

Russian Large-Scale Invasion of Ukraine: Concerns about the Security and Stability of the CEE Region



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The Russian invasion has caused widespread destruction and loss of life in Ukraine and raised concerns among neighboring states about the potential escalation of the aggression. The protracted war triggered by the occupation has profound implications – not exclusively for the security and stability of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region, but also for the rest of the world. Nonetheless, CEE countries in particular have been significantly affected by this situation, leading to a reassessment of regional security dynamics. In this context, it is crucial to understand the security concerns faced by these countries and the measures taken to address these challenges. It is, therefore, of key importance to analyze the impact of the occupation on the lands of Central and Eastern Europe and the steps taken to promote regional security and stability.

It is heartbreaking to see the destruction wrought over the years by the ongoing Russian aggression and occupation of Ukraine. What started with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 has turned into a bru-

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tal war, in which innocent lives have been lost and many more have been affected by the consequences of the conflict. As a citizen of Azerbaijan, a former Soviet country, I can understand the impact of Russian imperialism, and it is painful to see its consequence on Ukraine and the region. The continued hostility and occupation only serve to increase instability in the region, and it is imperative that the international community takes steps to address this situation. We must stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people and support their efforts to resolve this conflict peacefully.

RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE HAS LED TO A REASSESSMENT OF REGIONAL SECURITY DYNAMICS

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has shocked the Central and Eastern European region, raising concerns about the vulnerability of neighboring states to Russian aggression. This has forced a reassessment of regional security dynamics and raised important questions about how countries in the region can best be protected against future threats.

The war has resulted in tighter financial circumstances and heightened economic instability – specifically, in nations like Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic that are highly dependent on imports from Russia or those that have significant trading links with Ukraine. Given that Russia contributes a notable portion of the region's natural resources, the war has also prompted challenges in the security of Europe's energy supplies. The war in Ukraine also raised concerns about global food security and was categorized as an asymmetric shock, affecting some EU countries more than others¹.

¹ Europa.eu (2022) *Russia's War on Ukraine: Impact on Food Security and EU Response*. Available [online]: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/729367/EPRS_ATA\(2022\)729367_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2022/729367/EPRS_ATA(2022)729367_EN.pdf)



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At an informal meeting of heads of state and government on October 7, 2022, in Prague, European Union leaders met to discuss critical issues related to countering Russian rhetoric and addressing global food security challenges. The meeting served as a platform for constructive dialogue and cooperation, with EU leaders reaffirming their commitment to cooperate with third countries on these urgent issues².

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INVASION

The Russian invasion of Ukraine is a complex and multifaceted event rooted in geopolitical tensions. The year 2014 saw the

start of the war, shortly after Kyiv's pro-Russian president fled to Russia as a result of widespread protests. In response, first, Russia occupied Crimea, and then began a hybrid war in Donbas and supported pro-Russian rebels in eastern Ukraine in an armed revolt, sparking the Donbas War³.

Russia's annexation of Crimea, part of Ukraine, was widely condemned internationally and led to a deterioration in relations between Russia and the West. However, there is criticism that the European Union's response to Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was limited. In 2022, by contrast, the bloc threw its full economic weight against the Kremlin⁴.

Following the annexation of Crimea, armed clashes erupted in Eastern Ukraine, particularly in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Pro-Russian separatists, backed by Russia, declared their own republic, and clashed with Ukrainian forces. The fighting has led to thousands of deaths and a humanitarian crisis with civilians caught in the crossfire⁵.

Over the years, numerous attempts have been made to find a peaceful solution to the conflict through diplomatic means, but the situation remains highly volatile. The occupation has significantly increased security concerns not only for Ukraine, but also for neighboring Central and Eastern European countries, as it has exposed the potential susceptibility of bordering states to Russian aggression.

