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# GEOPOLITICAL MAELSTROM

strategic maneuvers for a changing environment

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Strategic Maneuvers for a Changing Environment

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# table of content

<b>NAVIGATING THE FOG OF GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS AND INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES IN EUROPE</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>STRATEGIC FORESIGHT IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>RUSSIAN AGGRESSION ON UKRAINE AND AGENCY IN EUROPE</b>	<b>9</b>
1. The Erosion of Post-Cold War Security Architecture	9
2. The role of OSCE amidst the crisis	9
3. The need for Strategic Foresight	10
4. Russian Agency in other European countries	10
5. Resilience, Adaptation and Unity	11
<b>FROZEN CONFLICTS, VOLATILE RELATIONS, AND OPEN ISSUES</b>	<b>12</b>
1. Post-Cold War Freeze	12
2. The Impact of Volatile Relations and Open Issues	13
3. Cooperation, Respect and Commitment	13
<b>CHINESE AGENCY IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIAN STATES</b>	<b>14</b>
1. Economic Investments and Diplomatic Overtures	14
2. Crafting a Roadmap that ensures Sustainable Growth	15
<b>THE EUROPEAN UNION'S GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES: NAVIGATING INTERNAL DIVISIONS AND EXTERNAL PRESSURES</b>	<b>16</b>
1. The Paradox of Unity and Divergence	16
2. External Dependencies and Strategic Autonomy	16
3. The Intricacies of Solidarity and Support	17
4. Balancing Enlargement Aspirations and Realpolitik	17
5. Charting the Geopolitical Course	17
<b>DYSFUNCTIONAL DEMOCRACIES AND ILLIBERAL TENDENCIES AMONG THE ALLIES</b>	<b>18</b>
1. Democratic Backsliding and External Counter-Leverage	18
2. Foreign Policy Shifts and Fragmentation	18
3. Resilience, Stability and Cooperation	19
<b>CLIMATE CHANGE AS A MULTIDIMENSIONAL SECURITY THREAT</b>	<b>20</b>
1. Resource Scarcity and Conflict	20
2. Human Displacement	20
3. Economic Disruption and Social Instability	20
4. Geopolitical Tensions and International Cooperation	21
5. Strategic Considerations	21
<b>MIGRATION DYNAMICS AND SECURITY IMPERATIVES</b>	<b>22</b>
1. Resource Competition and Conflict Risks	22
2. Community engagement and Counter-radicalization	22
<b>ENVISIONING THE FUTURE</b>	<b>23</b>
1. Strengthened Multilateralism and Enhanced Cooperation	24
2. Fragmentation and Unilateralism	25
3. Strategic Partnerships and Global Leadership	26
<b>EDITORS</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>AUTHORS</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>SPECIAL THANKS</b>	<b>33</b>



# navigating the fog of geopolitical tensions and institutional challenges in europe

In November 13 and 14, the OSCE Chairpersonship 2023 convened in Skopje a group of policymakers, diplomats, and experts, not just to dissect the current state of affairs, but to anticipate the future of Security Cooperation in Europe. The atmosphere, though somber in reflection of the challenges ahead, carried a palpable undercurrent of determination. At this pivotal juncture, the OSCE Expert Network meeting not only served as a testament to the enduring relevance of dialogue and cooperation but also as a crucial platform for strategic foresight in a rapidly evolving geopolitical landscape.

Europe is at a crossroad. The post-Cold War era, characterized by a relatively stable security architecture, has given way to a period marked by uncertainty, disruptive challenges, and a pressing need for adaptive strategies. At the heart of this confluence is the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), which itself embodies the aspirations and troubles that define contemporary Europe. Established with the noble intent of fostering peace, security, and cooperation, the OSCE today grapples with the daunting task of maintaining its relevance and efficacy amidst geopolitical tremors that threaten the very fabric of European stability. The resurgence of power politics, epitomized by Russian aggression in Ukraine, has not only redrawn security paradigms but has also cast a long shadow over the foundational principles that have guided the OSCE and similar institutions. This resurgence is not merely a regional concern but a harbinger of a shifting global order, where old alliances are tested, new power centers emerge, and the rules-based international order faces its sternest challenge yet. Moreover, the institution's internal dynamics mirror the complexities of the broader European landscape. The political blockades, budgetary constraints, and leadership challenges within the OSCE are symptomatic of a broader crisis of multilateralism. As nations retreat into nationalistic shells and skepticism about the utility of international organizations grows, the OSCE's struggle for coherence and purpose becomes emblematic of a larger struggle to preserve the spirit of cooperation in an increasingly fragmented world.

In the backdrop of these tumultuous developments, the OSCE Expert Network meeting in Skopje was a clarion call for introspection, a collective endeavor to sift through the fog of geopolitical tensions, and a search for a beacon that can guide the continent through these uncharted waters. The discussions, reflections, and debates that unfolded were imbued with a sense of urgency and a recognition that the path ahead, though fraught with challenges, also offers opportunities for renewal, resilience, and a reinvigorated commitment to the ideals that once inspired the creation of the OSCE. Through a cycle of earnest deliberations, the contours of a vision for a secure, cooperative, and resilient Europe were revealed. It was a moment that underscored the willingness to maneuver through the complexities of a changing world with foresight, fortitude, and an unwavering commitment to the principles of peace, security, and cooperation.

