) decline to choose between either Peace or Justice, but still largely support the EU's actions in

response to Russia's war in Ukraine. Members of this Swing group share the anti-Russian feelings of the Justice camp, but also worry about escalation – like the Peace camp. In the coming months pressure will rise on this third group to get off the fence. Their views – and their votes – could be crucial to determining Europe's next steps.

## Size of Europe's voter camps in response to Russia's war on Ukraine

In per cent



Segmentation based on the analysis of responses to two questions. Detailed explanation in the methodology annexe. Some lines do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

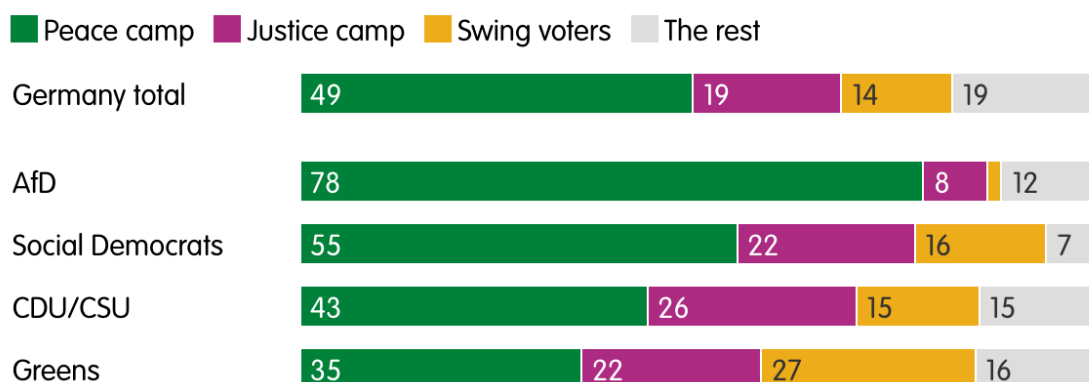
Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

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Representation from the Peace and Justice camps varies considerably among different member states, generations, and political parties. One notable finding is that, while across all ten countries the Peace camp is equally divided between men and women, there is a clear dominance of men in the Justice camp: by a proportion of 62 per cent men to 38 per cent women.

In terms of party politics, it could be assumed that voters of the right are more likely to belong to the Justice camp than voters of the left. But this rule seldom holds in full. In Germany, the preference for Peace dominates among both centre-right Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union and centre-left Social Democrat voters – while, from among the main parties, the Greens stand out in having the largest number of Swing voters.

## Germany: Size of Europe's voter camps in response to Russia's war on Ukraine In per cent



Segmentation based on the analysis of responses to two questions. Detailed explanation in the methodology annexe. Some lines do not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

In Finland, supporters of the ruling Social Democrats have a strong preference for justice, while centre-right National Coalition Party voters are roughly split down the middle. In Spain, the radical-right Vox has the largest share of Justice supporters among its voters (even if they still have a slight preference for Peace). Similarly, in Sweden radical-right Sweden Democrats voters are the most pro-Justice out of the three largest parties. Meanwhile, in France the far right is the most pro-Peace, with many voters of the left occupying Swing positions. And, in Italy, while voters of all parties prefer Peace to Justice, the largest support for Peace (more than 60 per cent) is among Brothers of Italy and League voters.

Members of the Peace camp and the Justice camp hold distinctive attitudes towards the war. While all blame Russia for the conflict, fewer in the Peace camp do (64 per cent, compared to 86 per cent in the Justice camp who point to Moscow). And, of the three groups it is Swing voters who attribute the most responsibility to Russia (92 per cent). Similarly, majorities in both Peace and Justice camps mostly consider Russia the main obstacle to peace, but many fewer in the Peace camp do (53 per cent, compared to 79 per cent in the Justice camp). Again, the vast majority of Swing voters believe Russia is the main obstacle to peace (87 per cent). And if anyone considers the United States an obstacle to peace, they are more likely to be in the Peace camp.

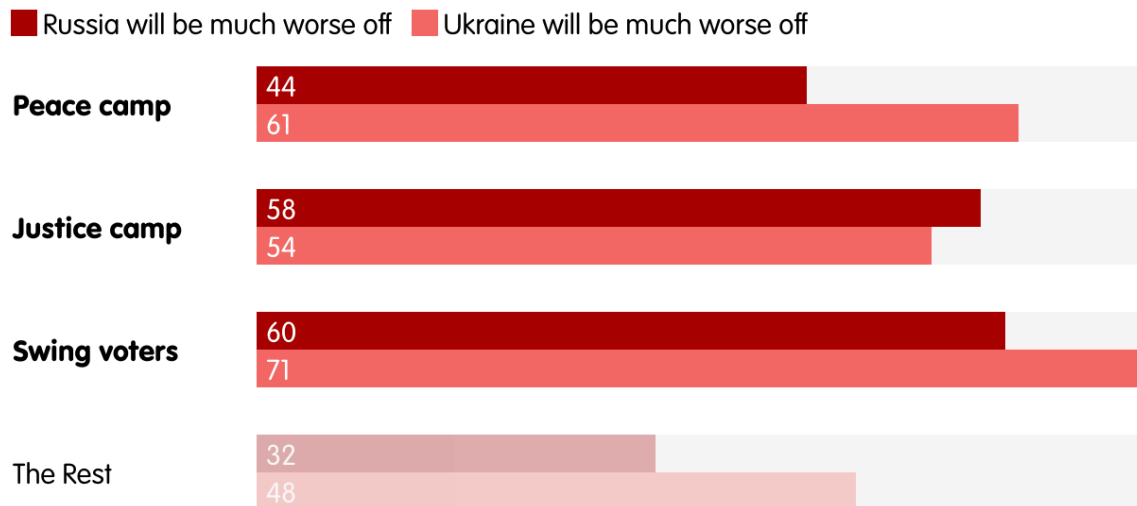
While some pro-Russian (or anti-American) voters might be part of the Peace camp, this does not necessarily make the Peace camp a Russia-friendly grouping. While both Peace and Justice camps agree that Russia and Ukraine will each be worse off as a result of this war, the Justice camp believes Russia above all will be “much worse off” – while Peace camp members



foresee that, of the two, Ukraine will suffer more. Some in the Peace camp may therefore want the war to end because they consider it is inflicting excessive suffering on Ukraine.