² <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/impact-of-russia-s-invasion-of-ukraine-on-the-markets-eu-response/>

³ <https://www.rand.org/blog/2023/02/consequences-of-the-war-in-ukraine-escalation.html>

⁴ <https://www.csis.org/analysis/continent-forged-crisis-assessing-europe-one-year-war>

⁵ United Nations (2017) *Meetings Coverage and Press Releases*. Available [online]: <https://press.un.org/en/2017/sc12704.doc.htm>



THE INVASION HAS MADE ENERGY SECURITY ISSUES IN THE CEE REGION MORE URGENT

Russia publicly recognized the independence of the two breakaway republics just before its invasion in 2022. Following military maneuvers near the border, Moscow launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022⁶. Despite repeated demands from the international community for an immediate cessation of Russian military operations, Russia escalated its military aggression against Ukraine on September 21, 2022. Thus, it helped organize an illegal 'referendum' in a part of the occupied Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporozhe regions. By declaring mobilization within the Russian Federation and threatening to use weapons of mass destruction again, the Russian Federation increased its aggression against Ukraine⁷.

⁶ <https://www.rand.org/blog/2023/02/consequences-of-the-war-in-ukraine-escalation.html>; <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/nato-russia-tensions-putin-orders-invasion-of-ukraine>

⁷ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/10/06/eu-adopts-its-latest-package-of-sanctions-against-russia-over-the-illegal-annexation-of-ukraine-s-donetsk-luhansk-zaporizhzhia-and-kherson-region-s/?utm_source=dsm&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EU%20adopts%20its%20latest%20package%20of%20sanctions%20against%20Russia%20over%20the%20illegal%20annexation%20of%20Ukraine%27s%20Donetsk%20Luhansk%20Zaporizhzhia%20and%20Kherson%20regions

SIGNIFICANT CONSEQUENCES AND CHALLENGES FOR ENERGY SECURITY

The invasion has made energy security issues in the CEE region more urgent. It has highlighted the dangers of relying solely on Russian energy supplies and triggered attempts to diversify energy sources and increase energy independence. The invasion affected Europe's future security architecture and energy policy, disrupted global commodity supplies, and drastically raised food and oil prices⁸. The weaponization of gas supplies by Russia has significantly impacted the energy security of the region⁹. Energy has become a focal point in the economic conflict between the EU and Russia, particularly concerning the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Russia has strategically employed energy resources as a weapon of war, using gas supplies as a means to exert influence and control over its neighbors¹⁰.

One of the main causes of the likely worst energy crisis in Europe since the Second World War, which will also have a significant impact on the economies of Central and South-East Europe, is Russia's assault against Ukraine¹¹. The energy security concern in Central and Eastern Europe clearly demonstrates the risks of over-dependence on Russian energy supplies. As a result, efforts have been made to diversify energy sources and boost the region's energy independence. The European Commission

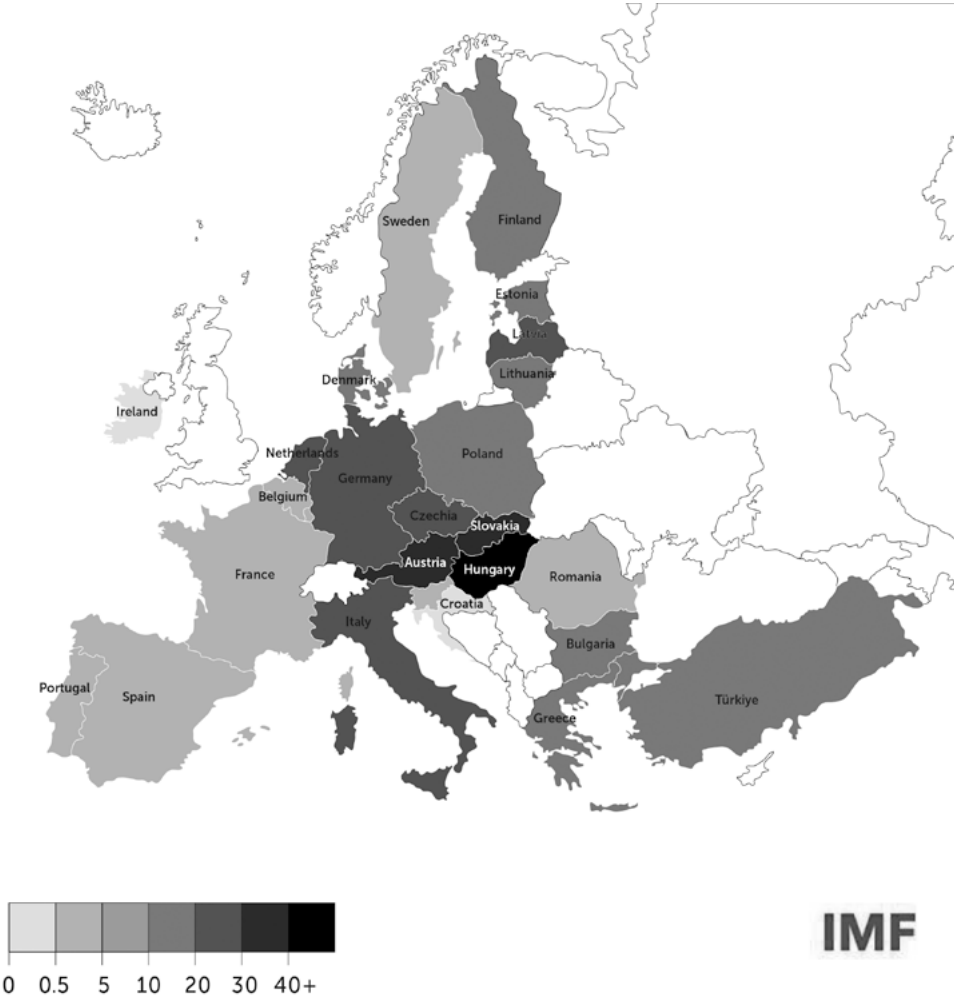
⁸ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/library/library-blog/posts/think-tank-reports-on-the-invasion-of-ukraine/>