In the ensuing pages, this policy study delves deeper into the key trends that endanger security cooperation in Europe, dissecting the intricate tapestry of geopolitical dynamics, institutional challenges, and emerging threats. It is a narrative that weaves together the strands of conflict, diplomacy, and hope, charting a course for a future where cooperation triumphs over discord, where principles hold sway over power politics, and where the OSCE and similar institutions continue to play a pivotal role in shaping the destiny of Europe.

# strategic foresight in a changing environment

European security landscape is laden by a plenitude of multifaceted challenges and ever-changing dynamics, while its complexity is underscored by internal divergences, regional instabilities, evolving geopolitical orientations, as well as the overarching challenge of climate change. To ensure stability, foster cooperation, and effectively respond to emerging threats it requires nuanced approaches and good level of cooperation between the European Union (EU), NATO, and the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

In the current geopolitical landscape, the EU finds its unity tested by underlying disagreements, particularly evident in its response to Russia's aggression and its support for Ukraine. While a superficial coherence persists, the increasing reliance on NATO for security underscores the EU's challenges in asserting its geopolitical influence. This situation is further complicated by the EU's struggle to expand, where the necessity for swift accession of new members must be balanced against the need for comprehensive reforms. Concurrently, OSCE maintains its operational integrity but encounters significant political impediments. Despite being a critical platform for dialogue, the OSCE's functionality is compromised by mutual blockades between Russia and the West. The organization faces pivotal moments, with the looming question of its chairmanship for 2024 and budget considerations being critical for its future functionality.

In South-Eastern Europe (SEE), the security landscape is mired in internal sources of insecurity, marked by disputes and competition within the region itself. While major powers like Russia are perceived as threats in other parts of Europe, they exert substantial influence in SEE, with local countries often leveraging this influence in their regional conflicts. The alignment of countries in SEE with Western institutions like the EU and NATO varies significantly, reflecting a diverse tapestry of geopolitical orientations.

The war in Ukraine has reshaped the geopolitical landscape, reinforcing Western unity in support of Ukraine. However, this conflict has also illuminated the EU's internal cohesion challenges, stemming from divergent national perspectives on global crises and the management of development aid. This era is characterized by geostrategic autonomy and shifting alliances, with countries like Turkey, Hungary and Serbia increasingly asserting their foreign policies, often in ways not fully aligned with Western preferences. This trend signifies a broader movement of nations striving for balanced relations with all major powers, marking a distinct characteristic of the emerging international order. In Central Asia, a notable shift in regional dynamics is occurring, largely due to Russia's perceived weakening. The growing agency of China in Central Asian countries, combined with increased Western interest driven by strategic considerations such as transport routes, raw material supply, and security concerns, is reshaping the region. This evolving landscape presents opportunities for enhanced collaboration but also harbors potential flashpoints arising from internal and cross-border conflicts.

Amidst these complexities, climate change stands out as a paramount security threat, demanding intensified international cooperation. The OSCE, with its untapped potential, is called upon to focus more on political dynamics and less on formal organizational features to effectively address the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change.

In this intricate security environment, the role of the OSCE as a platform for dialogue between the West and Russia gains prominence. Maintaining dialogue with Russia, despite the prevailing challenges, is deemed crucial for peace and security in regions like Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. The OSCE's strategy should encompass exerting political pressure on Russia while simultaneously engaging with the burgeoning ambitions of Central Asian states, striking a delicate balance between cooperation and the upholding of democratic principles.



# russian aggression on ukraine and agency in europe

This section will delve into the multifaceted impact of the Russian aggression on Ukraine. It will explore how this aggression has not only directly affected the countries involved but also how it has led to a broader degradation of Europe's security environment. The section will analyze Russia's blatant contraventions of international commitments and the resultant strain on mutual confidence, predictability, and cooperation that characterized post-Cold War Europe. Additionally, the section will address the many aspects of Russian interference into domestic political processes and agency throughout Europe.

## 1. THE EROSION OF POST-COLD WAR SECURITY ARCHITECTURE

The tremors of Russian aggression on Ukraine have reverberated throughout the European continent, significantly disrupting the fabric of European security and cooperation. This overt defiance of international norms and commitments has not only redrawn the geopolitical landscape of the region but has also cast a profound shadow on the broader strategic dynamics across Europe. In this volatile environment, the critical roles of institutions like the OSCE, as well as the agency of individual European nations, are underscored, highlighting the imperative for a comprehensive response to a crisis that is as intricate as it is transformative.

The era following the Cold War in Europe was marked by an unprecedented level of security and cooperation, founded on mutual confidence and predictability. The principles established in the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and the Charter of Paris of 1990 forged a path towards a continent united in the pursuit of peace, democracy, and shared prosperity. However, the recent Russian aggression against Ukraine marks a stark deviation from this trajectory, shaking the core of OSCE's principles and challenging the ethos of security cooperation that has governed European international relations for decades. This aggression has not only destabilized the established security architecture but also questioned the foundational norms that have steered the region's international relations for years.

