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The European Union and the war in Ukraine: the liberal power and its limits

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The European Union has been deeply affected by the war in Ukraine. There was talk of a "paradigm shift" in France, of a "*Zeitenwende*" ("change of era") in Germany, of an "end to naivety". Across Europe, a surge of sympathy and solidarity for Ukraine and its suffering has gripped public opinion, right down to the blue and yellow colours of the EU and Ukrainian flags being ostensibly displayed by Ursula von der Leyen. The European Union has given massive economic aid to Ukraine (€20 billion already paid out, €20 billion planned for 2023) and has taken in 4 million Ukrainian refugees. At the June European Council, it accepted Ukraine's membership application, as well as that of Moldova, and a prospect of accession for Georgia. By adopting sanctions against Russia that were unprecedented since those taken against Serbia at the beginning of the wars in the former Yugoslavia, it has also demonstrated its capacity for "hard power". In the wake of its common defence policy, it delivered arms to Ukraine for the first time through its €3 billion "peace facility". By almost completely depriving itself of Russian fossil fuels, it is accelerating its energy transition.

This shows the enormous change that the war in Ukraine represents for the European project, which is undergoing a new existential crisis after the repeated shocks of the last few years (eurozone crisis, migration crisis, Brexit, Covid-19 pandemic), which again seems to confirm Jean Monnet's prophecy that Europe would be built through crises and would be the sum of the solutions brought to these challenges. By defending its values against Russia, the European Union is asserting itself as a "liberal power". But it remains no less fragile beyond its response.

POWER THROUGH VALUES

Like the United States, the European Union defends both interests and values, as provided for in the Maastricht Treaty (Articles 3-5 and 21-2 TEU). It is thus a "liberal power" or a "democratic empire", as Philippe Moreau-Defarges has called it[1]. This was the policy that led it to enlarge to the former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, to develop a "European Neighbourhood Policy" towards its eastern European and southern Mediterranean neighbours (2002), and then an "Eastern Partnership" aimed specifically at its eastern neighbours (2009), and to gradually distance itself from Vladimir Putin's Russia.

Whereas the brief Russian-Georgian war in the summer of 2008 was halted by Nicolas Sarkozy, then holding the French presidency of the Union, without preventing the continuation of EU-Russia cooperation, the Ukrainian crisis of 2013-2014, triggered by the issue of the Association Agreement negotiated between the European Union and Ukraine, was a turning point. It led to a change of attitude, resulting in a first break between Moscow and Brussels in the form of a suspension of meetings and ongoing negotiations, in addition to already severe EU sanctions (including an arms embargo, the restriction of Russian banks' access to European financial markets and a limitation of technological investments in the Russian energy sector). Despite attempts at a 'reset' by President Emmanuel Macron's overtures in 2019, and then High Representative Josep Borrell's failed trip to Moscow in 2021, the relationship did not subsequently normalise due to the lack of progress on the reintegration of the

[1] L'Union européenne, Empire démocratique ? *IFRI, 2002*

Donbass into Ukraine. The Russian aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 led to the adoption of much heavier sanctions: long lists of travel bans and asset freezes (even targeting the Russian President and his Foreign Minister), severe restrictions on financial transactions with major Russian banks, a halt to air travel, an embargo on exports of technology and luxury goods, a halt to purchases of Russian coal and oil, and the suspension of the visa facilitation agreement. The interruption of the Nord Stream gas pipelines completed the process and reduced EU-Russia economic relations to a trickle.