### Will Russia and Ukraine be better or worse off as a result of the war?

In per cent



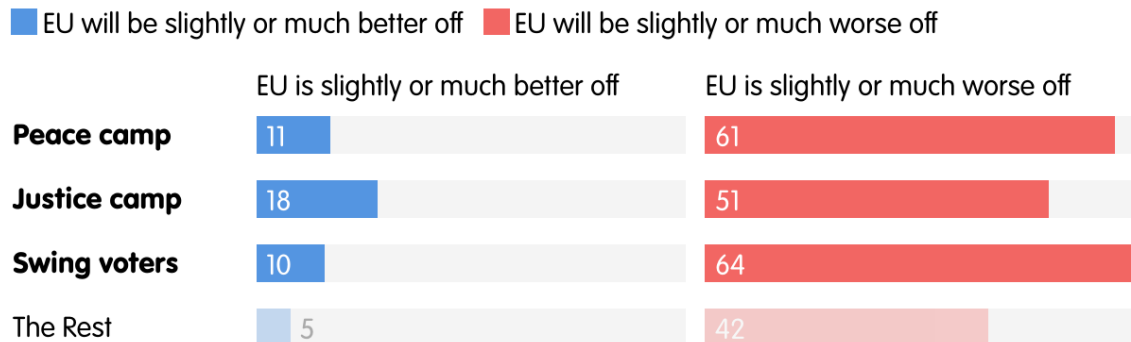
Available options included 'Much better off', 'Slightly better off', 'No impact', 'Slightly worse off', 'Much worse off', and 'Don't know'.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

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The Peace camp is also more likely than the Justice camp to believe that the EU will be worse off as a result of this conflict. This may be another reason for them to want this war to stop. In many respects the Peace camp is a camp of pessimists.

## Will the EU be better or worse off as a result of the war in Ukraine? In per cent



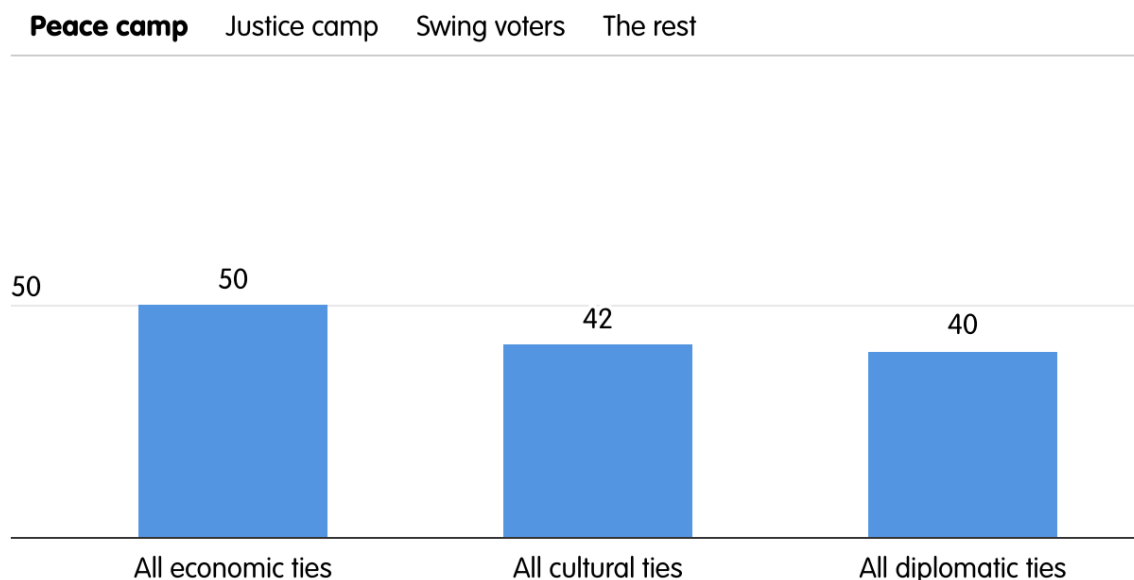
Two other available options (not represented on this chart) included 'No impact' and 'Don't know'.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

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In terms of Europe's political and practical response to the war, all three main groups support the cutting of economic ties with Russia. But they do so by radically different proportions: in the Peace camp, 50 per cent back this but 37 per cent do not; in the Justice camp, the difference stands at 83 per cent to 11 per cent. Among Swing voters, it is 83 per cent to 7 per cent. The Peace and Justice camps also differ over whether to sever diplomatic ties: the Justice camp clearly supports this (70-23 per cent), as do the Swing voters (60-30 per cent), while the Peace camp opposes this (49-40 per cent). Likewise, the Justice camp and the Swing voters want to cut cultural ties while the Peace camp opposes this.

## Which ties with Russia should be cut off as a result of the war in Ukraine? In per cent



Share of respondents who supported cutting off these ties. The rest either opposed this, or said they didn't know. By Europe's main camps in response to Russia's war on Ukraine; jointly for 10 countries surveyed.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

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**i** This chart is interactive. Click on it to see it in your browser.

Military matters also generate considerable disagreement. The three groups disagree over whether to enforce a no-fly zone over Ukraine. The Justice camp and Swing voters support such a proposition (by 54-24 per cent and 41-23 per cent respectively), while the Peace camp is sceptical (48-25 per cent). The question of sending troops to Ukraine also divides opinion: the Justice camp and Swing voters support it (52-32 per cent and 49-31 per cent respectively), while the Peace camp is opposed (59-24 per cent).

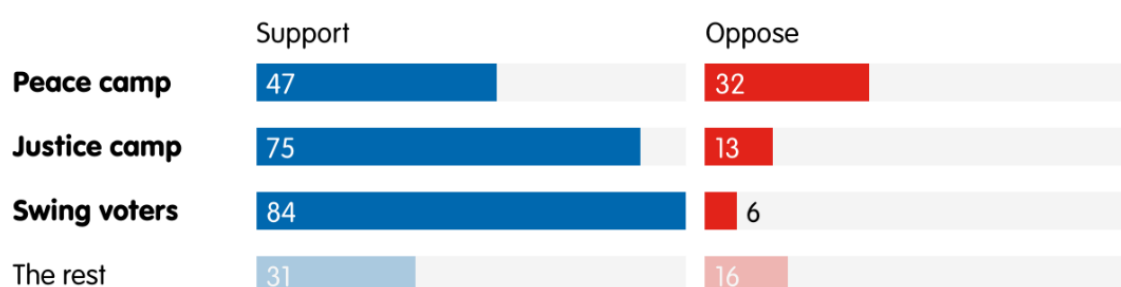
And on Ukrainian accession to NATO, Justice camp and Swing voters are both in support by wide margins (71-15 per cent and 75-8 per cent respectively), while the Peace camp is divided, with 37 per cent in support and 40 per cent against. On whether to send extra troops to NATO's eastern members, again the Justice camp and Swing voters are strongly in favour (75-14 per cent and 75-8 per cent respectively), while the Peace camp is split (41 per cent support while 40 per cent oppose).

On potential EU membership for Ukraine, all camps are in favour, but the Peace camp offers only lukewarm support.