## 2. THE ROLE OF OSCE AMIDST THE CRISIS

The Ukrainian crisis has rigorously tested the resilience of European nations and posed significant challenges for the OSCE. The organization, traditionally a bastion against conflict and a forum for dialogue, now faces internal divisions and an existential crisis induced by the actions of one of its prominent members. Despite these challenges, the OSCE's operational capacity remains robust on the ground, with its field missions continuing to play a crucial role in upholding the organization's principles. The steadfast dedication and commitment of the OSCE's personnel and leadership highlight the organization's adaptability and resilience amidst adversity.

Yet, the OSCE confronts a paradox: while Russian aggression has eroded the mutual trust and cooperation that typified the post-Cold War era in Europe, it has also ignited an unprecedented level of solidarity among like-minded nations within the organization. This duality accentuates the complexity of the crisis

and necessitates a nuanced approach that fortifies the OSCE's core principles while adapting to the shifting security landscape.

### 3. THE NEED FOR STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Highlighting the vulnerability of current systems and emphasizing the imperative for enhanced collaboration and strategic planning, the Ukraine conflict has prompted a pivotal reevaluation of Europe's security framework. In this scenario, the importance of maintaining open communication and cooperation channels, even in the face of explicit hostility, is paramount. The OSCE provides such a platform, enabling its members to address the crisis's realities and seek pathways towards resolution and peace. Moreover, the situation highlights the significance of dialogue, even against overt aggression. The OSCE's forum, which brings together a broad spectrum of countries, presents an essential opportunity for dialogues that are crucial, albeit challenging, for understanding the motivations and behaviors of all involved parties. During these discussions, the principles of the Helsinki Final Act stand as guiding lights, reminding member states of their obligations to one another and their collective commitment to the principles of peace and cooperation.

### 4. RUSSIAN AGENCY IN OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES


The specter of Russian aggression extends beyond Ukraine's borders, casting a pervasive shadow over the broader European domain. Across the continent, nations confront the insidious threat of Russian interference, a multifaceted campaign aimed at destabilizing democratic institutions, encroaching on national sovereignty, and reshaping the geopolitical order. This section explores the various dimensions of Russian interference in other European countries, illuminating the tactics used and their implications for European security and cooperation.

Central to Russian interference is the widespread deployment of disinformation and propaganda. Through an intricate network of state-controlled media and social media platforms, Russia orchestrates extensive misinformation campaigns designed to sow discord, polarize societies, and erode confidence in democratic institutions. These campaigns exploit existing societal divisions, amplifying grievances and inciting unrest. European nations are tasked with countering this deluge of falsehoods, necessitating a concerted effort to enhance media literacy, foster transparent communication, and protect the sanctity of the information space.

Cyber-attacks and espionage represent another significant aspect of Russian interference. European nations have become frequent targets of sophisticated cyber operations, ranging from data breaches and espionage to assaults on critical infrastructure. These cyber incursions pose a direct threat to national security and serve as a means for Russia to exert political pressure and gain strategic advantage. Tackling this challenge demands robust cyber defense mechanisms, improved intelligence-sharing among European nations, and a collective determination to identify and decisively respond to these malicious activities.

Russian interference also manifests in attempts to exert political and economic influence within European countries. Utilizing dependencies on energy supplies, investments, and trade, Russia seeks to establish a network of political allies, sway policy decisions, and weaken the unity of European institutions. The strategic deployment of energy as a coercion tool is particularly notable, with nations heavily dependent on Russian gas facing significant vulnerabilities. Combatting this influence necessitates diversifying energy sources, increasing investments in renewable energy, and striving to reduce economic reliance on Russia.

Russia's interference extends to backing illiberal and anti-establishment movements across Europe. By providing financial, logistical, and media support to populist and nationalist parties, Russia aims to



propagate divisive narratives, challenge the European integration process, and weaken the transatlantic alliance. These actions risk undermining the democratic fabric of European societies and require a vigilant and proactive approach to safeguard democratic values and institutions.

## **5. RESILIENCE, ADAPTATION AND UNITY**

As Europe navigates these tumultuous times, the path forward is laden with challenges but also brimming with opportunities. The crisis, while testing the resilience and unity of European nations and institutions, also offers a chance to reassert the values that have long underpinned the continent's security architecture. The OSCE, with its rich heritage of fostering dialogue and cooperation, stands at the forefront of these endeavors, serving as a symbol of hope and a testament to the enduring significance of diplomacy and multilateralism.

The organization's capacity to adapt to the evolving geopolitical context, to stand resolute amidst adversity, and to champion the principles of peace, transparency, and cooperation will be pivotal in determining the future direction of security cooperation in Europe. As member states and institutions unite to tackle the impending challenges, the spirit of solidarity and the dedication to shared values will be their most potent assets. In this collective effort, the OSCE emerges not merely as a spectator of history but as an active participant in shaping a future where peace, stability, and cooperation prevail.

