

FRAGILE UNITY: WHY EUROPEANS ARE COMING TOGETHER ON UKRAINE (AND WHAT MIGHT DRIVE THEM APART)

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SUMMARY

- A recent multi-country poll for ECFR suggests that Europeans have come closer together in their support for Ukraine.
- Europeans now agree that Russia is their adversary or rival.
- Three factors have supported this remarkable coming together: Ukrainian successes in the first year of the war; the way the war has united the political left and right; and the perceived return of a strong West led by the US.
- But these factors are fragile and European leaders should be careful in their optimism.
- European policymakers should take advantage of this unity to equip Ukraine, while doing everything they can to mitigate divisions caused by changing circumstances at home and abroad.

Introduction

The conventional wisdom is that wars end in negotiations. But their end is more often determined at the ballot box – or even in the opinion polls. A lack of public support brought America’s war in Vietnam to an end, the French war in Algeria to its close, and – with Slobodan Milosevic’s defeat at the ballot box in 2000 – ended the wars in the former Yugoslavia. Ukraine’s Western allies have so far been surprisingly united in their support for Kyiv. But Vladimir Putin surely hopes that Western public opinion will turn, leaving Ukraine high and dry.

In his state of the nation speech delivered a few days before the anniversary of his invasion of Ukraine, the Russian president made it very clear that he is positioning for a long war, hoping that the logic of democratic politics will exhaust Western support for Kyiv and allow Moscow to prevail.

But 12 months into the fighting, the cracks in the Western coalition have got smaller rather than larger. A multi-country ECFR poll conducted in January 2023 in ten European countries (Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Spain) shows that Europeans are surprisingly united in their determination to back Kyiv’s independence. Could the unity of European public opinion surprise Putin – in the same way that the fighting spirit of the Ukrainians did? What does the dynamic of public opinion in the last 12 months tell us about the next stage of the war?

This paper documents Europe’s remarkable coming together, explores three major drivers of this unity, and explains how European leaders can position themselves for the challenges ahead.

Surprising unity: the rallying of European publics

In May 2022, a major ECFR [poll](#) revealed that while Europeans were unified in their condemnation of the war and their desire to break relations with Russia, they were deeply divided about how they saw the war ending.

One group believed that it was most important that the war ended as soon as possible, even if that meant Ukraine making concessions to Russia (we called them the ‘peace camp’), while the other group believed that only Russia’s clear defeat could bring peace, even if that meant a longer war (the ‘justice camp’). In 2022 our analysis indicated that the ‘peace camp’ was larger than the ‘justice camp’, with the preference for the war to end as soon as possible prevailing in most European countries that we polled. There was a particularly strong preference for this

option in Italy, Germany, Romania, and France. Poland was the only country where more people wanted to see Russia punished for its aggression, even if that meant a longer war. Our fear back then was that the divide between these two camps might undermine the impressive display of unity the European Union had mustered after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022.

But nine months later, although important divisions remain between and within European countries, the picture has changed.

Given that 'pushing back' against Russia's aggression is increasingly about Ukraine regaining all of its territory, rather than just punishing Russia, we phrased the long war option differently in the 2023 poll. We also added a third possible answer – that the Western dominance of the world should be pushed back, even if it means accepting Russian territorial aggression against Ukraine – as the 2023 poll was also conducted in China, India, Türkiye, Russia, and the United States.

Despite these differences, the results indicate that the desire for the war between Russia and Ukraine to end as soon as possible is no longer as popular among Europeans. In several countries – Estonia, Poland, Denmark, and Great Britain – there is now a clear preference for Ukraine to regain all of its territory, even if it means a longer war or more Ukrainians being killed and displaced. In Germany and France, the number of those who would like to see the war end as soon as possible has dropped significantly. In Germany, almost as many people now want Ukraine to regain all its territory as want the war to end as soon as possible. And in France, the long war option has a slight lead over the option to end the war as soon as possible. Only in Italy and Romania do many more people still think the war should end as soon as possible.

2023: Which of the following statements comes closest to your view? In per cent

< 15 15–30 30–45 ≥ 45

	All	DE	ES	FR	GB	IT	PL	PT	RO	DK	EE
The conflict between Russia and Ukraine needs to stop as soon as possible, even if it means Ukraine giving control of areas to Russia	29	39	30	31	22	41	18	33	37	24	17
Ukraine needs to regain all its territory, even if it means a longer war or more Ukrainians being killed and displaced	38	33	29	35	44	26	52	28	22	48	66
Western dominance of the world needs to be pushed back, even if it means accepting Russian territorial aggression against Ukraine	5	7	6	5	4	5	4	4	8	3	2
None of these	14	9	22	14	14	16	13	23	17	8	9
Don't know	13	12	12	16	17	12	14	12	17	16	6

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DK, FR, DE, GB, IT, PL, PT, RO, ES), Datapraxis and Norstat (EE), January 2023.
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2022: Which of the following statements comes closest to your view? In per cent

< 15 15–30 30–45 ≥ 45

	All	DE	ES	FR	GB	IT	PL	PT	RO	SE	FI
The most important thing is to stop the war as soon as possible, even if it means Ukraine giving control of areas to Russia	35	49	35	41	22	52	16	31	42	38	26
The most important thing is to punish Russia for its aggression, even if it means that more Ukrainians are killed and displaced	22	19	16	20	21	16	41	21	23	22	25
Neither of these	28	21	38	22	39	17	31	39	20	22	30
Don't know	15	11	12	17	19	15	11	10	16	18	19

Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022.
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The results from this poll also confirm our claim from May last year that – contrary to the journalistic cliché that the war has divided the EU into a hawkish east and a dovish west – at least three different blocks have emerged. Firstly, there are the northern and eastern hawks (Estonia, Poland, Denmark, and Great Britain), where most people strongly support Kyiv's