⁹ <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/gas-and-energy-security-germany-and-central-and-eastern-europe>

¹⁰ CEEP Central Europe Energy Partners (2022) *CEEP Policy Paper: Russia's War Against Ukraine and Energy Crisis Impact on Central and South-Eastern Europe*. Available [online]: <https://www.ceep.be/category/news/>

¹¹ Ibid.

Figure 1: Dependence on Russia for gas and other energy resources varies greatly from country to country



Source: IMF staff calculations

and other stakeholders have put out several plans and suggestions to lessen reliance on Russian fossil fuels and encourage the use of alternative energy sources. These measures are expected to facilitate the transition to a more environmentally friendly and sustainable energy system in

the region and reduce economic and security concerns related to a single energy source.

The heightened dependence of many countries in Central and Eastern Europe on Russian gas imports has led to a diversity



WHILE SOME COUNTRIES PRIORITIZE ENERGY SECURITY AND DIVERSIFICATION, OTHERS PRIORITIZE ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS

of political positions regarding this issue [See: Figure 1]. For example, Poland has taken proactive measures to reduce its reliance on Russian gas, while Hungary has increased its imports of Russian gas. This spectrum of political positions reflects the complex geopolitical considerations underlying the region's relationship with Russian energy supplies. While some countries prioritize energy security and diversification, others prioritize economic considerations¹².

This map shows how some countries can suddenly stop importing Russian imports. The high intensity of Russian gas usage in Central and Eastern European countries, particularly Hungary, the Slovak Republic, and the Czech Republic, highlights the pressing need to address energy security

challenges. The quest for diversification and reduced reliance on Russian gas is driving these nations to explore alternative energy sources and engage in regional cooperation. Balancing energy needs with geopolitical complexities will be instrumental in securing a sustainable energy future for the region.

However, diversification would be much more difficult in the event of a complete cut-off. Gas bottlenecks could make it more difficult to re-route gas within Europe due to limited import capacity or transmission constraints. Some countries in Central and Eastern Europe could experience shortages of 15% to 40% of annual consumption as a result of the war¹³.

The proportion of Russian gas in the European Union's gas consumption decreased from 40% in 2021 to 9% so far in 2022 as a result of Russia's sharp supply reduction. The areas of Central and Eastern Europe are feeling the immediate effects most intensely. The industrial sector, electricity generation, and space heating in Central and Eastern Europe heavily rely on gas.