The European Union has indeed become a "liberal power" that defends its values by using the tools of "hard power" (sanctions), even bordering on co-belligerence through the delivery of arms to Ukraine. Of course, it does so within a Western framework where sanctions are largely coordinated with the United States and where military strategy is mainly carried out through NATO (in particular the military reassurance measures on the Alliance's eastern flank). But it is doing so with a degree of unanimity that has surprised observers and perhaps the Russian President himself, and with strong public support[2]. There is no better illustration of this exemplary resolve than the U-turn on the part of the German Social Democrats and Greens in government, who have turned their backs on both the old principles of Ostpolitik (the search for "Détente" in the East, the idea of "change through trade", *Wandel durch Handel*) and the pacifism of the German Left. Even Viktor Orban's Hungary, while contesting the sanctions and negotiating exemptions on the cessation of Russian oil purchases, has not dared to block the decisions that have been taken unanimously. Parties more conciliatory towards Russia, on the far left or the far right, have had no qualms about condemning Russian actions, as illustrated during the French presidential campaign. While President Emmanuel Macron has never wanted to interrupt dialogue with the Russian President and has continued to promote a diplomacy of de-escalation, he has also very clearly demonstrated his support for Ukraine, as shown by the joint visit of four national leaders of the Union (Emmanuel Macron, Olaf Scholz, Mario Draghi, Klaus Iohannis) to Kyiv in June, at the end of the French presidency of the Council of the Union.

And so, the whole of Europe stands united against the Russian aggressor, whereas the relationship with Russia was undoubtedly one of the foreign policy issues that divided Europeans the most, between countries that favoured maximum resolve (Poland, Sweden, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), countries that favoured a more realistic approach (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Finland), and outspoken supporters of Putin (Hungary).

GEOPOLITICAL EUROPE, MILITARY POWER AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Europe has not only emerged from its naivety in the face of the Russian regime's policies, it has also matured in its geopolitical awareness. The war in Ukraine has hit a trajectory that was already favourable to the European Union's geopolitical consolidation. Since 2013, European defence had been revived, at least in terms of capabilities, with the creation of joint funding for military research projects and the joint development of defence capabilities (in particular the European Defence Fund with €8 billion for the period 2021-2027). Since 2016, in the wake of Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, the Europeans have been stressing that they must "*take greater responsibility for their security*". The concept of strategic autonomy, dear to the French, was written into High Representative Federica Mogherini's "*global strategy*" (2016), with the European Council stating that Europeans should be able to "*act autonomously when and where necessary, and with partners wherever possible*". In 2017, Emmanuel Macron delivered his Sorbonne speech proposing to strengthen European sovereignty in areas such as defence, foreign policy, borders, sustainable development, digital, economy. In 2019, the European Commission found the courage to call China a "*systemic rival*" and the new Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, spoke of a "geopolitical" Commission. In 2020, thanks to the Covid-19 pandemic, strategic autonomy was extended from a politico-military concept (an autonomous capacity for action) to an economic one (reduction of

[2] According to the European Commission's latest Eurobarometer survey (No. 97, Summer 2022), 57% of European citizens are satisfied or very satisfied with the European response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, compared to 37% who are not or not at all satisfied. Support for specific measures is even stronger, with, for example, 68% of respondents supporting the financing of arms supplies to Ukraine, compared to 26% who do not. The only countries where support is not in the majority (on this last point, and also on the ban on Russian media in the EU) are Greece, Cyprus and Bulgaria, countries with an Orthodox culture that are less hostile to Russia.

dependencies, diversification of supplies, building up of strategic stocks, recycling).

The war in Ukraine has led to new developments on several levels

From the geopolitical point of view, it is the "*all against Russia*" scenario that has become established within Europe's institutional structures. Russia was excluded from the Council of Europe, which it indeed preferred to quit before it was effectively excluded. The Council of Europe which embodies the widest possible geographical expression of "Europe" has now been reduced to 46 members, without Russia, Belarus – which had never really been accepted due to value-related grounds - and without Kosovo, which has not yet been acknowledged by all European states. The European Union, which is already scheduled to expand from 27 to 33 member states (six countries from the Western Balkans), has opened up the prospect of membership to Ukraine, Moldova and, to a lesser extent, Georgia. To bridge the gap between the two spaces, President Emmanuel Macron proposed the creation of a "*European Political Community*", the inaugural summit of which was held in Prague in October 2022 with 44 participating states (Kosovo was invited, but not the "micro-states" Andorra, Monaco and San Marino). The European Political Community is both an antechamber to membership (for those states that have a vocation to join the European Union) and a framework embodying political solidarity based on common values, including some non-member states such as the United Kingdom, and distant states such as Armenia and Azerbaijan. In this framework, which is very similar to the Council of Europe, it is in fact the European Union that is the backbone with its common policies supported by considerable resources. Quite significantly, the European Union has sent a CSDP observation mission to Armenia's border with Azerbaijan, which is a new step in the conflicts of the Caucasus.