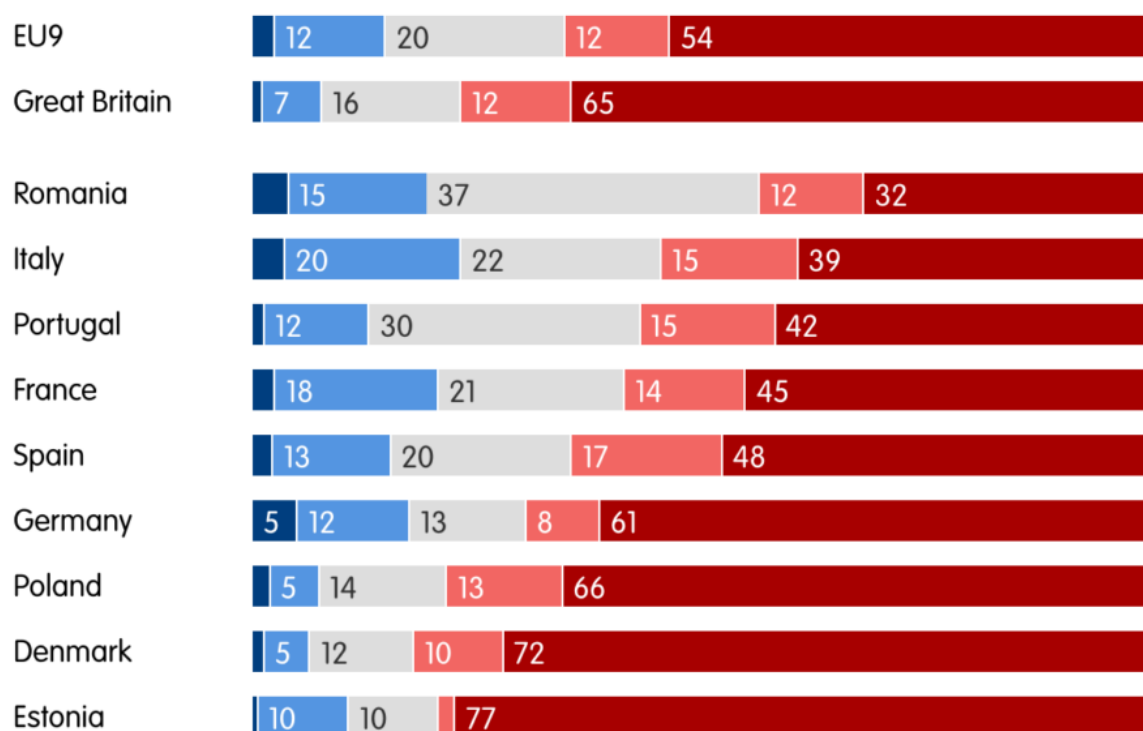
objectives in the war. Secondly, there is the ambiguous west (France, Germany, Spain, and Portugal), where opinions are divided on how the war should end. And finally, there are the southern weak links (Italy and Romania), where the preference for the war to end as soon as possible has the upper hand.

The convergence on how Europeans perceive Russia is even more striking than the coming together around the idea of fighting the war. In every country polled, the prevailing opinion is now that Russia is an adversary (ranging from as little as 32 per cent in Romania to 77 per cent in Estonia). Across the nine EU member states polled, just 2 per cent of respondents see Russia as an ally, and 12 per cent consider it a necessary partner for their country. Meanwhile, 66 per cent of respondents see Russia as either an adversary or a rival.

This is a wholly different result compared to the findings of an ECFR [poll](#) conducted in spring 2021. Back then, we asked people about their perception of Russia's relationship with Europe, rather than with their country – which again makes it hard to directly compare the results. But overall, there has been a major change in how Europeans perceive Russia. Two years ago, far fewer respondents (ranging from 5 per cent in Bulgaria to 38 per cent in Poland) saw Russia as an adversary. The most widespread perception was that Russia was a necessary partner for Europe: a view shared by over 30 per cent of respondents in Germany, France, and Spain, and by half of those in Italy.

2023: Which best reflects your view on what Russia is to your country? In per cent

■ An ally – that shares our interests and values
 ■ A necessary partner – with which we must strategically cooperate
 ■ A rival – with which we need to compete
 ■ An adversary – with which we are in conflict
 ■ Don't know



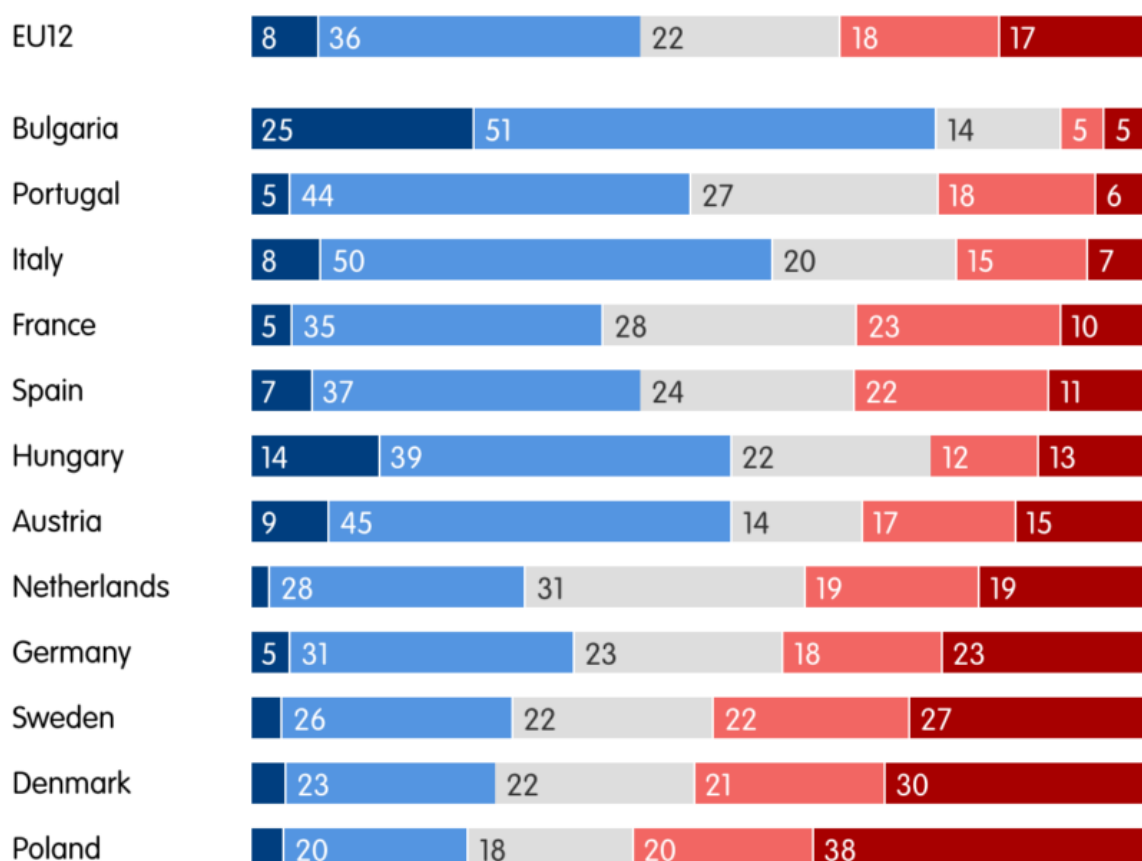
Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DK, FR, DE, GB, IT, PL, PT, RO, ES), Datapraxis and Norstat (EE), January 2023.

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2021: Which best reflects your view on what Russia is to Europe?

In per cent

■ An ally – that shares our interests and values
 ■ A necessary partner – with which we must strategically cooperate
 ■ A rival – with which we need to compete
 ■ An adversary - with which we are in conflict
 ■ Don't know



Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DE, FR), Dynata (DK, ES, HU, PL, PT, SE, IT, AT), AnalitiQs (NL), and Alpha (BG), April 2021
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Drivers of unity

Why has public opinion changed in this way? And, more importantly, how durable is this unity likely to be?

There is probably no single explanation for these dynamics. But our data suggest that three

main, and mutually reinforcing, factors have led to this change: Ukraine's success on the battlefield, the way the war has united both sides of the political spectrum, and the role of the US.