In conclusion, the Russian aggression against Ukraine signifies a critical turning point for Europe, compelling nations and institutions to introspect, reassess, and react to a rapidly transforming security environment. While the challenges are formidable, the crisis also presents an opportunity to reaffirm the principles that underpin European security and cooperation. In this endeavor, the OSCE stands not only as an observer of unfolding events but also as an active participant, tirelessly working to uphold the tenets of dialogue, transparency, and cooperation, even in the most challenging times. As the continent steers through this crisis, the resilience, adaptability, and unwavering commitment of its nations and institutions will be instrumental in sculpting the future of security cooperation in Europe.

# frozen conflicts, volatile relations, and open issues

In the tapestry of European security, the threads of frozen conflicts, volatile relations, and unresolved issues form a complex pattern, reflecting the enduring challenges and historical legacies that continue to shape the geopolitical landscape. These conflicts, often rooted in deep-seated ethnic, territorial, and political disputes, not only pose a direct threat to regional stability but also impede broader efforts towards cooperation and integration. This section delves into the intricate dynamics of these conflicts, exploring their origins, current status, and the overarching implications for European security and cooperation.

## 1. POST-COLD WAR FREEZE

The Cold War is long gone. However, several regions of Europe although free from active hostilities, still await comprehensive political resolution to be achieved. This state of limbo, with sporadic outbreaks of violence and an ever-present risk of escalation often brings the whole region into a freeze. The OSCE has been actively involved in monitoring and mediating several of these conflicts, employing its field missions and diplomatic channels to mitigate tensions and foster dialogue. However, the resolution of these conflicts is often hindered by complex geopolitical interests, historical grievances, and the lack of political will among the parties involved.

The **Nagorno-Karabakh** conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan has seen intermittent flare-ups of violence, most recently in September 2023. While a cessation of immediate hostilities was marked, significant concerns for the future stability and security of the region remain. The ceasefire agreement led to the disbandment of the Artsakh Defense Army and signaled the end of the Republic of Artsakh as a self-declared entity, drastically altering the political landscape of Nagorno-Karabakh. However, this shift raised serious apprehensions, notably among human rights organizations, about the potential threats looming over the future of the region's Armenian population. The mass exodus of Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians, prompted by the offensive, underscored fears of potential ethnic cleansing and genocide, pointing to deep-seated ethnic tensions and unresolved issues that could fuel further instability and conflict. The OSCE's Minsk Group has played a pivotal role in mediating the conflict, but a lasting resolution remains elusive, underscoring the need for sustained diplomatic efforts and confidence-building measures.

The breakaway region of **Transnistria**, located within Moldova, has been a source of tension since the early 1990s. Despite the presence of Russian troops and a ceasefire agreement, the political status of the region remains unresolved. As recently as February 2023, Russian President Putin revoked a significant 2012 decree, an action that has substantial implications for Moldova's sovereignty in the context of the Transnistria conflict. This decree, played a crucial role in underpinning Moldova's sovereignty and was instrumental in shaping the future of the Transnistria region. This region, known as Transdniestria,



has been a longstanding source of tension, harboring a Moscow-backed separatist regime and hosting Russian troops. The revocation of this decree represents a notable shift in Russia's stance and is indicative of changing geopolitical strategies in the region, potentially altering the dynamics of the Transnistria conflict and Moldova's sovereignty over the area. The OSCE's involvement, through its mission to Moldova, aims to facilitate dialogue and promote a peaceful settlement, yet progress has been slow, reflecting the intricate interplay of regional dynamics and international interests.

Finally, the conflicts in Georgia's breakaway regions of **South Ossetia and Abkhazia** have led to significant human suffering and displacement. The role of external actors, particularly Russia, adds layers of complexity to the resolution process. The OSCE's efforts to promote peace and reconciliation have been constrained by geopolitical considerations and the absence of a conducive environment for constructive negotiations.

## 2. THE IMPACT OF VOLATILE RELATIONS AND OPEN ISSUES

The volatile relations between conflict parties and external actors significantly impact the prospects for resolving frozen conflicts. The interplay of nationalistic sentiments, historical narratives, and external geopolitical interests creates an environment where mistrust prevails, and compromise becomes exceedingly challenging. The role of regional powers, often pursuing their strategic agendas, further complicates the dynamics, making the path to reconciliation fraught with obstacles.

Open issues, such as the status of disputed territories, the rights of minority populations, and the return of displaced persons, are critical components of the conflict resolution process. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses political dialogue, legal frameworks, and socioeconomic development. The OSCE, with its multidimensional approach to security, is uniquely positioned to facilitate this process, offering a platform for engagement and the mobilization of international support.

## 3. COOPERATION, RESPECT AND COMMITMENT

Frozen conflicts, volatile relations, and open issues present significant challenges to the stability and security of Europe. The path to resolution is complex, requiring patience, persistence, and a nuanced understanding of the underlying issues. In this context, the role of the OSCE is paramount, serving as a mediator, monitor, and facilitator of dialogue. As Europe grapples with these enduring challenges, the principles of cooperation, respect for sovereignty, and commitment to peaceful conflict resolution will be crucial in navigating the intricate landscape of frozen conflicts and building a more stable and secure continent.