In military terms, the European Union is obviously a second-tier player compared to NATO and the states, but it is far from being irrelevant. The European Peace Facility, created in 2004 for Africa and provided in the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework with a new possibility to deliver lethal weapons, has been used extensively in favour of Ukraine, which was not planned at the outset: so far, €3 billion have been mobilised to finance arms deliveries to Ukraine by the member states. The European Union also launched a training mission for 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers in October 2022.

This action by the Union is part of the new "strategic compass" adopted in March 2022, under the French Presidency of the Council, and in the midst of the war in Ukraine, to provide a strategic framework for the Union's action in the field of security and defence. Through four programmatic actions ("Act", "Secure", "Invest", "Cooperate"), the European Union intends to play a complementary role to NATO, which remains responsible, according to the terms of the treaties, for the collective defence of Europe. The war in Ukraine has served as a "wake-up call" for Europeans, leading them to spend more on their defence and to be better prepared to use "hard power", but it is also in line with the constant strengthening of the Common Security and Defence Policy.

European added value lies mainly in CSDP missions (the one in Armenia, and the military training mission in Ukraine), in the financing of arms deliveries and in support for the strengthening of common capabilities. In this respect, the recent agreement between industrialists to launch the European combat aircraft of the future (SCAF) is promising for European armaments cooperation, which in the past has often come up against national obstacles. Without disputing NATO's pre-eminence, the European Union is entering the new era of power competition with a much more ambitious role than the European Community did during the Cold War. Significantly, Denmark relinquished its CSDP exemption from the Maastricht Treaty in a referendum on 1 June 2022.

In economic terms, the war in Ukraine is also accelerating the European Union's progress towards "strategic autonomy". This concept, which originated in French defence doctrine, certainly refers to the Union's autonomous capacity for action in the politico-military field, particularly in terms of external operations. But it also implies military and armaments capabilities, which has led to an increased strengthening of European defence at the capability level. According to the definition that emerged during the pandemic in 2020, strategic autonomy must also apply to a much wider range of goods (including raw materials and agri-food). This means making Europe more autonomous, sometimes referred to as more 'sovereign' (the objective of digital sovereignty was recognised by the European Council in 2019), and in 2022 there was also talk of 'energy sovereignty', thus making it less dependent. To satisfy the more liberal Nordic countries, this strategic autonomy is described as 'open': it does not mean autarky and protectionism, it is part of an open commercial environment, it aims to diversify supplies as much as to relocate production or increase strategic stocks. Joint industrial projects have thus been launched or are planned to develop the production of batteries or electronic chips, to structure a European hydrogen industry, to develop innovations in health, to create a "European cloud".

Nothing has been more telling about the war in Ukraine than the consequences for the EU's energy supply. The EU found itself torn in its sanctions policy between its energy dependence on Russia (which supplied about 20% of its gas and oil consumption before the war) and its determination to sanction it based on its interests and values. At first it solved the equation by avoiding attacking Russian energy imports, so as not to clip its own wings, at the risk of indirectly financing Moscow's war, especially as the crisis inflamed the price of oil and gas. Then it was caught up in its own contradictions and decided to stop buying Russian coal, then oil, before also suffering the repercussions of the closure of the Nord Stream I gas pipeline - caused by a Russian pretext involving spare parts, then by a mysterious explosion at the bottom of the Baltic Sea. If there has been one positive consequence of the war in Ukraine, it has been to force the European Union to reduce its consumption of fossil fuels and accelerate its energy transition to a climate-neutral economy. But for the time being, the European Union cannot completely do without Russian gas, especially liquefied natural gas following the shutdown of the gas pipelines. It has partly replaced this with other sources: American LNG in particular, but also gas from Qatar, Algeria and Norway. For the future, it is banking on other energies such as nuclear power, the choice of which remains controversial in several member states, renewable energies, hydrogen, etc.