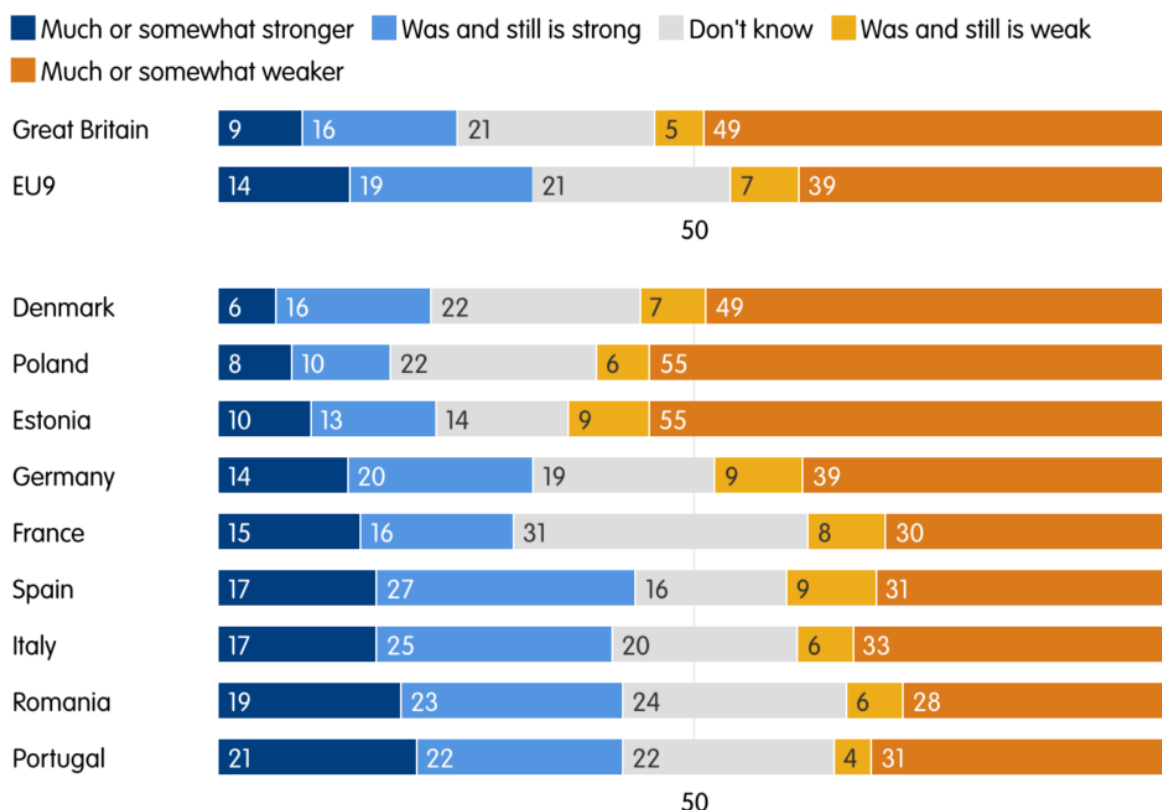
Ukrainian momentum

In May 2022, a large majority of respondents to our poll was united in condemning Russia for its aggression and wanting to support Ukraine. In every country polled back then, over 50 per cent (ranging from 56 per cent in Italy to 90 per cent in Finland) considered Russia mainly responsible for the outbreak of the war – rather than Ukraine, the EU, or the US. Similarly, in each of the ten countries polled, a majority was in favour of providing more economic assistance to Ukraine – ranging from 51 per cent in Italy to 76 per cent in Sweden. Almost everywhere (except for Italy and Romania), a majority supported sending additional arms and military equipment to Ukraine too.

In the meantime, the Ukrainian army has succeeded in regaining over 50 per cent of the territories occupied by Russia since 24 February. Its successes in the summer and autumn have meant a Ukrainian victory now looks more realistic. The findings of another recent poll indicate that a majority of Europeans now believe that Ukraine will win the war. And, although our survey this year did not include questions about Putin's war objectives or Kyiv's chances of regaining occupied territories, its results nonetheless hint that Europeans' perceptions about the conduct of the war have shifted.

Firstly, people report a change in their perception about how powerful Russia and the EU are. A plurality of Europeans think that Russia is weaker now than they say they thought it was before the war. Across the nine EU countries polled, an average of 46 per cent see Russia as equally weak or weaker than before, while 33 per cent consider it strong or stronger. The responses do not present a uniform picture. For people in Great Britain, Denmark, Poland, Estonia, and Germany, it is clear that the war has demonstrated Russia's weakness. Elsewhere, respondents have a more balanced view. This perceived weakening of Russia may make more people believe that Ukrainians have a real chance of winning the war.

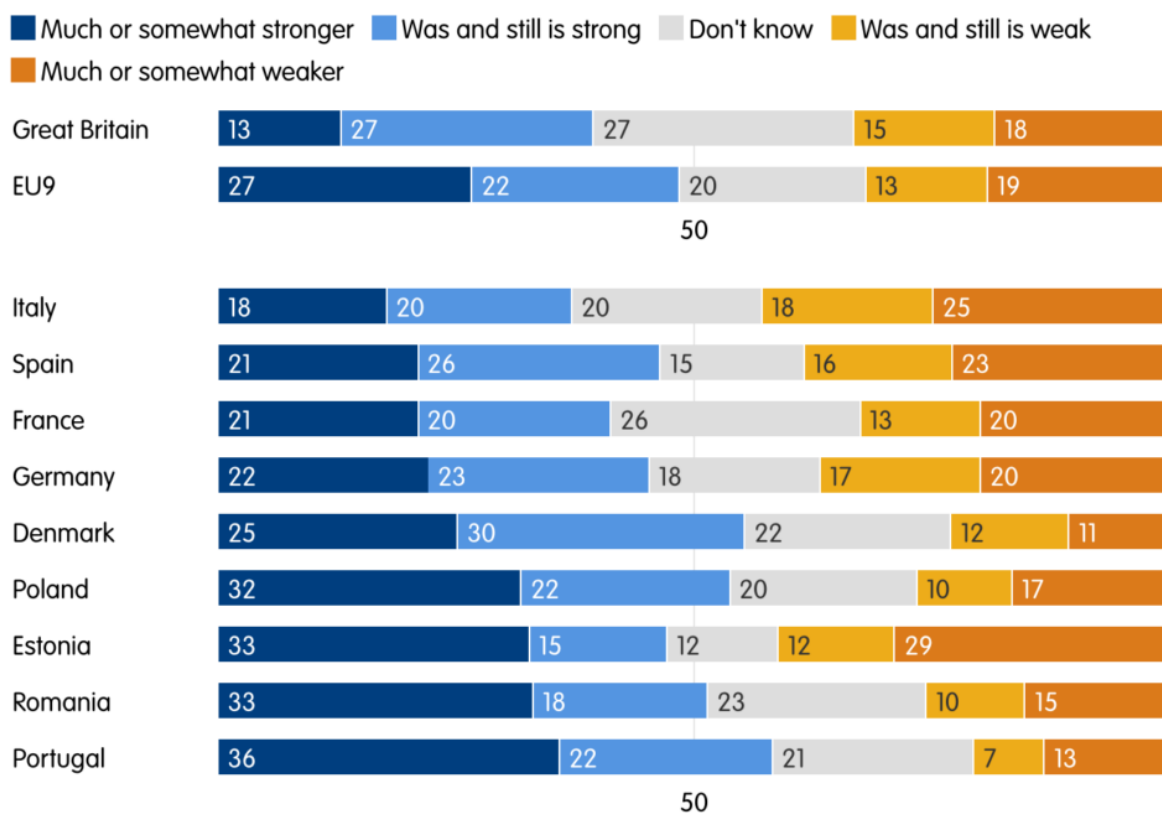
Does the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine make you think Russia is stronger or weaker than you had previously thought? In per cent



Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DK, FR, DE, GB, IT, PL, PT, RO, ES), Datapraxis and Norstat (EE), January 2023
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Europeans now also share the broad perception that the EU is either as strong as they saw it before – or even stronger than they previously thought. A year after the beginning of the war, the number of people who see the EU as stronger than they perceived it before the war is higher than the number of people who see it as weaker. Across the nine EU countries polled, an average of 49 per cent consider the EU to be stronger, or at least equally as strong, compared to how they say they perceived it before the war. Meanwhile, 32 per cent believe it is weaker, or at least equally weak, compared to before. In almost all the European countries polled – with the sole exception of Italy – the prevailing opinion is that the EU is strong or stronger rather than weak or weaker.