The European Union pledged to stop importing Russian gas in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Depending on how dependent the member states are on Russian gas and how well-prepared they are for the prospect of a future cut-off, any accelerated phase-out of Russian gas will necessitate a swift scaling up of clean energy investments. This step would need to include energy efficiency and renewables, as well as a diversification of gas supplies through the development of liquified natural gas (LNG) import capacity and improved regional gas market integration for Central

¹² <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/gas-and-energy-security-germany-and-central-and-eastern-europe>

¹³ <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2022/07/19/blog-how-a-russias-natural-gas-cutoff-could-weigh-on-european-economies>

and Eastern Europe – a region that has historically been heavily dependent on Russian gas.

The disruption of the global supply of commodities such as oil and gas has affected the region's energy security, while rising food and energy prices have also adversely affected the economies of countries in the region. The war in Ukraine has also led to changes in geopolitical alliances and supply chains, which have impacted the entire global economy. The EU has expanded sanctions against Russia, targeting sectors of the Russian economy and political elites, in response to the invasion.

The special problems brought on by their heavy reliance on Russian natural gas are being addressed by some Central and Eastern European nations. Almost half of the gas consumed in countries in Central and Eastern Europe in 2021 came from Russia, compared to just over one-fifth for the rest of Europe. Some nations, including Serbia and the Republic of Moldova, are largely reliant on Russian gas imports¹⁴. Overall, the region's heterogenous political positions highlight the need for a nuanced approach to addressing the challenge of Russian gas dependence in Central and Eastern Europe.

PROLIFERATION OF NUCLEAR ENERGY IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: THE CASE OF SLOVAKIA

Many Central and Eastern European countries have recently announced plans to increase their nuclear power capacity, and Slovakia is at the forefront of this trend. In 2022, Slovakia commissioned a new nuclear unit that will be capable of generating around a quarter of the country's electricity consumption. This unit is expected to help



THE HIGH INTENSITY OF RUSSIAN GAS USAGE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, PARTICULARLY HUNGARY, THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC, AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC, HIGHLIGHTS THE PRESSING NEED TO ADDRESS ENERGY SECURITY CHALLENGES

Slovakia achieve energy independence and provide a reliable source of low-carbon energy. Plans have already been announced to construct an additional unit, which will further increase Slovakia's energy production and make the country a net exporter of electricity from 2024. This expansion of nuclear power capacity in the region represents an important shift towards more secure and sustainable energy sources¹⁵.

¹⁴ <https://www.iea.org/commentaries/accelerating-energy-diversification-in-central-and-eastern-europe>

¹⁵ <https://dgap.org/en/research/publications/gas-and-energy-security-germany-and-central-and-eastern-europe>



THE WAR IN UKRAINE HAS LED TO CHANGES IN GEOPOLITICAL ALLIANCES AND SUPPLY CHAINS, WHICH HAVE IMPACTED THE ENTIRE GLOBAL ECONOMY

THE WAR SPURS EU'S CONCERNS OVER DEMOCRACY IN POLAND AND HUNGARY: POLARIZED RESPONSES TO RUSSIAN AGGRESSION UNFOLD

The ongoing war in Ukraine has brought these challenges to the forefront, urging the EU to address and confront issues related to democracy, sovereignty, and regional stability in both Poland and Hungary¹⁶. The European Union's focus on the erosion of democracy in Poland and Hungary intensifies. Both nations have drawn attention to their respective political challenges, prompting the EU to take serious measures in response.

¹⁶ <https://www.gmfus.org/news/erosion-democracy-and-rule-law-hungary>

Poland, once viewed as an outlier within Europe, faced concerns over democratic principles as the ruling government disregarded the constitution, leading to repression of media freedom and attacks on minority and women's rights. The EU responded with infringement processes, leading to Poland's isolation within the bloc and labelling it as a pariah for its actions and policies¹⁷.

The war in Ukraine has served as a turning point in the European order, with Poland playing a pivotal role in this evolving landscape. Showing remarkable humanitarian support, Poland welcomed more than two million Ukrainian refugees¹⁸, underscoring its significance in addressing regional challenges and fostering stability.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin's aggressive campaign to undermine Ukraine's democracy acted as a stark reminder to European politicians about the significance of upholding democratic ideals. Europe's unified support for Ukraine encouraged optimism that Poland would align itself strategically with the rest of the EU and recommit to liberal democratic values, presenting an opportunity for the nation to contribute actively to preserving and promoting democracy in the region¹⁹.