In addition to defence and energy, there are other areas where European strategic autonomy is progressing: space (with Thierry Breton's project for a new secure satellite constellation), digital (through protective European legislation - on data protection, competition, content regulation - that limits the power of GAFAMs and promotes the emergence of a European ecosystem), health (with the creation of a European agency for response to health emergencies, HERA), raw materials (through support for production, securing supplies, recycling), agri-food (which is the oldest sector targeting European autonomy, with the Common Agricultural Policy).

Overall, it can be said that the European Union has so far emerged stronger from the war in Ukraine. Its sovereignty agenda has been strengthened and it has demonstrated, once again after the multiple crises of recent years, its unity and resilience. But is it without weaknesses? In fact, it faces three major challenges.

THE "ILLIBERAL" CHALLENGE

The first element of weakness lies in the rise of the 'illiberal' trend not only in the European Union, but in the Western world and, indeed, worldwide.

One only has to compare the political landscape of 2022 with that of 20 years ago to see the trend in Europe. Far-right parties have grown in Germany (AfD) and Spain (VOX) to around 10% of the vote. In Italy, populist parties (Northern League, 5-Star Movement) rose to power in 2018-2019 and have returned to power with Fratelli d'Italia since the end of October 2022, which coincided with the 100th anniversary of Mussolini's "march on Rome". The populist wave has also spread to Scandinavian countries (the far-right supports the government in

Sweden). In France, Jean-Marie Le Pen's National Front peaked at 18% of the vote in 2002, while his daughter (who, it is true, has abandoned the father's excesses) went from 34% to 41% of the vote in the presidential election between 2017 and 2022 (second round). Viktor Orban's 'illiberal' government has been in office since 2010 in Hungary, while PiS ('Law and Justice') has governed Poland since 2015 after having already ruled it between 2005 and 2007, and Slovenia took an authoritarian turn with Janez Jansa in 2020. He has since been defeated.

These right-wing populist parties surf on economic and social difficulties, on sentiments of "identity" and on the rejection of immigration, on the rejection of a political class denounced as inefficient and corrupt. But we should also include in this far-left populism (LFI in France, *Die Linke* in Germany) which also breaks away from the classic democratic parties, fuelling the rejection of Europe and political radicalisation.

The development of populism does not only reflect protest movements which, after all, are not new (in France they have always represented around a third of the electorate, which was, moreover, the combined score of the *Rassemblement National* and *France Insoumise* in the 2019 European elections). More fundamentally, it expresses the general rise of nationalism in the world, which was thought to have been extinguished after the defeat of fascism in 1945. Where the moderate or republican right allies itself with these populist tendencies, it governs by changing politics in support of a more identity-based, nationalistic, authoritarian, security-oriented, anti-immigration direction: this is the case - obviously with variations - with Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey (in power since 2003), Benjamin Netanyahu in Israel (in power almost continuously since 2009), Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India (in power since 2014), the development of the Conservative Party under pressure from UKIP in the United Kingdom (leading to the Brexit vote in 2016), the Republican Party in the United States (with Donald Trump, president from 2016 to 2020, governing according to the 'America First' principle), Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines (2016-2022) and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (2019-2022).

To oppose Western democratic regimes to authoritarian regimes such as Vladimir Putin's Russia (in power since 2000) and Xi Jinping's China (in power since 2012), as a number of analysts of international relations schematically do, ignores the profound rise of the nationalist, identity-based, authoritarian and 'illiberal' current, including within our own democracies, and the influence that this trend exerts on the more moderate parties.