Besides, members of the Peace and Justice camps come to radically different conclusions on the question of whether their country should now boost defence spending. A majority in the

Justice camp (53 per cent) supports raising military spending, even if it means making funding cuts in areas such as health, education, and crime prevention. Meanwhile, just 29 per cent say that their country should not increase spending on defence, despite the war, as this could require cuts in other areas. In the Peace camp, the proportions are almost exactly reversed – 29 per cent in favour with 51 per cent against. Swing voters are roughly split on this issue, with a slight preference for refraining from spending more on defence (by 35 per cent to 30 per cent). The other options available for this question were “Neither of these” or “Don’t know”, with a significant number of Swing voters (26 per cent) choosing the former.

### Would you support or oppose the EU in taking steps further towards Ukraine's accession? In per cent



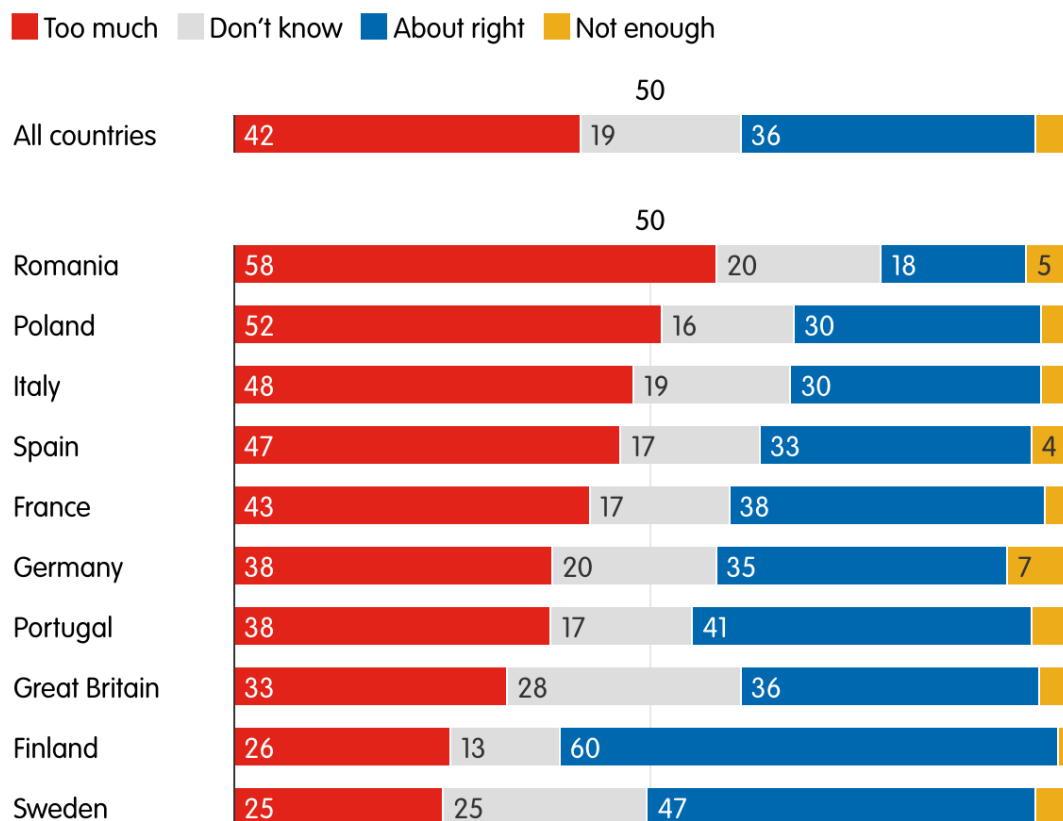
'The rest' responded 'Don't know'.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

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Therefore, the Swing voters are as tough, if not tougher, than the Justice camp in their criticism of Russia – they blame Russia first and foremost for the war; maintain that Russia is the biggest obstacle to peace; and believe that Europe should sever its ties with Russia. But they do not share the Justice camp’s moral outrage and escalatory goals. On issues such as whether the war will leave Ukraine and the EU worse off, or whether to increase defence spending, they are much closer to the Peace camp. In some ways the Swing voters possess the instincts of Kissingerian realists. They are openly hostile to Russia and support tough policies towards it, but they fear that a protracted war will be too costly for Europe.

## How much attention does your government dedicate to the war in Ukraine, compared to other problems its own citizens are facing? In per cent



The exact options included: (a) 'My government is focusing too much on the war in Ukraine and not enough on the problems facing its own citizens', (b) 'My government is getting the balance about right between the war in Ukraine and the problems facing its own citizens', (c) 'My government is focusing too much on the problems facing its own citizens and not enough on the war in Ukraine', and (d) 'Don't know' (not represented on this graph).

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

Speaking to the World Economic Forum in Davos at the end of May, Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, warned that "our task is for the world not to get tired of war". It is a daunting challenge. Fifty per cent of Peace camp members believe their government dedicates too much attention to the conflict – while 38 per cent say there is "just enough" or "too little". Conversely, in the Justice camp, 52 per cent consider either that enough or too little attention is going towards the war; only 38 per cent think there is too much. Swing voters are closer to the Justice camp on this issue: just 35 per cent agree that too much attention is dedicated to the war while 47 per cent say there is enough or too little. It is therefore unlikely that war-weariness is (yet) causing the Swing voters to hesitate between the goal of Peace and the goal of Justice. And the rest of the voters are more likely to say "too

much” attention is dedicated to this war (38 per cent), rather than “just right” or “too little” (22 per cent), even if most of them simply do not know (40 per cent).

These data also show that even among the Justice camp some sort of ‘solidarity fatigue’ may soon emerge. Two of the most exposed frontline states – Romania and Poland – are the only countries where more than 50 per cent of people say that their governments are focusing too much on the war at the expense of other pressing issues. Since many Peace supporters think Ukraine, rather than Russia, will end up worse off because of this conflict, further Russian military advances may also cause more people to join the Peace camp.