# chinese agency in europe and central asian states

In recent years, China's emergence as a global power has significantly reshaped the geopolitical terrain of Europe and Central Asia, introducing new complexities into the regional dynamics. The multifaceted nature of China's engagement, characterized by strategic economic investments, infrastructure projects under the Belt and Road Initiative, and diplomatic overtures, brings both opportunities and challenges to the fore. This section of the policy study aims to dissect the intricate fabric of Chinese involvement in the region, scrutinizing its impacts on regional dynamics, and outlining strategic considerations for European nations and institutions.

## 1. ECONOMIC INVESTMENTS AND DIPLOMATIC OVERTURES

Hefty investments in vital infrastructure, technology, and key industries, marks China's economic expansion to Europe and Central Asia. It has taken dramatic proportions. The Belt and Road Initiative stands out as a cornerstone in establishing economic links, providing substantial funding for infrastructure projects aimed at enhancing connectivity. However, this initiative also raises alarms about debt sustainability and economic reliance. European nations are thus challenged to strike a delicate balance between reaping the economic benefits of Chinese investments and preserving national interests, economic sovereignty, and ensuring equitable competition.

On the other hand, China's diplomatic foray into the region makes a concerted effort to cultivate bilateral relations, frequently using economic ties as leverage for political influence. The «16+1» format, engaging Central and Eastern European countries, is indicative of this strategy, eliciting a spectrum of responses from participating nations. While some perceive these overtures as gateways to economic growth, others are wary of their geopolitical repercussions, fearing potential divisions within the European Union and a dilution of a collective stance on pivotal issues.

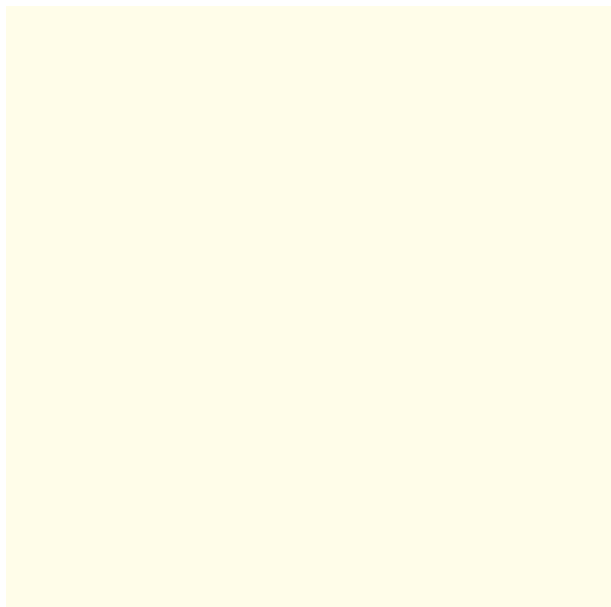
Such escalating presence in Europe and Central Asia carries significant implications for the region's dynamics and European security. Chinese investments, while fostering economic development and infrastructure advancement, introduce multifaceted challenges. These include potential over-reliance on Chinese capital, apprehensions regarding technology transfer and cybersecurity, and the strategic ramifications of China's burgeoning influence in critical domains like telecommunications, energy, and transport.



## 2. CRAFTING A ROADMAP THAT ENSURES SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

While the rise of Chinese agency in Europe and Central Asian States presents a mixed bag of opportunities and challenges, a proactive, strategic, and unified approach from European nations and institutions is essential. In navigating the intricate landscape of Chinese engagement in Europe and Central Asia, European nations and institutions must not only be reactive but also visionary in their strategies. It is not just about mitigating risks and responding to immediate challenges; it is about foreseeing future trends, harnessing the potential of emerging opportunities, and crafting a roadmap that ensures sustainable growth, security, and stability in the long run. This requires an in-depth understanding of China's global ambitions and a keen insight into the shifting patterns of international relations. By fostering innovation, investing in research and development, and prioritizing education and skill development, European nations can enhance their competitiveness and reduce dependency on external powers. Moreover, in the face of a rapidly evolving global order, the cultivation of a robust civil society, informed public discourse, and a strong commitment to democratic values will serve as the bedrock for resilient and forward-looking policies.

As Europe treads this path, the journey will be as consequential as the destination, setting a precedent for international cooperation and mutual prosperity in the 21st century.



# the european union's geopolitical challenges: navigating internal divisions and external pressures

The European Union stands at a critical juncture, striving to assert its role as a significant geopolitical force amidst a plethora of internal and external challenges. This section of the study endeavors to dissect the multifaceted nature of these challenges, delving into the internal divisions that hamper collective action and examining the implications of these fissures on the EU's global stance.

## 1. THE PARADOX OF UNITY AND DIVERGENCE

Despite moments of apparent consensus, the EU is characterized by a profound internal complexity, where unity on the surface often belies a deeper undercurrent of divergence. The EU's collective response to external threats, such as Russian aggression in Ukraine, demonstrates its capacity for unity. However, beneath this consensus lies a labyrinth of divergent interests and perspectives, especially pronounced in areas of foreign policy and security. The crisis in Ukraine has accentuated these internal divisions, challenging the EU's ability to maintain a cohesive front in the face of evolving geopolitical landscapes. Divisions between Member States are often influenced by historical affiliations, economic ties, and national strategic interests. This fragmentation within the realms of foreign policy and security underscores the fragility of the EU's Common Foreign Policy Framework and poses substantial challenges in achieving a unified and effective response to international crises.