For the international system, it is a factor of profound instability, as periods of strong nationalism (i.e. Europe from the second half of the 19th century to 1914, and then in the 1930s) were periods of great tension that led to two world wars. The main counterbalance to this rise in nationalism is still the American liberal system and the power of the United States, but on the one hand it is questionable how far the latter will remain unaffected by nationalism, and on the other the relative decline of American power - especially with regard to China - risks weakening the liberal international order that the United States built after 1945.

This is not reassuring news for the European project. For the moment, the rise of populism has been contained: populist or nationalist parties only attracted a third of the vote in the 2019 European elections, and the coalition of pro-European parties still has a very comfortable majority, even if the European People's Party and the Social Democrats have lost the absolute majority they held together before 2019 in the European Parliament. But it is clear that, despite the calls to strengthen European sovereignty, despite the Union's formidable resilience in weathering crises, despite the citizens' consultations of 2018 and the conference on the future of Europe in 2021-2022, the member states' appetite to strengthen European competences remains very limited. This is not new: the European Convention of 2002-2003 reformed the institutions more than it increased the Union's powers, and the rejection of the European Constitution in 2005 raised serious concerns about the ability of pro-European leaders to lead their people.

Given the changes in the world and in public opinion, we cannot exclude new worrying shifts in the future, such as Brexit in 2016. This is all the more hazardous since the war in Ukraine is having major economic and social consequences (the return of inflation, particularly for food and energy, and the risks of recession), fuelling discontent. For all the parties that refuse to be dragged down by nationalism and populism and want to continue to bet on Europe, this represents a real political challenge.

THE CHALLENGE OF FURTHER ENLARGEMENTS

Throughout its history, European integration has been remarkably successful in reconciling enlargement and deepening. It has grown from its historic 'Carolingian' core of 6 founding states to 28 members (before Brexit), accompanying each enlargement with further progress towards integration: in particular, the major enlargement of 2004 was preceded by the creation of the European Union and the launch of the single currency.

Today, the European Union faces the prospect of a Union of 33 members (with the countries of the Western Balkans) or even 36 (with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia) and is approaching the borders of the Council of Europe after the exclusion of Russia. The United Kingdom and Turkey (the latter still a candidate in principle) are the two main links that distinguish the new "European political community" from the European Union.

Like the 2004-2007 eastern enlargement, future enlargements present three challenges. Firstly, the institutional one: while it does not seem necessary to review the definition of the qualified majority reformed by the European Convention (Lisbon Treaty) with the rule of a demographic majority (65% of the population) coupled with a numerical majority (55% of the States), the question of the size of the Commission poses a serious problem if we were to move towards a Commission of 36 members. One should probably aim for a Commission where not all Member States would be represented - which was considered in the Lisbon Treaty, but which was impossible to impose on the people of Ireland, and the small states are very reluctant to lose their representative in the College of Commissioners - or, as a last resort, provide for Commissioners without portfolio or exercising co-management over the Commission's directorates, as proposed by the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in his Prague speech. More broadly, the multiplication of the number of member states weakens the legitimacy of supranational institutions to impose choices on member states and risks making the Commission drift towards an intergovernmental organisation secretariat (one can already see the Commission's caution in many examples). The second challenge is budgetary: like the Central and Eastern European countries, the future member states are poor, they will be heavy consumers of agricultural and cohesion policy funds and will be 'net beneficiaries' of the European budget - Ukraine is the equivalent of Poland and the Balkan countries the equivalent of Romania. The third challenge concerns foreign policy: Ukraine and Georgia, for understandable reasons, are states that will remain hostile towards Russia for a long time to come and will make the construction of a security framework with Russia particularly difficult.

Of course, enlargement to include these 9 new members is not for tomorrow and will take time. One might also say that, after all, integrating a new Poland (Ukraine) and a new Bulgaria (the population of Serbia) into the Union, as well as a handful of smaller countries, is not insurmountable in an already large Union. However, there is also a fear that the European Union will lose its cohesion in the North, South and East.