## **Divided Europe: Country versus country**

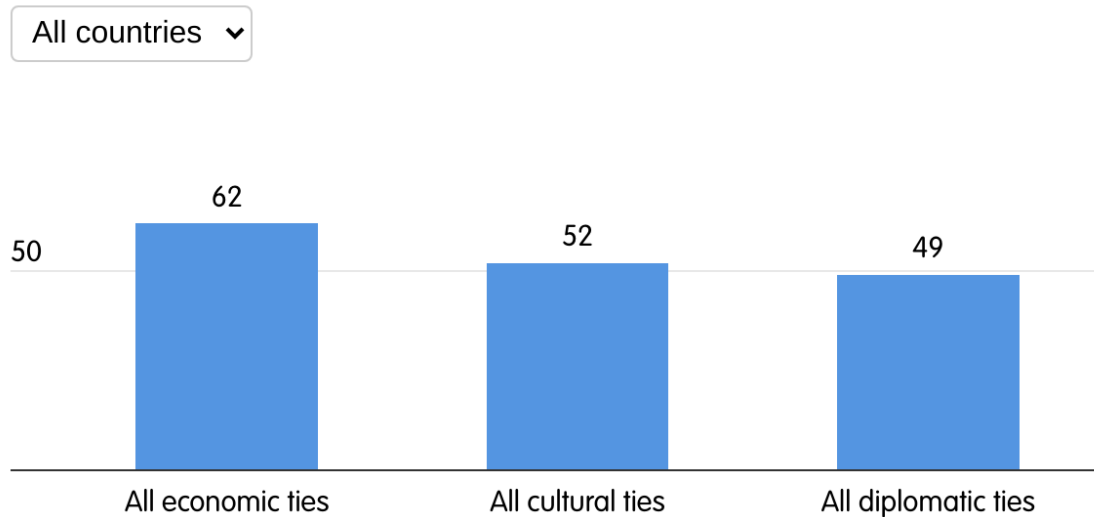
Large divisions are emerging between EU member states whose citizens feel they are participants in the war and those where people still want to try to avoid involvement in the conflict.

A clear outlier is Poland, where respondents prefer Justice to Peace by 41 per cent to 16 per cent. Meanwhile, the preference for Peace is strongest in Italy (52 per cent) and Germany (49 per cent).

Europeans’ views of the causes of the war vary considerably. For example, over 80 per cent of people in Poland, Sweden, Finland, Portugal, and Great Britain say that Russia is mainly responsible for starting the conflict. This stands in contrast to just 56 per cent in Italy, 62 per cent in France, and 66 per cent in Germany who lay the blame at the Kremlin’s door. On the question of who represents the biggest obstacle to peace, 64 per cent in all surveyed countries say Russia – but just 39 per cent in Italy and 42 per cent in Romania agree. In Italy over one-quarter (28 per cent) say the US is to blame, against 9 per cent in the other nine surveyed countries.

Still, the break with Moscow is real and will remain for some time, regardless of how and when the war ends. There is strong support across all countries for severing all economic ties with Russia (62 to 22 per cent), with no country – not even Italy – dissenting from this course of action. There is also significant support for cutting cultural and diplomatic ties with Russia, although this is not as strong as in the case of economic relations. In some countries, respondents oppose the ending of such ties (Italy on cultural contacts; and Italy, France, and Germany on diplomatic relations).

## Which ties with Russia should be cut off as a result of the war in Ukraine? In per cent



Share of respondents who supported cutting off these ties. The rest either opposed this, or said they didn't know.

Source: Datapraxix and YouGov, 2022.

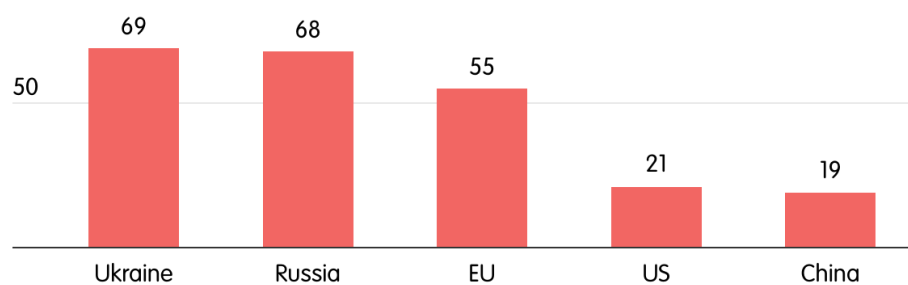
Europeans believe that Russia and Ukraine will lose out because of this war. A majority of Europeans – contrary to the upbeat talk in many European capitals, which see the war as an EU “moment” – also believe the EU will be worse off. In turn, prevailing opinion across most surveyed countries is that the war will have no impact on the US or China.

The two issues that Europeans are most concerned about with respect to the ongoing conflict are the cost of living (including higher energy prices), and the threat of the use of nuclear weapons by Russia. But, while anxiety about these questions exists in all countries, differences emerge in respondents' main concerns. In Portugal, Italy, and France, people are the most worried about the impact of war on the cost of living and energy prices. In contrast, in Sweden, Poland, and Romania, citizens are the least concerned about this issue. Swedes, Finns, and the French are more preoccupied with the threat of Russian cyber attacks than people are in other countries. And the countries located closest to Russia – Finland, Poland, Romania, and Sweden – are comparatively more concerned about the threat of Russian military action against them. It may be that Russia's immediate neighbours fear occupation, while people across all states surveyed are worried about the risk of nuclear war.

## Who will be worse off as a result of the war in Ukraine?

In per cent

All countries ▼

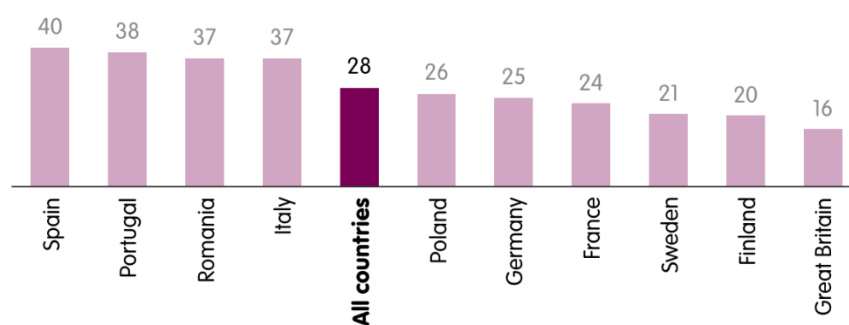


Share of respondents who said a given country will be 'slightly worse off' or 'much worse off' as a result of the war.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

## What are your biggest concerns in regards to the war in Ukraine? In per cent

Economic downturn or losing my job ▼



Share of respondents who ranked a given concern as one of their top three.