Meanwhile, Hungary, under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's regime, posed continuous challenges to Western responses against Russia's aggression and hampered

¹⁷ <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210910IPR11928/poland-attacks-on-media-freedom-and-the-eu-legal-order-need-to-stop>

¹⁸ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/news-releases/poland-welcomes-more-two-million-refugees-ukraine>

¹⁹ Jaroslaw K. and K. Wigura (2022) "Will the Ukraine War Return Poland to Europe's Democratic Fold? Europe and Poland Need Each Other More Than Ever", [in]: *Foreign Policy*. Available [online]: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/11/poland-democracy-illiberalism-europe-ukraine-russia-war-eu-nato/>

Ukraine's defense efforts. The country's autocratization history questioned the West's democratic credentials, while Orbán's deliberate efforts to weaken strategic alliances with the United States and the European Union raised concerns about the stability of the Western alliance. Favoring Russia over its friends, Hungary delayed and softened EU sanctions against Russia and signaled opposition to crucial financial aid for Ukraine. The obstruction of high-level NATO-Ukraine Commission meetings, refusal to provide military assistance, and denial of transit for military supplies, further complicated official communication with Ukraine, setting it apart from other Central European NATO members²⁰.

EU LEVERAGES FUNDING TO PUSH FOR REFORMS IN HUNGARY: AGREEMENT REACHED ON RULE OF LAW AND JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE

The European Union pulled EUR 22 billion in cohesion money from Hungary's long-term budget for 2021–2027 in December 2022 in response to Viktor Orbán's administration's refusal to comply with demands over the asylum system, academic freedoms, judicial independence, and LGBT-QI+ rights. Additionally, it blocked funding totaling EUR 5.8 billion from the epidemic recovery fund until Hungary fixes issues with its judicial system.

A deal was achieved after discussions, and Budapest mostly endorsed it. The European Union would only cut EUR 6.3 billion until Hungary completes 27 reforms aimed at fighting corruption and improving judicial independence. In return, Hungary withdrew its objections to the EU's EUR 18 billion aid package for Ukraine and the global minimum corporate tax of 15%. While this does not completely solve Hun-



FAVORING RUSSIA OVER ITS FRIENDS, HUNGARY DELAYED AND SOFTENED EU SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA AND SIGNALLED OPPOSITION TO CRUCIAL FINANCIAL AID FOR UKRAINE

gary's rule of law or corruption problems, it shows that the EU is willing to use its leverage to promote necessary reforms²¹.

THE PARADOXICAL IMPACT OF THE CONFLICT ON THE SECURITY OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

The ongoing conflict in the region has created a paradoxical situation for the security of Central and Eastern Europe. On the one hand, the war has significantly worsened the security environment facing the CEE countries, with the potential for increased aggression and instability in the region. On the other hand, however, the conflict has also led to a reinforcement of the foundations of the security architecture that protects them, as countries come together to

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Max B., Ilke T. and S. Otto (2023) *A Continent Forged in Crisis: Assessing Europe One Year into the War*. Available [online]: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/continent-forged-crisis-assessing-europe-one-year-war>

uphold shared values and defend against external threats. While the conflict has certainly created challenges for the region, it has also underscored the importance of regional cooperation and the shared commitment to a stable and secure CEE²².

The ongoing battle has significant impacts on Washington's security commitment to NATO and the eastern flank, which is a cornerstone of the security architecture of Central and Eastern Europe. While the war amplifies concerns for the security of the CEE countries, it will likely strengthen the commitment of the United States to the region.

This enhanced commitment can be expected to manifest as increased deployment of U.S. troops and weapons in the CEE, an even stronger American commitment to defend NATO's borders, and closer defense cooperation with CEE countries. These measures reflect the United States' recognition of the importance of upholding shared values and defending against external threats in the region. Overall, the war has increased the importance of NATO's security architecture for the region, and we can expect Washington to continue prioritizing their relationship with CEE countries in the context of this war²³.