## 2. EXTERNAL DEPENDENCIES AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

The EU's geopolitical influence is further complicated by its dependencies and strategic interactions on the global stage, particularly in its relationship with NATO. The resurgence of power politics, epitomized by Russian aggression and increasing global instability, has spotlighted the EU's reliance on NATO for security needs. Despite efforts to foster strategic military autonomy, the EU's over-dependence on the transatlantic alliance raises questions about its long-term vision for security and defense cooperation, both within Europe and in the broader international arena. Its struggle to develop an independent strategic military capacity limits the EU's ability to act autonomously in addressing security concerns. This over-reliance constrains the geopolitical maneuverability and necessitates a reevaluation of its approach to security, defense cooperation, and its role in the global security architecture.





### 3. THE INTRICACIES OF SOLIDARITY AND SUPPORT

Divergent political stances are not the only test to EU's internal solidarity. In the last two years, the practical challenges of supporting Member States and partners, as evidenced by the situation in Ukraine and the contentious issue of EU enlargement represents an additional test. The EU's initially robust support for Ukraine is showing signs of fatigue. The prolonged nature of the conflict, coupled with its economic and social costs, contributes to a decline in solidarity. Moreover, distributional conflicts within the EU, such as those concerning grain exports and resource allocation, further complicate the pursuit of a unified approach. On the other hand, the prospect of EU enlargement, especially concerning Ukraine, introduces a contentious dynamic that will exacerbate existing divisions further. The debate over enlargement and the broader implications for the EU's institutional architecture has just begun, and already it is overrun by strategic decisions of the Institutions and by demands from acceding countries.

### 4. BALANCING ENLARGEMENT ASPIRATIONS AND REALPOLITIK

The EU's approach to the Western Balkans and South East Europe is fundamental in understanding the broader context of its geopolitical challenges and aspirations. The region has intricate history, diverse culture, and is of strategic importance. Thus, it has been a protracted hurdle to EU's cohesion and geopolitical stance.

The region's path to EU integration has been complex, marked by a combination of transformative reforms and persistent challenges. The EU's strategy in the Western Balkans emphasizes the need for comprehensive democratic reforms, rule of law, regional cooperation, and reconciliation. However, the pace of integration, overburdened by bilateral disputes and blockades has been subject to criticism and frustration within the region, highlighting the necessity for a more effective and engaging EU approach. Meanwhile, EU's influence in this region is crucial for maintaining stability, promoting economic development, and countering external influences that seek to exploit historical divisions and weaken European unity. The EU's ability to project a coherent and strategic vision for the Western Balkans is paramount for its broader geopolitical objectives and for the stability of the whole of the South East European Region.

### 5. CHARTING THE GEOPOLITICAL COURSE

As the European Union confronts a tapestry of internal challenges and external pressures, its future, as a geopolitical force, hinges on its ability to navigate these complexities with strategic acumen and unified resolve. Balancing internal cohesion with strategic autonomy, while engaging effectively with critical regions like the Western Balkans, is paramount.

In forging a path forward, the EU must adhere to the principles of unity, strategic foresight, and principled engagement. Despite the challenges, a proactive, cohesive, and visionary approach can enable the EU to overcome obstacles and reinforce its stance as a key geopolitical player. By projecting a coherent vision and fostering stability, democracy, and regional cooperation, the EU can navigate the intricacies of the geopolitical landscape, ensuring a secure, stable, and prosperous future for itself and its partners. The journey is complex, yet through strategic foresight and unwavering solidarity, the European Union has the potential to navigate these turbulent waters and emerge as a stronger, more cohesive force on the global stage.

# dysfunctional democracies and illiberal tendencies among the allies

Having such a varied political landscape, the OSCE region is becoming more and more a labyrinth of challenges that critically impact its geopolitical stability, democratic integrity, and collective strength. The following section will offer an in-depth exploration of the multifaceted issues confronting the region, including democratic backsliding, internal political dynamics, external geopolitical influences, and regional disputes.

## 1. DEMOCRATIC BACKSLIDING AND EXTERNAL COUNTER-LEVERAGE

The phenomenon of democratic backsliding, particularly evident in South East Europe and within the EU Member States, is a multifaceted challenge intensified by external geopolitical maneuvers, notably by major powers like Russia. This external counter-leverage not only complicates the democratic trajectory of the region but also poses significant hurdles in maintaining a coherent and effective policy framework. The erosion of democratic norms is manifested through the undermining of judicial independence, media freedom, and civil liberties, leading to a weakening of democratic institutions and the rise of illiberal tendencies.

Principles of liberal democracy are progressively weakened or disregarded even in some of the EU Member States, while manifesting strong populist and nationalist rhetoric, policies aimed at marginalizing minority groups, and a general disdain for pluralism and inclusive governance. Dysfunctional institutional system and the rise of illiberalism challenges the principles of liberal democracy and threatens the unity and solidarity that are fundamental to the strength of alliances.