Does the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine make you think the EU is stronger or weaker than you had previously thought? In per cent



Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DK, FR, DE, GB, IT, PL, PT, RO, ES), Datapraxis and Norstat (EE), January 2023
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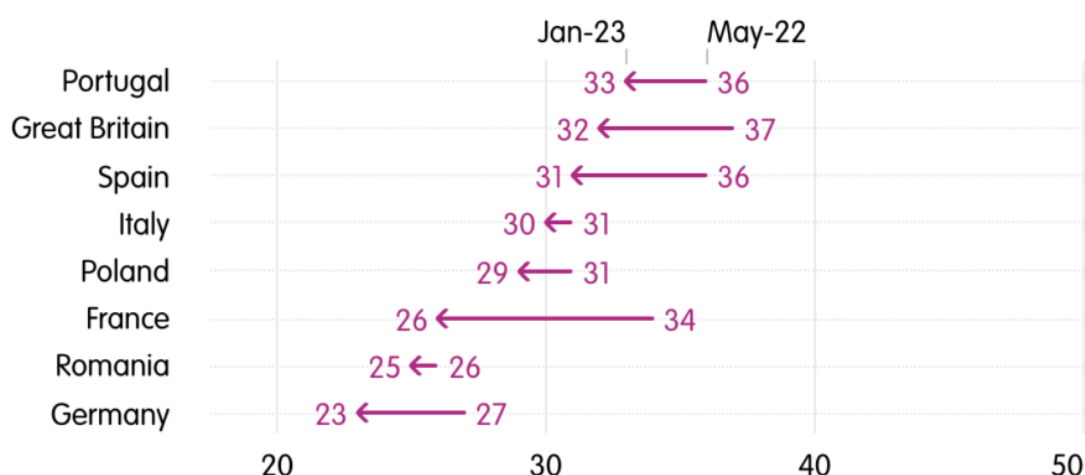
More importantly, these perceptions about the EU's strength correlate with support for Ukraine to regain all of its territory. Across the nine EU countries polled, a majority (54 per cent on average) of those who consider the EU stronger want Ukraine to regain all its territory, while only 25 per cent want the war to stop as soon as possible. Meanwhile, those who see the EU as weaker are more divided on this point, with a preference for the war to stop quickly (38 per cent) rather than for Ukraine to stand up to Russia (32 per cent).

These changing perceptions could also be linked to the fact that some of the catastrophic scenarios people feared at the beginning of the war have not materialised – especially in terms of nuclear escalation. The latest poll demonstrates that, compared with a year ago, the number of Europeans who fear nuclear war has decreased, most markedly in France. Similarly, in Romania, the perception that Russian military action against the country is the single biggest threat has decreased from 21 to 16 per cent.

Thinking about the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which of the following, if any, are you most concerned about?

In per cent

■ Threat of the use of nuclear weapons by Russia



Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022. Datapraxis and YouGov (DK, FR, DE, GB, IT, PL, PT, RO, ES), Datapraxis and Norstat (EE), January 2023
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While the threat of the use of nuclear weapons was considered the single largest threat in all eight countries included in both the 2022 and 2023 polls, the picture is different today – with the cost of living now seen as the biggest threat in the EU’s three largest economies of Germany, France, and Italy (even if the nuclear threat remains the main concern elsewhere). This slight shift might be explained not just by growing economic anxiety – but also by declining concern about a nuclear attack.

Fusing nationalists with cosmopolitans

Another factor in the current unity is the way that Russia’s war in Ukraine has united different strands of European public opinion. This was also not a given at the beginning of the war. Putin’s war not only challenges European security and the European economy, it also challenges European culture. This has caused a radical rethink on both the left and the right sides of the political spectrum.

The West’s peaceful victory in the cold war led both European elites and publics to take peace

for granted. Europeans increasingly looked at security through the eyes of insurance companies rather than military planners. As the former US secretary of defence, Robert Gates, warned in a February 2011 speech at the National Defense University, the “demilitarization of Europe — where large swaths of the general public and political class are averse to military force and the risks that go with it — has gone from a blessing in the 20th century to an impediment to achieving real security and lasting peace in the 21st.” Sacrifice was no longer part of the European social contract.

In this context, it was not just Putin’s imperial aggression but also Ukraine’s nationalist mobilisation that challenged the way liberal Europeans viewed the world. While the fear of a Russian attack forced them to rethink the value of hard power, their admiration for Ukrainian resilience forced them to reassess the value of a post-heroic society.

And while liberal, pro-Europeans questioned their views on the role of nationalism, the nationalist right was forced to once again adjust its views on the role of the EU. This process had already begun after the covid-19 pandemic. Following the global financial crisis and the refugee crisis, which catapulted far-right parties to the centre of political debates in the last decade, the failure of Brexit and the rise of covid-19 saw Euroscepticism start to fade as mainstream parties benefitted from the public’s desire for protection from chaos. ECFR’s polling showed that during these events, many voters on the right realised that sovereignty could only be reclaimed through combined action, and many previously Eurosceptic parties abandoned their pledges to leave the EU or the euro.