The allies decided to build four new multinational battle groups in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, in addition to fortifying their current battle groups. With eight multinational battle groups overall as a result of this, the number of troops on the ground virtually doubled, and NATO's expanded presence on the alliance's eastern flank was extended from the Baltic Sea



THE ONGOING CONFLICT IN THE REGION HAS CREATED A PARADOXICAL SITUATION FOR THE SECURITY OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

in the north to the Black Sea in the south. Furthermore, numerous actions performed by the allies on a national level also boost allied engagement in the alliance's eastern region. The allies have moved more ships, planes, and troops to NATO territory in Eastern Europe in reaction to Russia's full-scale invasion, bolstering the alliance's deterrent and defensive stance²⁴.

Indeed, CEE nations have improved their defense capabilities significantly in response to Russia's invasion. The necessity to thwart prospective assaults and growing security concerns have resulted in greater defense spending, improved military readiness, and the hosting of NATO forces and exercises. To ensure that their forces can effectively counter a variety of threats, this has required not just expenditures in

²² <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/ukraine-war-and-the-paradox-of-central-and-eastern-european-security/>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ NATO (2023) *NATO's Military Presence in the East of the Alliance*. Available [online]: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136388.htm



CHANGES IN GEOPOLITICAL ALLIANCES AND SUPPLY LINES HAVE ALSO BEEN BROUGHT ABOUT BY THE WAR IN UKRAINE, WHICH IS NOW SERI- OUSLY HARMING THE WORLD ECONOMY

modern weapons and technologies, but also changes in military organizations and training programs. To strengthen their deterrence and reassure their citizens of the Alliance's backing and unity, several nations, including Poland and the Baltic States, have taken special measures to host NATO soldiers and exercises.

Additionally, in response, NATO and its partners expanded their military collaboration with Russia while maintaining open channels for political and diplomatic communication. The list of entities and people subject to sanctions against Russia was also significantly increased by the EU. These tougher measures, which target the Russian political and economic elites, were put in place in reaction to Russia's unlawful and unjustified invasion of Ukraine. Chang-

es in geopolitical alliances and supply lines have also been brought about by the war in Ukraine, which is now seriously harming the world economy²⁵.

THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND ITS IMPACT ON THE POSITION OF THE CEE COUNTRIES IN NATO AND THE EU

In addition, it would be reasonable to say that the ongoing war in Ukraine is likely to have strategic implications for the Central and Eastern European countries in their relationship with both NATO and the EU. The geographical position of these countries and their crucial role in containing Russian influence have long been recognized by both organizations. However, the conflict has increased the political weight of these countries, strengthening their position in shaping the security and economic policies of both organizations. This is particularly evident in the case of Poland, whose government has been at odds with Brussels and the Biden administration, but now emerges as a key NATO and EU member in the region.

The war has underscored the importance of the Central and Eastern European countries on the frontline of both NATO and the European Union, lending them greater influence in shaping policy and decision-making. As such, we can expect their voices to carry more weight in both organizations moving forward. However, this enhanced influence also comes with greater responsibilities and expectations from the international community on matters of security and global governance. Overall, while the conflict has created challenges for the region, it has also brought about opportunities for CEE countries to strengthen their

²⁵ Europa.eu (2023) *EU Response to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine*. Available [online]: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/>.



THE RESOLUTION OF THE CONFLICT AND ITS AFTERMATH WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE SECURITY AND STABILITY OF THE REGION

position in NATO and the EU and to shape policies that affect their interests²⁶.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the ongoing war and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have had significant and far-reaching effects on the security and stability of the Central and Eastern European region. The war has exposed the dangers of dependence on Russian energy supplies, disrupted global commodity supplies, and raised concerns about global food security and growing economic instability. However, the conflict has also led to the strengthening of the regional security architecture, as countries in the region came together to promote common values and defend against external threats.

The Russian occupation also served to underline the importance of upholding dem-

ocratic ideals and regional stability, and Poland emerged as a key member of both NATO and the European Union. Despite the challenges posed by the conflict, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have significantly improved their defense capabilities and are actively working to diversify their energy sources, strengthen regional cooperation and promote sustainable and secure energy use.

Looking ahead, it is clear that the resolution of the conflict and its aftermath will continue to have a significant impact on the security and stability of the region. However, the continued efforts of CEE countries to build partnerships, strengthen the security architecture and promote regional cooperation offer hope for a brighter future of increased stability and prosperity.



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²⁶ <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/ukraine-war-and-the-paradox-of-central-and-eastern-european-security/>