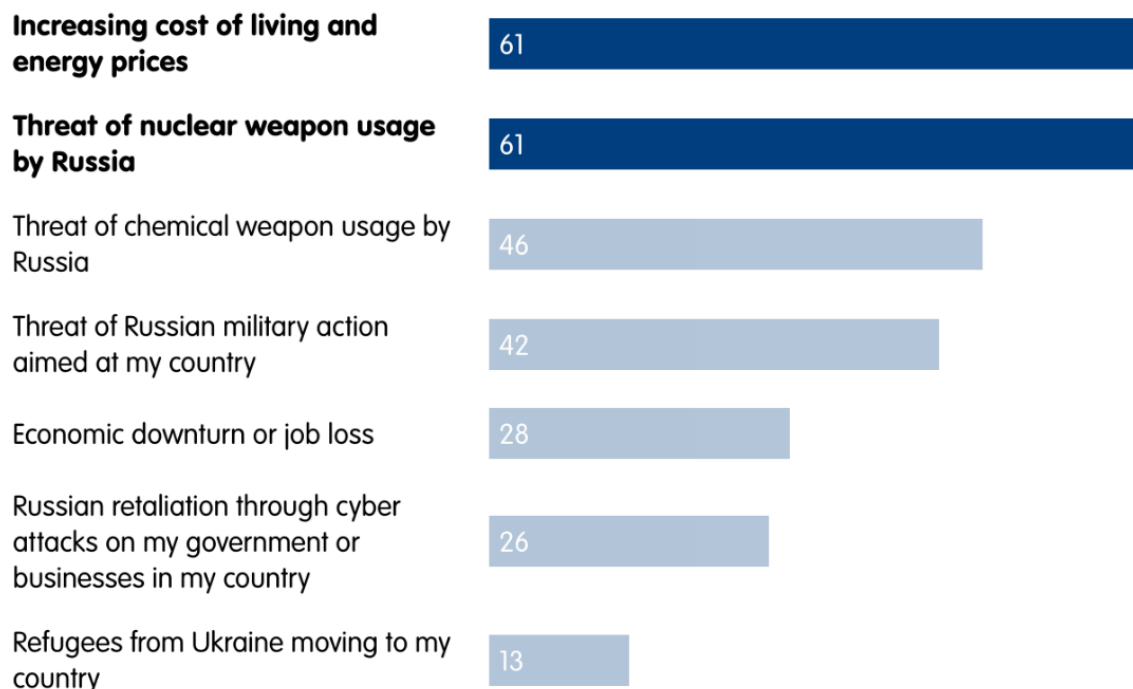
Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

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**i** These charts are interactive. Click on them to see them in your browser.



## What are your biggest concerns in regards to the war in Ukraine? In per cent



Ranked first, second, or third. For all countries surveyed. 8 per cent of respondents did not rank any of these as their concerns.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.  
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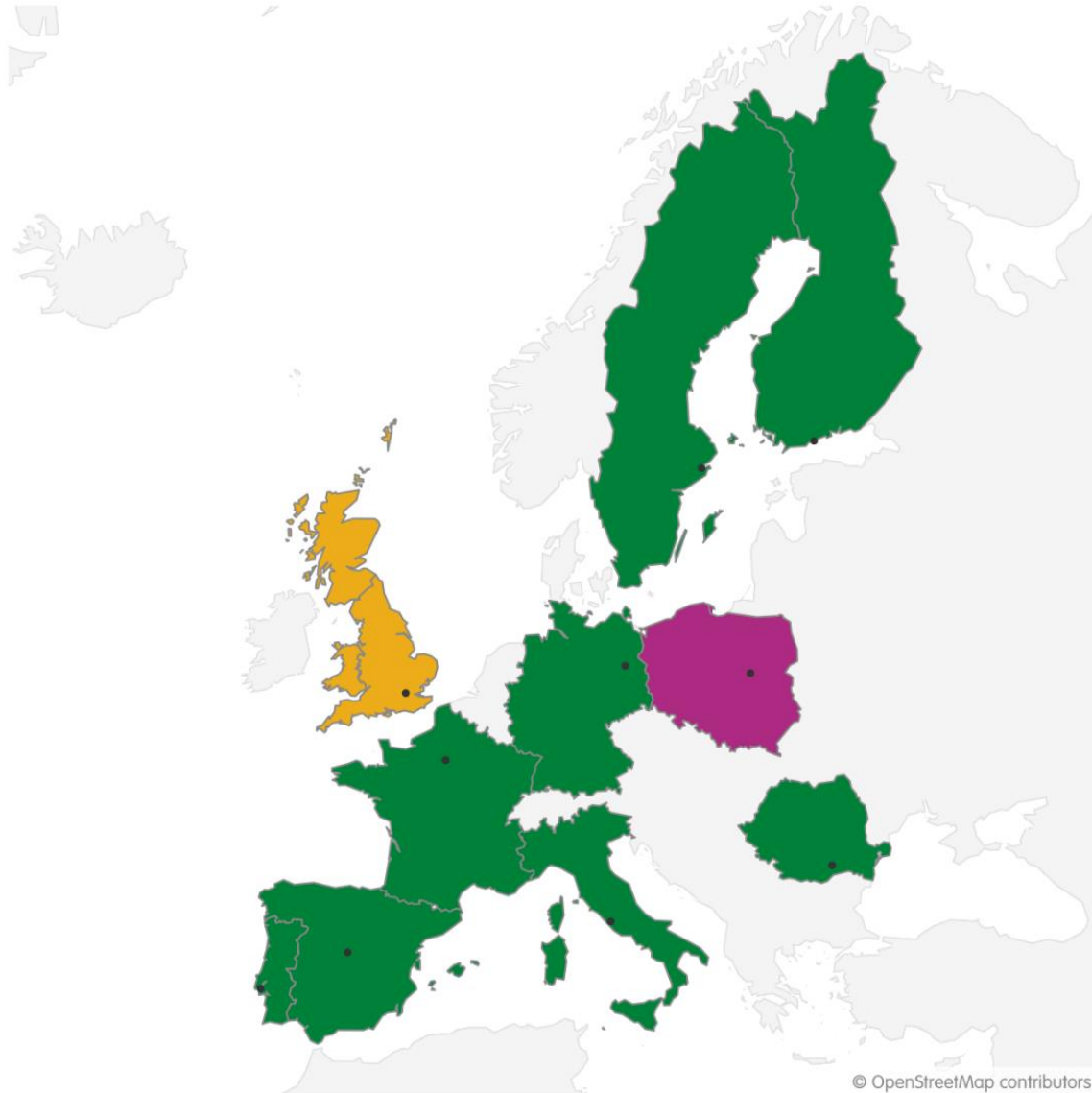
## Divisions within eastern Europe: Poland versus Romania

In trying to imagine the future divisions in Europe caused by the war, analysts often refer to an “east-west divide” and to differences between frontline countries and those geographically farther from the conflict. ECFR’s study suggests a much more nuanced map. It reveals, for example, significant differences between Poland and Romania, both frontline countries that are hosting large numbers of refugees and that are historically suspicious of, and hostile to, Russia.

Even if both Poland and Romania border Ukraine and their governments are among Kyiv’s major supporters, their citizens display quite distinct attitudes to the war. Eighty-three per cent of people in Poland blame Russia for the conflict; in Romania, just 58 per cent do. Even more importantly, 74 per cent of people in Poland see Russia as the biggest obstacle to peace, while only 42 per cent in Romania do.