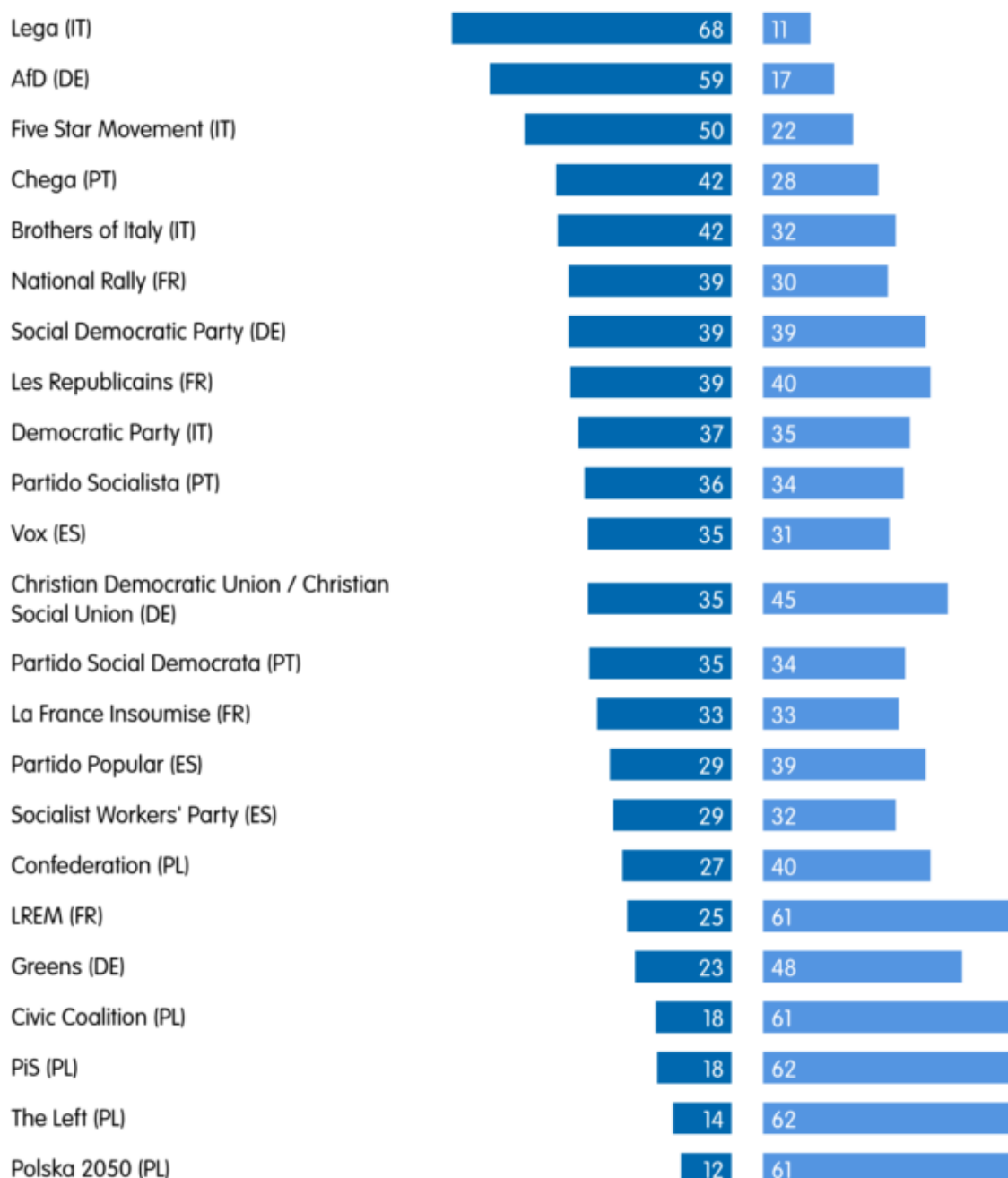
The response to Russia’s invasion in Ukraine can be viewed as both an embrace of sovereignty by the liberals and a further mainstreaming of some of the parties on the nationalistic right. The result is a blurring of the left-right divide in Europe on geopolitical matters – and a move towards a fusion of nationalism and cosmopolitanism. This has been particularly evident in the decision to offer Ukraine EU candidate status – whereby a post-national organisation focused on law rather than war has rallied behind military support for a nationalist cause.

The results from our 2023 opinion poll show how liberals and nationalists within as well as between countries have moved closer in their views on Ukraine. For example, in their strong support for supporting Ukraine in regaining all of its territory, voters of Emmanuel Macron’s liberal La République en Marche (LREM) party are united with those of Poland’s nationalist Law and Justice party (PiS). Those of LREM (the most hawkish of the French parties) prefer this option to that of stopping the war as soon as possible by a proportion of 61 to 25 per cent; and those of PiS (which is united with all the other major Polish parties on this point) by 62 to 18 per cent. People who voted for Germany’s Green party (the most hawkish of Germany’s main parties) hold a similar preference, with the corresponding proportion of 48 to 23 per cent.

Which of the following best reflects your view?

Selected parties, by voter intention. In per cent

■ The conflict between Russia and Ukraine needs to stop as soon as possible, even if it means Ukraine giving control of areas to Russia ■ Ukraine needs to regain all its territory, even if it means a longer war or more Ukrainians being killed and displaced



Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (FR, DE, IT, PL, ES, PT), January 2023.
ECFR - ecf.eu

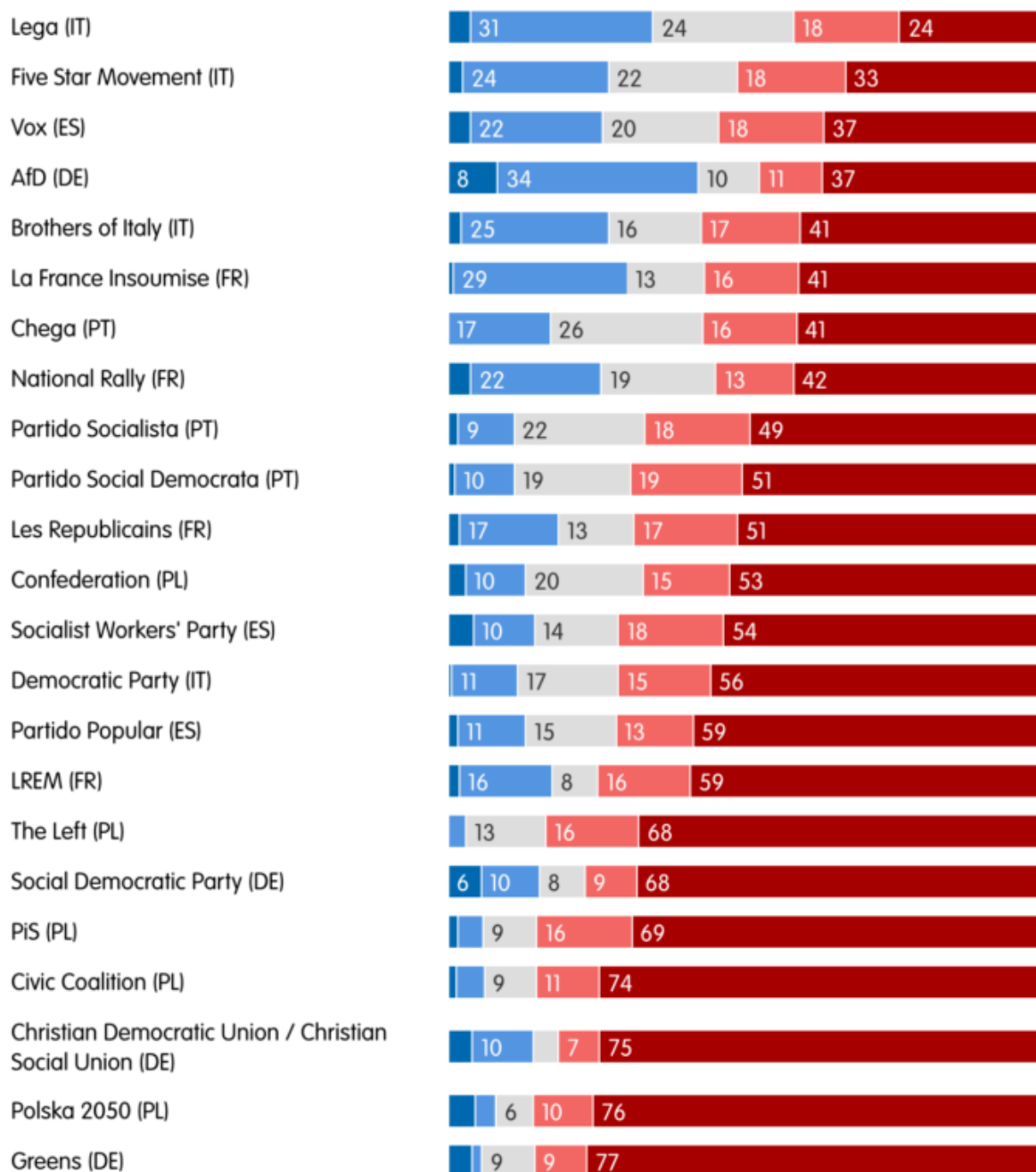
The electorates of European Eurosceptic or far-right parties are more varied in their opinions than would be expected. Unlike the parties above, voters of the nationalist Brothers of Italy party have a preference for stopping the war as soon as possible over the long war scenario, by a proportion of 42 to 32 per cent. But compared to their other radical national rivals, they are clearly less dovish than voters of Lega (who opted for this option by a proportion of 68 to 11 per cent) or the Five Star Movement (who preferred it by a proportion of 50 to 22 per cent). Voters of the Brothers of Italy party had a similar preference for stopping the war to that of voters of Marine Le Pen's National Rally party in France (by 39 to 30 per cent, which is less radical than one could assume given the party's previously Russia-friendly stance and Le Pen's close ties to Putin); and to those of Vox in Spain (35 to 31 per cent) or Chega in Portugal (42 to 28 per cent).