In the North, we can see that rich countries with a Protestant culture, where the historical and cultural identity is communitarian rather than Roman and Latin, are already inclined to refuse supranational integration: this is the obvious case of the United Kingdom since Brexit, of Switzerland since the beginning, of Norway (which has refused membership twice), of Denmark and Sweden (which are not in the Euro). Austria, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands have formed a group of "frugal" countries that were reluctant to adopt the European recovery plan in 2020 and want to limit solidarity. By refusing to make a budgetary effort in an impoverished Europe, it is not impossible that some of these countries will be tempted by the example set by Brexit. The Dutch voted against the association agreement with Ukraine in 2016 because they were reluctant to open up the prospect of enlargement to that country.

In the South, the countries that were massively and effectively helped by the cohesion policy have lost ground since the creation of the monetary union and the enlargement to the East. Spain and Portugal have not become rich countries like Ireland. Greece has been hit hard by the structural reforms that came with the financial rescue packages: its GDP fell by a quarter after 2008. Italy is richer and more industrialised (at least in its northern part) but its public debt is considerable (over 150% of GDP). Contrary to the scenario of economic and social convergence produced by the single market, cohesion policy and monetary integration, it appears that the regions of southern Europe are likely to remain poor and in need of solidarity.

In the East, the challenge is that of a delay in economic and social development (Ukraine's GDP/capita was 20% of that of Poland before the war), but also of delays in relation to the rule of law. In these Eastern countries, which were part of the "other Europe[3]", The historical model of political, economic and social development has not been the same as that of Western Europe and it is not surprising to find shortcomings in the rule of law, organised crime and corruption. We see this in Poland, Hungary, the Balkans, Ukraine, and even in Greece (as shown by the falsified public accounts that triggered the Greek crisis). The difficulty is not only to finance the economic development of these countries before they are emptied of their vital forces (the demographic exodus being already a test with dramatic consequences[4]), but also to entrench Western values (the primacy of the individual, the separation of powers, the rule of law). This may be possible, but it will necessarily take a long time, probably several generations.

The risk is that European integration will eventually break down under the effect of internal imbalances and centrifugal forces, that instead of continuing to deepen, further enlargements will lead to a deconstruction of the European project, which some analysts have long seen as a possibility[5]. To prevent this catastrophic scenario, it will be necessary to maintain close Franco-German understanding (which remains the primary cement of the Union), to preserve the conditions for a Union that is both governable and financeable, and to skilfully manage the transitions, notably through the new "European political community" launched in Prague.

THE CHALLENGE OF POWER

The third element of concern is the weakness of European power, despite the progress noted, in terms of geopolitical vision, European defence and strategic autonomy.

The weakness stems first from the economic foundations. Despite the strength of the internal market, which proved its effectiveness in the Brexit negotiations, and which generates real European normative power[6], the long-term reality is that Europe is losing economic power. The EU's GDP, which had long been on a par with that of the US, has fallen well behind it since the eurozone crisis (2010-2012). Brexit also meant a cut of almost 15% in 2020 and the EU has now been overtaken by China. The internal market can no longer be called the largest in the world, neither in terms of population nor economic wealth. And the fragility caused by the war in Ukraine is not likely to strengthen the European economy. The European Union pays nine times more for gas than the United States and spends five times less than the United States on research and development: it is not surprising that financial investors prefer to bet on American stocks, and this makes a strong European response to the US Inflation Reduction Act, which aims to massively subsidise American industry, more than necessary.