## Europe's different voter camps in response to Russia's war on Ukraine by largest group

Peace camp Justice camp Swing voters



The map shows which of the three groups had the largest share of respondents in each country and the percentage share for that group. Segmentation based on the analysis of responses to two questions. Detailed explanation in the methodology annexe.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

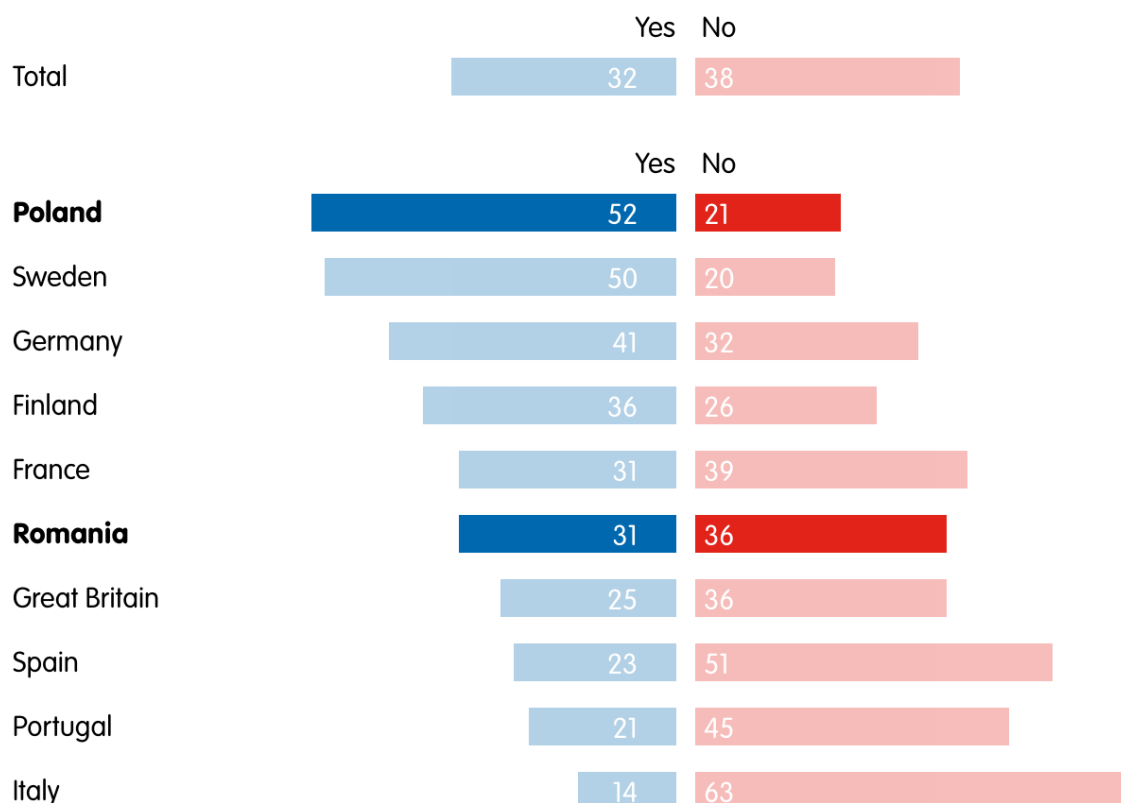
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The two countries are also effectively on two different planets when it comes to their preference for Peace or Justice. As noted, Poland is the only country in the poll where the Justice camp clearly prevails over the Peace camp (41 to 16 per cent). Meanwhile, Romania –

alongside France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and Spain – exhibits a clear preference for Peace over Justice (42 to 23 per cent).

Poles are among Europe's biggest hawks and Romanians among the biggest doves. In Poland, 77 per cent want to cut off all economic ties with Russia; in Romania, only 45 per cent do. Seventy-four per cent of Poles support completely ending imports of fossil fuels from Russia, compared to 51 per cent in Romania. Similarly, 71 per cent of people in Poland – in contrast to just 39 per cent in Romania – want to cut all diplomatic ties with Russia. And 73 per cent in Poland – versus just 40 per cent in Romania – support ending all cultural contact with Russia.

### Should your country spend more on defence now given the war in Ukraine? In per cent



The exact answers were: (a) 'The war in Ukraine has showed that my country should be spending more on defence, even if that means that we must cut money on other areas like health, education and crime prevention', and (b) 'Despite the war in Ukraine, my country should not be increasing spending on defence as that could require cutting money on other areas like health, education and crime prevention'. Two other available options (not represented on this graph) were (c) 'Neither of these', and (d) 'Don't know'.

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

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Poles and Romanians also differ in the strength of the solidarity they feel with Ukraine. For example, 71 per cent of people in Poland – but 54 per cent of people in Romania – support providing more economic assistance to Ukraine. On the question of sending additional arms to Ukraine, 78 per cent in Poland are in favour against just 46 per cent in Romania. The two countries differ most significantly over the idea of sending troops to Ukraine: Poland is among the few countries where support for this option prevails over opposition to it, by 46 per cent to 30 per cent; Romanians oppose sending troops by 44 per cent to 26 per cent.

While Poland is one of just two countries where 50 per cent or more agree that the war means countries should increase military spending, Romanians are much less convinced. Geography is not destiny when it comes to defining citizens' attitudes to the war.

## **The divided west: Germany versus Italy**

A look at some of the European countries formerly most friendly towards Russia also shows diverging trajectories. While eastern Europeans regularly accuse Germany of appeasing Russia, this new poll shows that German citizens are significantly more hawkish than Italians.

For example, even if most Germans (66 per cent) and Italians (56 per cent) mainly blame Russia for the war, they differ over who represents the biggest obstacle to peace. Sixty-three per cent in Germany believe the answer is Russia – but just 39 per cent in Italy agree. Italy is also the country with the largest number of respondents who state that the US is mainly to blame (20 per cent) and is the biggest obstacle to peace (28 per cent); fewer in Germany (11 and 9 per cent, respectively) share these beliefs.

In both countries, there is prevailing support for severing economic ties with Russia: 57 per cent in Germany and 47 per cent in Italy back this, while 29 per cent and 36 per cent respectively oppose it. Germans are more hawkish than Italians in several other respects. For example, when asked to decide whether it is more important to reduce Europe's energy dependence on Russia or stick to the EU's climate goals, Italians are strongly divided. However, most Germans prefer to address Europe's energy dependence. Germans are fairly divided over whether to cut cultural ties with Russia, while Italians are clear in their preference to keep cultural channels open – the only country in this study to support this.