This makes Germany's Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Italy's Lega and Five Star Movement European outliers – rather than the norm among Europe's radicals. AfD voters not only have a strong preference for stopping the war as soon as possible (by 59 to 17 per cent) but are also almost equally divided on whether Russia is an ally or a partner (42 per cent), or a rival or adversary (48 per cent). Nonetheless, the prevailing view among AfD voters is still that Russia is an adversary (37 per cent). These results are in line with those of the voters of most other far-right parties, who also see Russia mostly as an adversary – a response given by 42 per cent of National Rally voters, 41 per cent of Brothers of Italy voters, 53 per cent of Poland's Confederation voters, and 41 per cent of Chega voters. It seems that Putin has managed to antagonise the electorates of many of Europe's most pro-Russian parties.

Which best reflects your view on who Russia is to your country?

Selected parties, by voter intention. In per cent

■ An ally – that shares our interests and values
 ■ A necessary partner – with whom we must strategically cooperate
 ■ A rival – with whom we need to compete
 ■ An adversary – with whom we are in conflict
 ■ Don't know



Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (FR, DE, IT, PL, ES, PT), January 2023.
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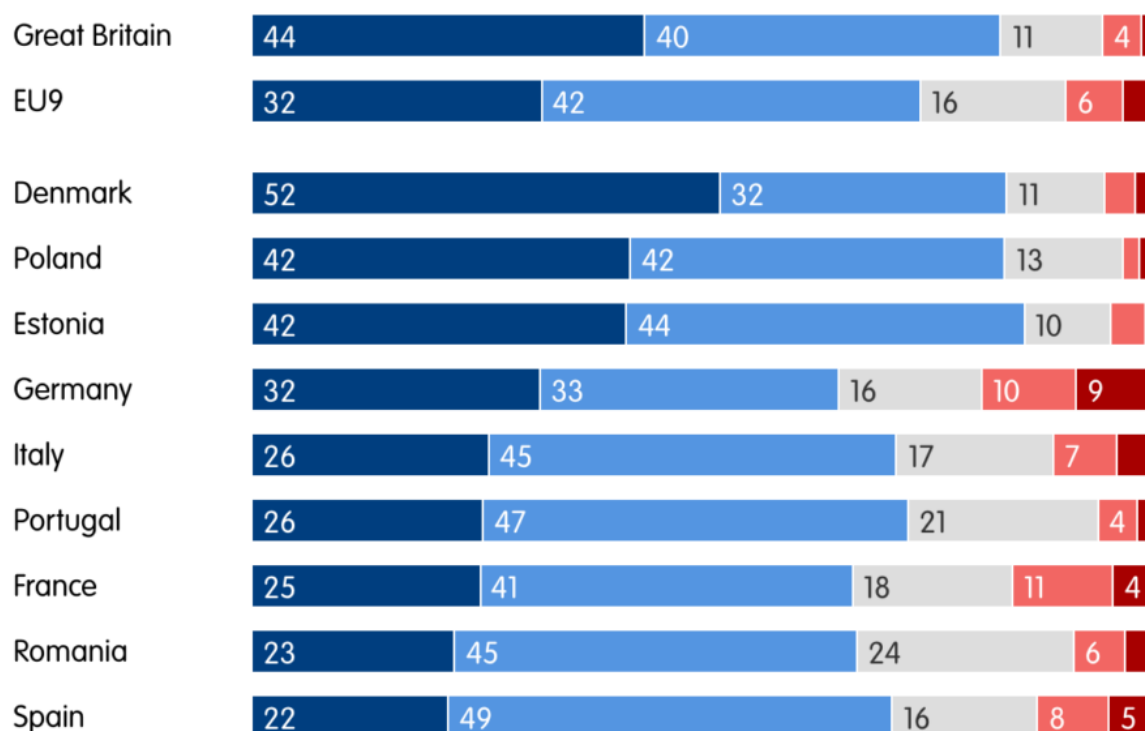
The return of the West

Finally, the role of the US throughout the war has been an important factor in bringing about this unity. Much has been written about the overwhelming importance of American support for Ukraine's military effort. But President Biden's pivot to Europe has also had a significant effect on public opinion across the continent. During the Iraq war of 2003, Washington split Europeans into new and old parts. By contrast, on Ukraine, the Biden administration has helped to foster a new unity between the traditional euro-Atlanticists and the European sovereigntists.

In a previous ECFR survey conducted in April 2021, the majority of Europeans saw the US as Europe's "necessary partner", rather than an "ally". While this year we asked about people's perception of what the US was to their countries, not to Europe, the results can still be interpreted as showing one slight but meaningful difference. Across the eight countries included in both the 2021 and 2023 polls, most people still view the US as a "necessary partner" – but in Denmark and Great Britain, the prevailing view now is that the US is an "ally", and in Germany and Poland opinions are fairly evenly split between these two options. The difference is most notable in Germany and Denmark. Back in 2021, Europeans were less likely to consider Americans allies, which was not the largest response in any country polled.