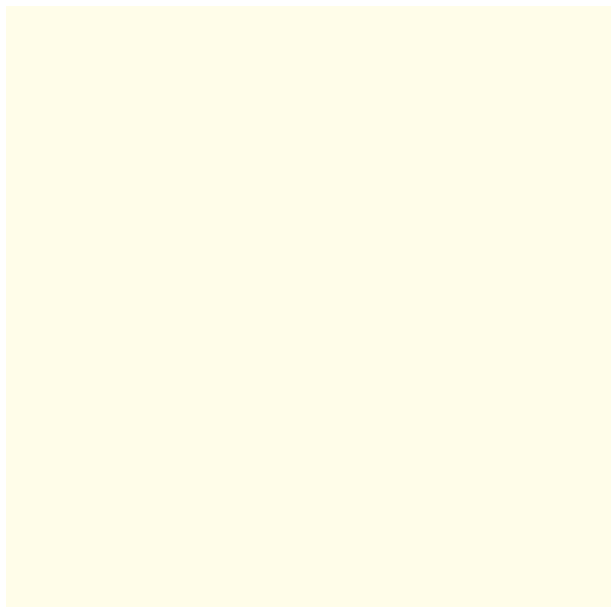
## 2. FOREIGN POLICY SHIFTS AND FRAGMENTATION

Political systems heavily influenced by ethnic divisions hinder civic progress and fuel ongoing instability and political conflict. Nations frequently confront challenges to their stability and autonomy due to regional conflicts and ethnic discord, notably in areas like Bosnia and Herzegovina. Moreover, in countries such as North Macedonia, there's noticeable indecision regarding international alliances, suggesting potential shifts in foreign policy driven by internal political debates and external pressures. The fragmented approach of the European institutional framework hinders collective action and often leaves countries, especially in Southern Europe, isolated in dealing with challenges such as migration, energy security, and economic development. The lack of consensus on a common agenda underscores the need for a more cohesive and strategic approach to regional cooperation and policy-making.



### 3. RESILIENCE, STABILITY AND COOPERATION

The OSCE region faces a complex geopolitical landscape characterized by democratic backsliding, regional disputes, and internal challenges. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive and coordinated responses that promote democratic resilience, regional stability, and enhanced cooperation. By adopting a unified and proactive approach, fostering dialogue, and reaffirming commitment to democratic principles, the region can overcome these challenges and pave the way for a more stable, democratic, and prosperous future. The journey ahead is intricate and demanding, yet it is through strategic foresight, unwavering solidarity, and a commitment to shared values that the OSCE region can navigate these challenges and emerge stronger and more united.



# climate change as a multidimensional security threat

Climate change poses an existential threat to the global community, with its impacts transcending national borders and affecting various facets of society, economy, and the environment. In the European context, the ramifications of climate change are particularly pronounced, presenting a myriad of challenges that necessitate immediate and concerted action. Following is an analysis of the multifaceted nature of climate change as a security threat and its implications for European stability and cooperation.

## 1. RESOURCE SCARCITY AND CONFLICT

Climate-induced changes in weather patterns can lead to resource scarcity, particularly concerning water and food security. This scarcity has the potential to exacerbate existing tensions, fuel competition over natural resources, and potentially ignite conflicts. Nations facing these challenges must prioritize sustainable resource management, diplomatic negotiation over shared resources, and conflict prevention mechanisms to mitigate the security risks associated with resource scarcity.

## 2. HUMAN DISPLACEMENT

Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation, are major drivers of human displacement. Climate refugees pose significant challenges for host communities, straining social and economic systems, and potentially leading to tensions and conflicts. Ensuring adequate response capacities, integrating climate migration into national security strategies, and fostering international cooperation are critical for managing the security implications of climate-induced displacement.

## 3. ECONOMIC DISRUPTION AND SOCIAL INSTABILITY

Economy is severely affected by climate change, with key sectors, among which agriculture, energy, and tourism being most affected. This climate induced economic disruption can lead to social instability, increasing the risk of unrest and weakening the resilience of communities. Strengthening economic diversification, investing in resilient infrastructure, and promoting social safety nets are essential measures to safeguard against the security risks posed by economic disruption.



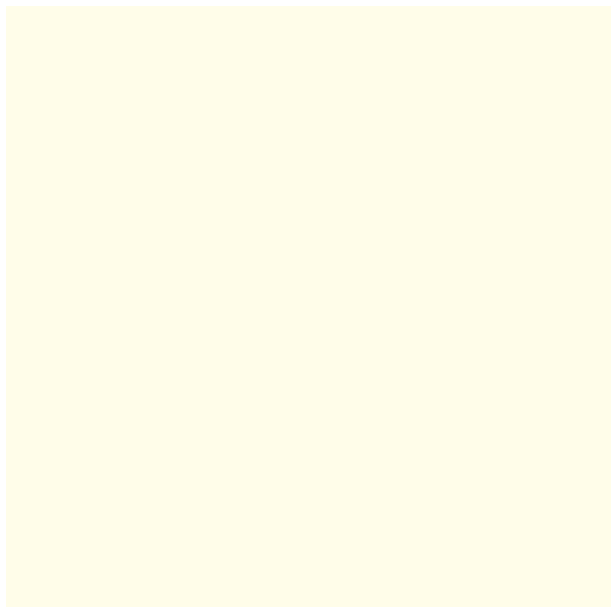
## 4. GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Geopolitical tensions, can be exacerbated by climate change. This is particularly the case in regions where countries compete over dwindling resources or where the opening of new sea routes, such as in the Arctic, introduces new strategic considerations. Navigating these tensions requires robust international cooperation, adherence to international law, and the establishment of frameworks for the peaceful resolution of disputes.