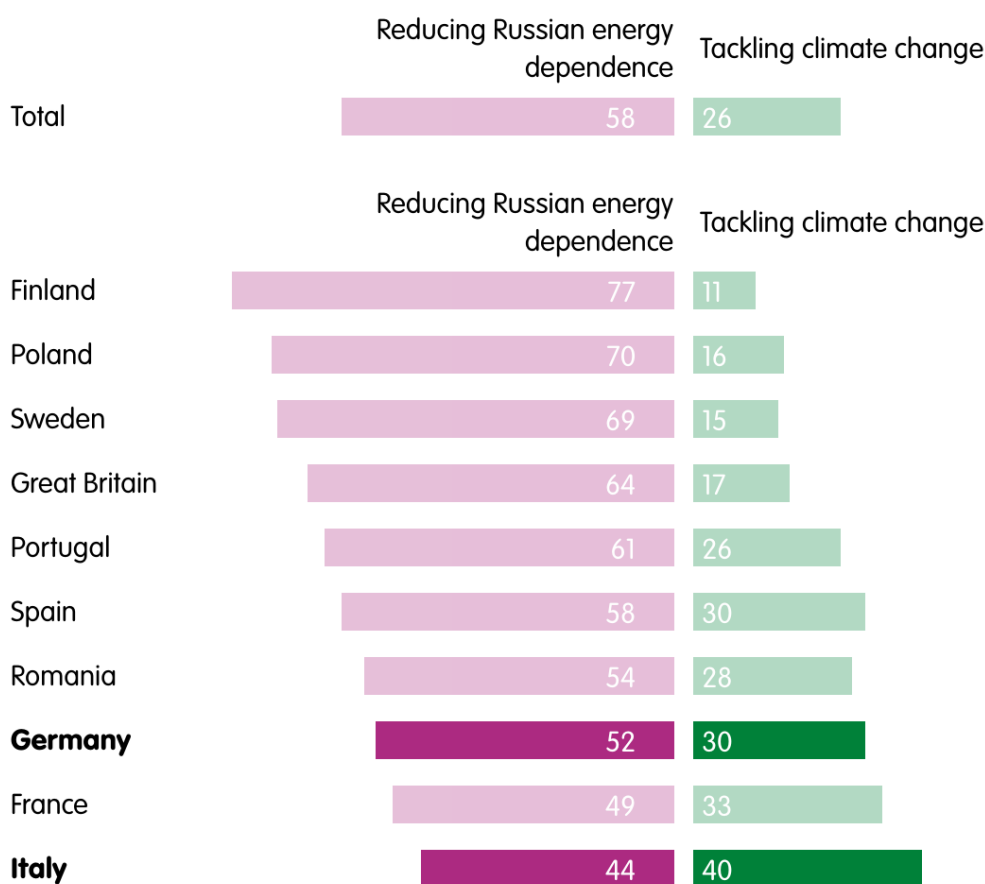
Germans support (by 52 per cent to 33 per cent) the sending of additional arms and military supplies to the Ukrainian government. Italians are the only nationality surveyed to be mostly against this idea (by 45 per cent to 33 per cent). Similarly, prevailing opinion in Germany is that additional troops should be sent to eastern NATO members (by 45 per cent to 32 per cent). But Italians mostly oppose such a move – by 45 per cent to 30 per cent.

Perhaps the most striking difference between Germany and Italy lies in their citizens' stance on defence spending. Italy is an outlier among all countries surveyed, with 63 per cent saying

that no increase in defence spending is needed, despite the war; a mere 14 per cent want to see a rise. Meanwhile, Germany is among just four countries (alongside Finland, Poland, and Sweden) in which people largely back increasing defence spending (by 41 per cent to 32 per cent).

## What should be more important for the EU: reducing energy dependence on Russia, or sticking to climate policy goals?

In per cent



The exact answers were: (a) 'It is more important that the EU reduces its dependence on Russian oil and gas as soon as possible, even if it means a temporary increase in the use of our own fossil fuels like coal', and (b) 'It is more important that the EU continues to develop greener energy production to tackle climate change, even if it means continuing to rely on Russian oil and gas in the short term'. A third available option (not represented on this chart) was (c) 'Don't know'.

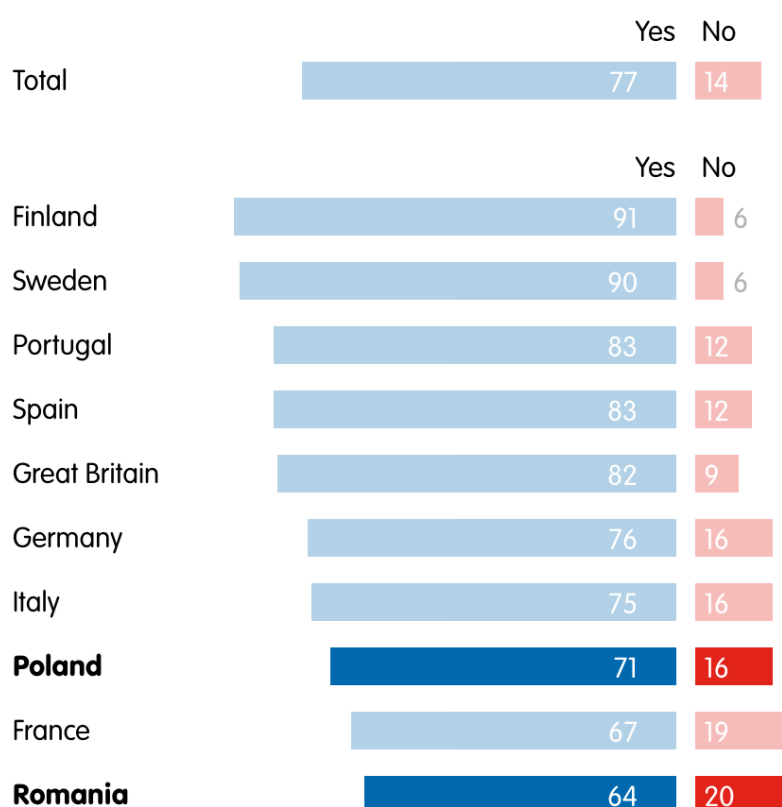
Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.  
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So, governments' formerly (relatively) friendly stances towards Moscow are also no reliable guide to public opinion.

## A coming refugee crisis?

The war in Ukraine has destroyed previous assumptions about divisions in Europe. One of the striking features of the war's impact has been eastern Europe's metamorphosis when it comes to those fleeing the violence: some of the states once keenest to keep Syrian refugees out during the 2015 crisis are now welcoming the largest numbers of arrivals.

### Do you support your government in taking in Ukrainian refugees? In per cent



The exact question was: 'Do you support or oppose your country offering to take in Ukrainian refugees who have been displaced as a result of the conflict with Russia?'. Available options included: (a) 'Strongly support', (b) 'Somewhat support', (c) 'Somewhat oppose', (d) 'Strongly oppose', as well as (e) 'Don't know' (not represented on this graph).