2023: Which best reflects your view on what the United States is to your country? In per cent

■ An ally – that shares our interests and values
 ■ A necessary partner – with which we must strategically cooperate
 ■ A rival – with which we need to compete
 ■ An adversary – with which we are in conflict
 ■ Don't know

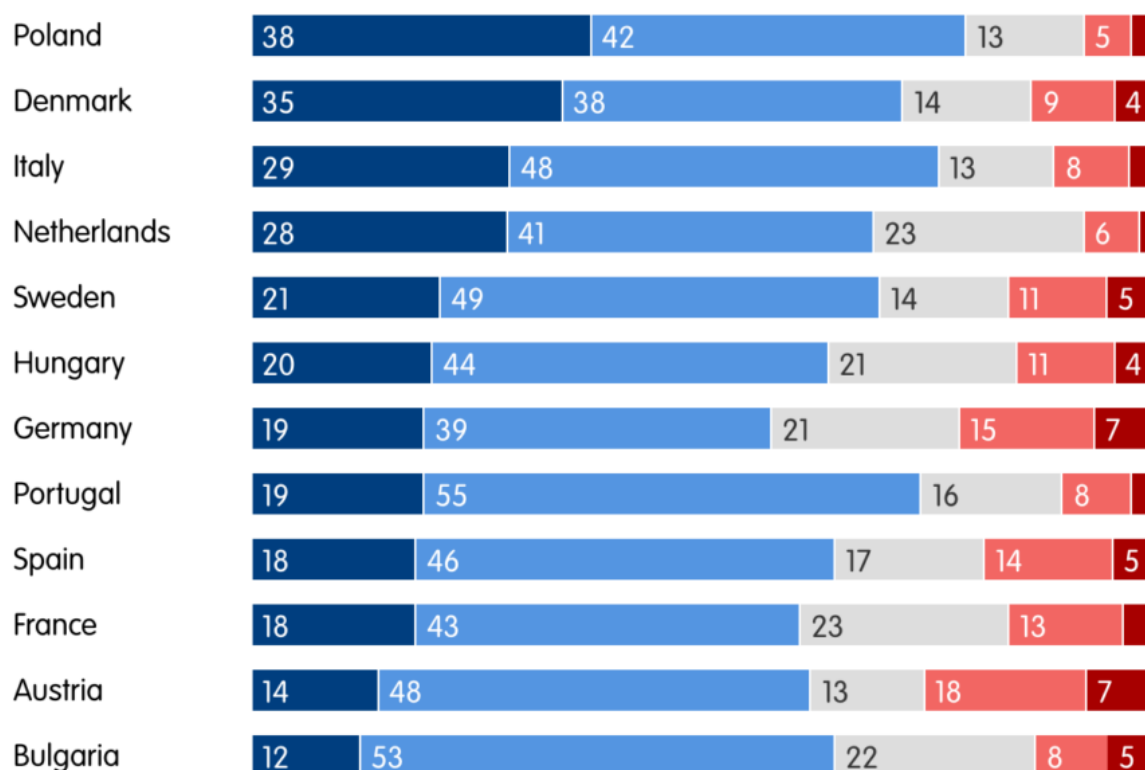


Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DK, FR, DE, GB, IT, PL, PT, RO, ES), Datapraxis and Norstat (EE), January 2023

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2021: Which best reflects your view on what the United States is to Europe? In per cent

■ An ally – that shares our interests and values
 ■ A necessary partner – with which we must strategically cooperate
 ■ A rival – with which we need to compete
 ■ An adversary – with which we are in conflict
 ■ Don't know



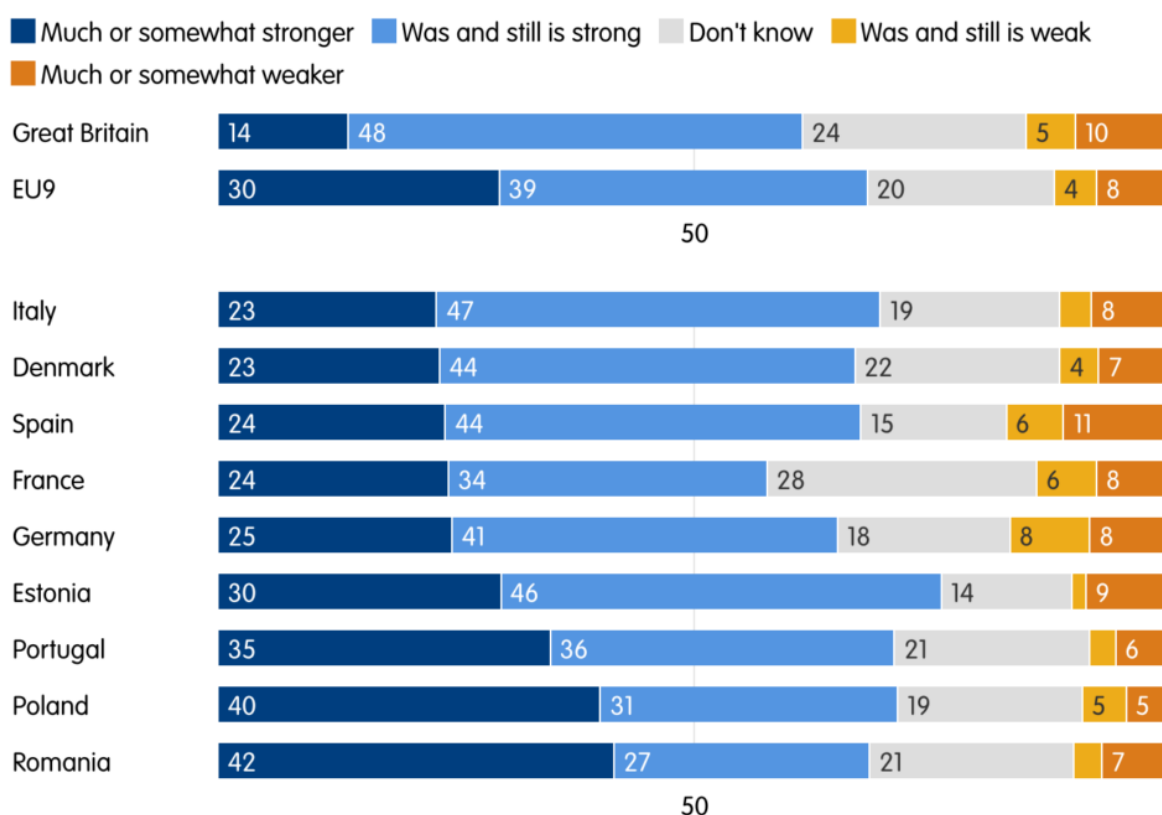
Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DE, FR), Dynata (DK, ES, HU, PL, PT, SE, IT, AT), Analitiqs (NL), and Alpha (BG), April 2021
ECFR · ecfr.eu

What is perhaps even more striking is the revival of the idea of American strength in Europe. The results of the 2021 poll revealed a crisis of American power, with many Europeans fearing that the US would be eclipsed by China within a decade. But in 2023, in every European country that we polled, Europeans clearly see the US as stronger or at least as strong as they previously thought. This ranges from 58 per cent in France to 76 per cent in Estonia. The war in Ukraine has reminded Europeans of American military power, which has seemingly reassured them.

What is more, the perception of a stronger US goes hand in hand with the perception of a

stronger EU. Across the nine EU countries polled, 63 per cent of those who see the EU as stronger consider the US stronger too – while that view is shared by just 22 per cent of those who see the EU as weaker than they say they previously thought. Forty-five per cent of respondents across the nine EU countries polled see both the EU and the US as either stronger than they previously thought or at least as strong as before; and just 9 per cent consider both of them weak or weaker. These results suggest that many Europeans feel part of a renewed, strong West, led by the US.

