



Europe must act, allowing Putin to win would only embolden him to undertake further aggression against the continent.

Two years since Putin launched his full-scale attack on Ukraine and ten years after the annexation of Crimea, this third year of war looks set to be the toughest yet for Ukraine. In a new policy brief, [‘Two years \(and ten years\) of war in Europe: Hard times for Ukraine’](#), researchers at the Centre for European Reform (CER) urge Europe to disprove Putin’s belief that, if he waits long enough, the US will stop supporting Ukraine, Europe will follow the US, and Ukraine will have no choice but to surrender.

There are plenty of reasons for pessimism. Though Ukraine has had surprising success at sea, there was little progress on land in 2023. American military aid is slowing, and the re-election of Donald Trump in Autumn would likely see it cut off completely. The war has affected European economies, especially Germany’s, and they have struggled to produce enough equipment and munitions. Meanwhile Russia’s economy, now on a war footing, appears more resilient than Western governments expected. There are hurdles within Ukraine too. Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s popularity has fallen slightly since the beginning of the war and if his military reshuffle doesn’t produce results, popular dissatisfaction may grow. Putin will win Russia’s election in March and Russian resistance to the war has been successfully, and brutally, repressed for the most part.

Ukraine’s situation is far from hopeless, however. In the short term, the CER team suggests that the EU should ensure Ukraine can weather the war without US support by stepping up supplies of weapons, systems and munitions. They then make three recommendations for the long-term:

1. Europe’s economy should adopt more of a war footing. By tackling its own economic weaknesses, seizing the profits earned on frozen Russian assets, and intervening more directly in the market to ensure that production of weapons and munitions is increased as rapidly as possible, Europe will be in a much better position to help Ukraine without needing to devote as high a proportion of GDP to defence as Russia has.

2. Europe should increase its strategic autonomy from China and Russia. Germany and France must end their intra-EU subsidy race and instead focus on deepening the single market through reforms such as the capital markets union. This way, Europe can harness the dynamism and potential of firms across the continent.

3. The EU should build a toolkit to protect citizens from future geopolitical economic conflict. Many of the legal instruments the EU needs in order to stand up to geopolitical rivals, such as screening foreign investment, or imposing export controls, remain national competences. This allows Russia and other powers to exploit loopholes and lean on individual member-states to fracture the EU.

To implement these recommendations, European leaders must convince their increasingly wary publics to continue to support the large efforts that will be required. They must take Macron's lead and explain what's at stake, because Russia's defeat is vital not only for Ukraine but for European security. Putin's ambition to reconstitute the Russian empire will not stop at Ukraine's border.

"President Macron is right to argue that Russia's defeat in Ukraine is vital for European security", said Ian Bond, the CER's deputy director. "But not enough of his fellow European leaders have yet woken up to that fact. That's why 2023 was a tough year for Ukraine, and 2024 seems likely to be even more challenging".

Luigi Scazzieri, one of the authors of the report said: *"Europeans need to disprove Putin's belief that he only needs to sit tight and wait for US support to Ukraine to dry up before Europe also folds, leading to Ukraine's capitulation."*

"Policy-makers who expected sanctions to achieve short or even medium-term economic results will be disappointed", said Zach Meyers, assistant director at the CER. "But their long term impacts will remain severe – and the EU can do much more to make sanctions effective."

Senior economist Sander Tordoir said: *"European policy-makers would be making a mistake if they forgot the war's key economic lessons: Europe, and in particular its vital economic engine Germany, can no longer rely to the same degree on energy and demand from abroad."*

Notes for editors:

For further information on the new research and to request an interview with one of its authors, please contact Octavia Hughes in the CER press office on pressoffice@cer.eu or +44 (0) 20 7233 1199.

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