Next, the weakness is military, and this is not new. Already in 2012, in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis, military spending in Asia exceeded that in Europe. Since 2014, European countries

[3] *Henri Mendras,* L'Europe des Européens, *Folio, 1997*

[4] *Ivan Krastev,* After Europe, *UPP, 2017*

[5] *Cf. Maxime Lefebvre, « Et si l'Europe se déconstruisait… », Annuaire français des relations internationales, 2005 ; Philippe Huberdeau,* La construction européenne est-elle irréversible ? *La Documentation Française, 2017*

[6] *Cf. Zaki Laïdi,* La norme sans la force. L'énigme de la puissance européenne, *Presses de Sciences Po, 2010 ; Anu Bradford,* The Brussels Effect. How the European Union rules the World, *Oxford University Press, 2021* decided - within the framework of NATO, not the European Union - to increase their defence effort to 2% of their GDP, and they have started to do so, but the gap with the United States and the rest of the world remains enormous. Roughly speaking, the United States spends four times as much as the Europeans combined and China has overtaken them. The European Union accounts for no more than 10% of global military spending. It should come as no surprise that the United States is spending ten times more on military support for Ukraine than its European partners. This also means that the European Union can hardly be more than a regional power in global strategic relations (in Europe, but also in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and Africa) and that it must remain realistic in its more distant commitments, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, despite the ambitions driven by France.

It follows that weakness is also diplomatic and geopolitical. In view of the figures, the European Union could still be the third world power behind the United States and China (or a Sino-Russian bloc), aim for a form of strategic autonomy, take charge of its security in its geographical environment, defend its interests and values according to its own conceptions, and be an honourable player in the world balance. But although this is the path that France would have liked to see it take, it is not, in fact, the one that it is taking.

The first reason for this is that the double shift in raw power relations (the war in Ukraine against Russia, the hardening of Sino-American relations) is automatically leading to a stronger alignment of the European Union with the United States, orchestrator of a liberal democratic camp against the new authoritarian powers. However, the Euro-American relationship is anything but equal. On the one hand, there is a single political decision-making centre which, since the Biden administration took office, has remarkably succeeded in remobilising its Western allies (even if this meant humiliating France in the AUKUS affair). On the other, 27 capitals, not to mention a few others outside the Union (such as London, Ankara, Berne, Oslo), which have to agree. On the one hand, there is a powerful and dynamic economy driven by technology, on the other, a sizeable economy weakened by war and dependence.

To put it in a positive light, Europe is fortunate to have a power on its side that allows it to defend democratic values. After its involvement in the First and Second World Wars, and finally in the Cold War, this is the fourth time that the United States has become involved in defending European freedom. It is not certain that the Europeans alone could have shown such determination against Russia, even if they did so in the past (cf. the Crimean War in the mid-19th century).

On a less positive note, this places Europe in a situation of increased political and strategic dependence. Virtually all European countries swear by the protection of the United States in NATO, including Finland and Sweden, which decided to abandon their neutrality and join the Alliance. The Europeans are in fact in a weak position, and when you are a weak ally, the only policy that works is not co-decision but followership. This is a natural and historical law of power. The consequent risk is that the Europeans will find it very difficult to influence the course of the war (the definition of war objectives, for example) as well as hypothetical negotiations on a political settlement. Robert Kagan[7] summed it up very well in the heyday of the neo-conservative George W. Bush administration: the Americans are on the side of strength (Mars), the Europeans on the side of weakness (Venus); the Americans 'do the cooking' (they conduct military operations and negotiate political agreements), the Europeans 'do the washing up' (they finance reconstruction - and now also arms deliveries - and possibly send soldiers to peacekeeping operations). The question of the Euro-American balance, which is not new (it already arose during the Cold War), remains wide open. In the minds of many European capitals, it is decided by political alignment (or a refusal to de-align). In the minds of many European companies, it is also decided by alignment behaviour as soon as there is a risk of being subject to US extraterritorial sanctions, for example.

[7] Of Paradise and Power: America and Europe in the New World Order*, Knopf, 2003*

Could things evolve in the direction of the political affirmation of a more united and autonomous European pole? This is a key issue and there are two ways to envisage it. The first option, which Germany is promoting, is to introduce majority voting in European foreign policy. This assumes that what works in trade policy, or competition policy, or monetary policy, could be extended to diplomacy, or even defence: the European Union would no longer be paralysed by unanimity negotiations, and it would be the institutions of the Union (the High Representative, the Commission, the EEAS) that would lead the policy and involve the member states.