Does the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine make you think the US is stronger or weaker than you had previously thought? In per cent



Source: Datapraxis and YouGov (DK, FR, DE, GB, IT, PL, PT, RO, ES), Datapraxis and Norstat (EE), January 2023
ECFR · ecf.eu

This is also confirmed by another surprising finding. Contrary to the hopes of some European leaders, such as Emmanuel Macron, Europeans do not necessarily expect Europe to become one of the centres of power in a multipolar world. When asked about the shape of the global order in a decade from now, a plurality of respondents across the nine EU countries expect a bipolar world, with rival camps led by the US and China, rather than a multipolar one.

In almost every country – except for Estonia – the prevailing substantive response (ranging

from 24 per cent in Romania to 32 per cent in Spain and Italy; and 28 per cent on average across the nine EU countries polled) is that the world will be divided into two blocs. The second most frequent substantive reply tends to be a multipolar world (but with only 19 per cent on average in the nine EU countries polled). There is also a large group of people who do not know the answer to this question (25 per cent on average across the nine EU countries polled, and the leading answer in Great Britain, Denmark, France, Poland, and Romania), which may point to a considerable level of confusion, uncertainty, or simply lack of knowledge on this issue among the European public.

In ten years from now, which of the following do you think is more likely?

In per cent

	EU9	GB	DK	EE	FR	DE	IT	PL	PT	RO	ES
A division of global power between two rival blocs, each led by the United States and China	28	29	30	25	28	30	32	26	27	24	32
A more even distribution of global power among multiple countries	19	16	17	30	17	17	9	17	24	19	18
Global dominance by the United States	7	4	6	4	4	6	10	9	4	9	5
Global dominance by China	9	11	9	5	7	10	15	9	8	8	9
Global dominance by another country (not the United States or China)	4	2	3	2	3	4	6	3	3	5	4
Don't know	25	30	31	20	33	22	23	29	23	25	22
None of these	8	9	4	13	8	10	4	7	9	10	9

Source: Datapraxix and YouGov (DK, FR, DE, GB, IT, PL, PT, RO, ES), Datapraxix and Norstat (EE), January 2023
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The ambition of the EU as an autonomous global player seems to have been at least temporarily retired as a result of the war. Confronted with the prospect of a generation-long break in relations with Russia, one might expect that Europeans would be more eager than ever before to focus on their relations with the rest of the world. But instead, Europeans are looking inward and relying even more than before on the US.

Conclusion: A fragile unity

One year on from the beginning of Russia's war in Ukraine, European unity has deepened and grown, surprising not just Moscow and Washington, but also Europeans themselves.

European leaders may feel encouraged and reassured by these results, but they should be

careful in their optimism. Each of the three forces we describe is contingent – and could change over the next year – with a great impact on European unity.

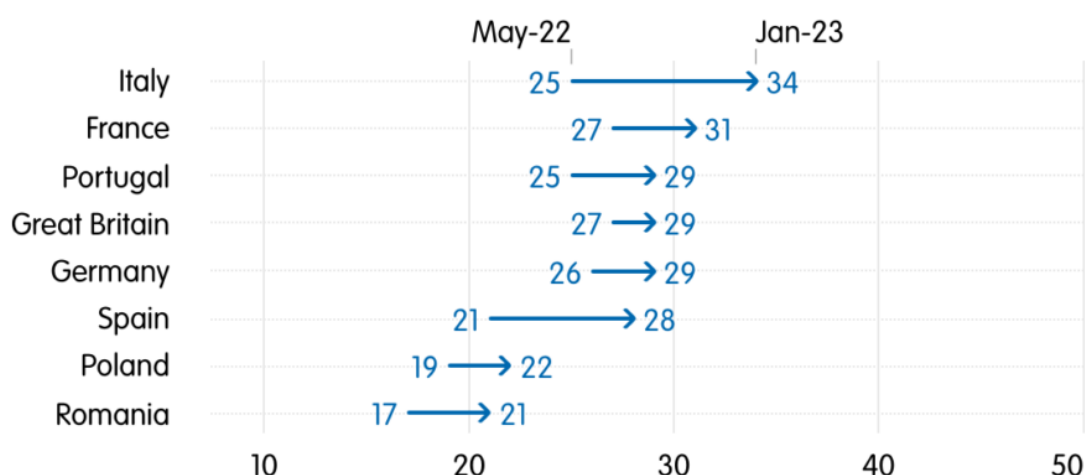
If the possibility of a Ukrainian victory has contributed to Europeans' support for Ukraine regaining all its territory, it is quite possible that the shift is soft rather than durable. Military setbacks could erode support for Ukraine and lead to a rise in the preference for the war to end as soon as possible.

The convergence of liberals and nationalists may also be fragile. As shown, economic fears are high on European publics' agenda – and their importance has increased everywhere since May 2022. If inflation and costs of living remain high, public support for Ukraine may therefore wane. Faced with problems at home, it is likely that liberals and nationalists would once more pull in different directions. Other issues linked to the war also have the potential to blow up the fragile union between left and right. For example, if the refugee issue returns to the centre of European politics, it could empower extremists, polarise societies, and put centrist parties on the back foot, as it did in 2015. The decline in support for refugees after the huge compassion shown in the early years of the Syrian war gives reason to fear that migration could be a critical issue in upcoming European elections, which would once again divide the left from the right and the liberals from the nationalists.

Thinking about the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which of the following, if any, are you most concerned about?

In per cent

■ Cost of living and higher energy prices



Source: Datapraxis and YouGov, May 2022. Datapraxis and YouGov (DK, FR, DE, GB, IT, PL, PT, RO, ES), Datapraxis and Norstat (EE), January 2023
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But maybe the biggest danger to this unity is a change in Washington. Biden has been almost as important to building European unity from a positive direction as Putin has been from a negative one. If Donald Trump – or another America First Republican – returns to the White House in 2024, US support for Ukraine and unity with Europe will look much less certain. Any change in American politics would leave European unity particularly vulnerable.

Rather than taking the current remarkable unity for granted, European leaders should use the space it creates to strengthen their own resilience in light of these factors. They should do what they can to equip Ukraine and put it in a positive place for the eventual negotiations which will be needed to end the war. They should put in place policies to mitigate rises in the costs of living and to share the burden of managing refugees. And above all they should make the most of the next 18 months to become immune to political change across the Atlantic, by developing European capabilities and common strategies for different scenarios. If Europeans manage to do these things, they may find that their public opinion really does surprise the man in the Kremlin.

Methodology

This report is based on a public opinion poll of adult populations (aged 18 and over) conducted in early January 2023 in ten European countries (Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, and Spain). The total number of respondents was 14,439.

The polls were carried out for ECFR as an online survey through Datapraxis and YouGov in Denmark (1,064 respondents; 3-11 January), France (2,051; 3-12 January), Germany (2,017; 4-11 January), Great Britain (2,200; 4-10 January), Italy (1,599; 4-12 January), Poland (1,413; 3-20 January), Portugal (1,057; 4-12 January), Romania (1,003; 4-11 January), and Spain (1,013; 4-11 January); and through Datapraxis and Norstat in Estonia (1,022; 18-24 January). In all these countries the sample was nationally representative of basic demographics and past votes. In the United Kingdom, the poll did not cover Northern Ireland, which is why the paper refers to Great Britain.

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