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.

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However, ECFR's poll hints at ways migration could still become a divisive issue in the east, just as it has in Turkey since Ankara opened the country's border to Syrian refugees. While most Europeans are happy to host Ukrainian refugees, Romania, Poland, and France are among the countries least open to this prospect. This is perhaps influenced by the fact that

Romania and Poland have already taken in many Ukrainian refugees – and by the toxicity of the politics of immigration in France, a country that has welcomed few Ukrainian refugees so far. The fact that refugees in Poland are staying mainly in private homes may perhaps influence the public’s attitude towards imagining what their country should do next.

## Conclusion

War is like a rollercoaster: public opinion can change with every twist and turn, and it is also a hugely powerful driver. As Gideon Rachman of the *Financial Times* wrote recently, “The war in Ukraine is essentially being fought on three fronts and among three protagonists. The first front is the battlefield itself. The second front is economic. The third front is the battle of wills. The three participants are Russia, Ukraine and the western alliance backing Ukraine.”

What happens on any of the three fronts affects the other two. Ukraine’s military successes are critical for bolstering the size of the Justice camp (whose informal leader, Zelensky, has an uncanny ability to communicate with European publics). Supporters of the Peace camp are already the biggest group among European citizens and will probably rise in number if feeling grows that the fierce economic sanctions on Russia are failing to bring results.

So, what do this new survey’s findings say about the ongoing battle of wills, and how to sustain support for the measures taken to arm Ukraine and sanction Russia? Ukraine’s dependence on the actions of its European neighbours means that who wins this battle of wills is likely to be even more important than what takes place on the economic and military terrains.

The next few weeks will be critical and the data show that it should be possible to keep Europe together with the right political messaging.

The poll suggests that Europe’s break with Russia is irreversible, at least in the short and medium term. There is no chance now that Europeans are dreaming of integrating Russia into their own structures or political community. They seem to be looking towards a world in which Europe decouples from Russia entirely.

But the European consensus on Russia does not automatically translate into a common position on what roles the EU should play in the war. The data herald a growing divergence between the Peace camp and the Justice camp as the war drags on and the costs associated with it grow.

The survey exposes potential divisions over refugees, Ukraine’s EU accession, the impact on living standards, and the threat of nuclear escalation. These combine into a central schism between the Peace and Justice camps. In many European countries, Ukraine’s cause could change from being a unifying national endeavour and turn into a divisive political issue. But,

as well as causing tensions within individual countries, the war could mean that the political stances of states such as Poland and Italy increasingly diverge.

In the early stages of the war, countries in central and eastern Europe felt vindicated in their past hawkishness towards Russia, and have grown in confidence and power within the EU. But, in the next phase, countries such as Poland could find themselves marginalised if the Peace camp broadens its appeal among the other member states.

The key to maintaining European unity in support of Ukraine is to take the fears of escalation seriously and to present the conflict as a defensive struggle against Russian aggression rather than talking about Ukrainian victory and defeating Russia.

While the Ukraine conflict could yet prove to be the midwife of a much more muscular EU, this research shows that support for increased defence spending is weaker among the public than it might appear if one were to listen only to political leaders.

Perhaps the most worrying sign is that most Europeans see the EU as a major loser in the war, rather than reading its relative unity as a sign of a strengthening union.

The danger remains that the Peace and Justice camps could yet become as polarised as the debtors and creditors in the euro crisis of the early 2010s. If this is allowed to happen – and if the EU becomes immobilised by its own divisions – then the war could signal the permanent marginalisation of Europe on the world stage.

European public opinion fortified the EU's unity in the face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. It is now up to Europe's leaders to sustain this unity. Finding a language that appeals to the Swing voters – tough on Russia, but cautious about the dangers of escalation – could provide a way of squaring the circle of public opinion.

If the EU manages to maintain the broad front it has shown so far, and if governments from all sides hang together rather than trying to humiliate one other, a stronger – geopolitical – Europe could still emerge from the shadow of war. How the Russian invasion of Ukraine is resolved will have far-reaching consequences for the brewing conflict between the US and China.



## About the authors

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## Methodology

This report is based on a public opinion poll in ten European countries of which nine are European Union member states. The polls were carried out for ECFR through Datapraxis and YouGov in Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Sweden. The survey was conducted between 28 April-11 May 2022, with an overall sample of 8,172 respondents.

This was an online survey conducted in Finland (n = 500), France (n = 1,000), Germany (n = 1,000), Great Britain (n = 1,103), Italy (n = 1,009), Poland (n = 1,002), Portugal (n = 506), Romania (n = 501), Spain (n = 1,050), and Sweden (n = 501). The results are nationally representative of basic demographics and past votes in each country. The general margin of error is  $\pm 3$  per cent for a sample of 1,000 and  $\pm 4$  per cent for a sample of 500.

The exact polling dates were: Finland (29 April-5 May), France (28 April-5 May), Germany (28 April-5 May), Great Britain (10-11 May), Italy (28 April-6 May), Poland (29 April-5 May),

Portugal (29 April-6 May), Romania (29 April-5 May), Spain (29 April-5 May) and Sweden (28 April-5 May).

The segmentation used in this report into different voter camps in response to Russia's war on Ukraine was primarily based on the following question: "Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?" Options included: "The most important thing is to stop the war as soon as possible, even if it means Ukraine giving control of areas to Russia", "The most important thing is to punish Russia for its aggression, even if it means that more Ukrainians are killed and displaced", "Neither of these", and "Don't know". Respondents who chose the first option constituted the Peace camp. Those who chose the second one ended up in the Justice camp.

For those who responded "Neither", we used another question to single out the Swing voters. This group includes those who said they supported at least five out of ten actions on the part of the EU in response to Russia's war on Ukraine, from among the following: (1) "Accepting more Ukrainian refugees into their country"; (2) "Providing more economic assistance to Ukraine"; (3) "Increasing economic and diplomatic sanctions on Russia"; (4) "Completely stopping imports of fossil fuels from Russia"; (5) "Sending additional arms and military supplies to the Ukrainian government"; (6) "Enforcing a no-fly zone over Ukraine, even if this might trigger a direct conflict between the West and Russia"; (7) "Sending troops to Ukraine to help the Ukrainian government defend itself against Russia"; (8) "Supporting Ukraine's admission into NATO"; (9) "Sending additional troops to NATO countries in Eastern Europe"; (10) "Supporting Ukraine's accession into the EU".

Those who chose "Don't know" or "Neither" in response to the first question, and selected fewer than five actions on the part of the EU in response to Russia's war in Ukraine, were combined into a group called 'The Rest'.

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