The idea may be attractive in the abstract, on paper, but it faces many obstacles. The European Union is not a federal state, there is no "European people" as the German Constitutional Court has pointed out. The member states continue to exist on the international scene and foreign policy expresses their fundamental interests in international relations, which makes European foreign policy "common" but not "unique". This is even truer in the field of defence, where it is difficult to see the European institutions deciding to send national soldiers without the consent of the national authorities (particularly in Germany, where the role of the Bundestag in this area has been unavoidable since a decision of the Constitutional Court in 1994). For France, the transition to a unified diplomacy and defence would raise questions about maintaining its seat on the UN Security Council and its attributes as a nuclear power. It is worth noting that the Franco-German Aachen Treaty in 2019 closed the arguments over the Europeanisation of the French seat at the UN by stating that the aim of Franco-German diplomacy is to obtain an additional seat for Germany. As for the other EU member states, it is not clear that many are in favour of a complete Europeanisation of diplomacy, let alone defence: this is not the case, for example, with Poland and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, which are keen to preserve their sovereignty in the face of choices dictated from Brussels.

There remains the second option, promoted by France, which is to rely on the major European countries, and on what remains of their power, to drive and strengthen Europe. This is the option of the locomotive rather than that of the old Germanic or Polish Diet. It has already produced convincing results in the past. A good example is the leading role of the E3 (Germany, France, UK) in the Iranian nuclear negotiations since 2003. Although the E3 format has been weakened by the UK's departure from the Union, it continues to play its role in the negotiations with Iran, which were unfortunately shelved after the withdrawal of Donald Trump's US in 2015. Another example is the Franco-German action in the Ukrainian conflict of 2014, under the "Normandy" format: this action helped, at least for a while, to freeze the conflict through negotiations involving Russia and Ukraine.

For the time being and in the wake of Brexit, no format has emerged to replace the "E3". The E3 continues to exist in the Iran dossier or in the informal consultations with the United States (which date back to the Cold War) within the "Quad" format. Within the European Union, there is sometimes talk of a Franco-German-Italian motor or of the "Big 5" (with the addition of Spain and Poland), but these formats have not yet established the strength of their effectiveness and immediately arouse the mistrust of other states ("major" countries such as the Netherlands, Sweden or Romania, or many other "small" countries). It has also been said that the war in Ukraine has put the Central and Eastern European states back at the centre of the game, as if the fact that these countries are most in tune with Washington's choices means that they are best suited to being the locomotives of European power.

While waiting for the question of formats to find a hypothetical solution, it is the Franco-German relationship that remains central to any effective and legitimate European policy: where the two capitals diverge, Europe can hardly exist; where they converge, they can exert a knock-on effect that is certainly not automatic, but which is undeniably a strength. And it is a constant feature of President Emmanuel Macron's policy that he has tirelessly sought to give this force its full potential. Whether it is in the face of Russia, China, the problems of the Middle East or Africa, we must continue. And obviously, this starts with the commitment of Paris and Berlin to be actors in ending the war in Ukraine.

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This realistic assessment of Europe's place in the world may seem hopeless, or worrying, but it nevertheless shows the paths to what is possible. If Europe is not to suffer from the hardening of international relations, but rather to become an active force, and why not a power, we must continue to encourage the forces of unification in the face of the forces of fragmentation. We must continue to strengthen the European Union's economic, technological and military capacities, including through reinforced forms of mutualisation, around an agenda of sovereignty or strategic autonomy. The "illiberal" forces must be fought internally. The issue of further enlargement must be managed without haste and the format of the European political community must be used effectively. The conditions for a more autonomous and active Europe in the field of diplomacy and security must be consolidated on an enlarged Franco-German basis, if it is to have any influence in the partnership with the United States. If the year 2022 opened a new black page in European history, it is up to Europeans to turn it into an opportunity to bounce back on their formidable resilience.

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