## 5. STRATEGIC CONSIDERATIONS

In addressing the security implications of climate change, the OSCE can play a pivotal role by:

- **Integrating Climate Security into Regional Policies**, by recognizing that climate change is a core security concern and through integration of climate change aspects into regional security frameworks and conflict prevention strategies.
- **Promoting Sustainable Development**, by supporting member states in developing sustainable practices and infrastructure to reduce vulnerability to climate-induced security risks.
- **Facilitating Dialogue and Cooperation**, by fostering dialogue and cooperation among member states to address shared challenges related to climate change, resource management, and migration.
- **Enhancing Adaptive Capacity**, by assisting member states in enhancing their adaptive capacity to climate change through knowledge exchange, capacity building, and the mobilization of resources for climate resilience.



# migration dynamics and security imperatives

**M**igration, driven by economic disparities, conflicts, and climate change, presents multifaceted security challenges in the OSCE region. The following section assesses these challenges, offering insights into their impact on regional stability and proposing strategic responses to mitigate associated risks.

## 1. RESOURCE COMPETITION AND CONFLICT RISKS

Migration can lead to heightened competition over scarce resources, particularly in resource-limited areas. This competition may intensify existing tensions or spark new conflicts, destabilizing OSCE member states and the broader region. Additionally, the influx of migrants and refugees can strain social services, housing, and employment sectors in host communities. Without effective management, this strain can provoke social unrest and economic instability, potentially leading to security breaches. Another, more insidious effect of migration is social polarization, which can arise from the perception of migrants as «outsiders.» Such polarization might foster environments conducive to radicalization, posing a significant threat to internal security and cohesion. Moreover, increased migration flows can challenge border security, creating vulnerabilities that non-state actors, including traffickers and smugglers, can exploit. This poses a substantial threat to national and regional security. Furthermore, migration issues can be politically manipulated, both internally and by external actors, leading to increased geopolitical tensions. If states use migration as a political tool or leverage, it can strain international relations and potentially lead to broader regional conflicts. Adding to these challenges is the impact of climate change on migration patterns, which acts as a «threat multiplier,» exacerbating existing security challenges through sudden demographic shifts, resource scarcity, and increased competition.

## 2. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND COUNTER-RADICALIZATION

In response to these multifaceted security threats, a comprehensive and proactive approach is essential. The OSCE should focus on enhancing resource management and establishing robust conflict resolution mechanisms to address resource-related tensions. Strengthening social and economic support systems to integrate migrants effectively can reduce the strain on host communities. Implementing community engagement programs and counter-radicalization strategies can foster social cohesion and address the root causes of radicalization. Moreover, reinforcing border security measures while ensuring humane treatment of migrants, and combating trafficking and smuggling networks are crucial. Diplomatic efforts are needed to minimize the political manipulation of migration issues and reduce geopolitical tensions. Lastly, developing climate resilience strategies and adaptive mechanisms to address the security implications of climate-induced migration is imperative. Through strategic planning, international cooperation, and a commitment to human rights and security, the OSCE can effectively navigate the complexities of migration and its impact on regional stability.



## envisioning the future

**A**s Europe navigates a complex array of challenges, from geopolitical tensions and internal divisions to climate change and migration, the future of security cooperation on the continent is at a pivotal juncture. The evolving landscape presents a spectrum of possible scenarios, each with its distinct implications for the stability, unity, and resilience of Europe. This conclusion outlines potential scenarios for security cooperation in Europe, highlighting the dynamic interplay of factors that will shape the continent's strategic trajectory.

## 1. STRENGTHENED MULTILATERALISM AND ENHANCED COOPERATION

In this optimistic scenario, European nations and institutions manage to overcome internal divisions and external challenges, leading to a renewed commitment to multilateralism and collective security.

Key characteristics of the scenario include:

- **Robust Multilateral Synergy:** The OSCE with other regional organizations develop a more integrated and complementary approach to security, combining economic and diplomatic prowess with security and military capabilities.
- **Effective Management of Common Threats:** Europe successfully addresses threats such as cyber-attacks, terrorism, and hybrid warfare through enhanced intelligence-sharing, joint operations, and coordinated policy responses.
- **Proactive Approach to Emerging Challenges:** Europe takes a leading role in addressing global challenges like climate change and migration, implementing forward-looking policies that not only mitigate immediate threats but also contribute to long-term stability and prosperity.





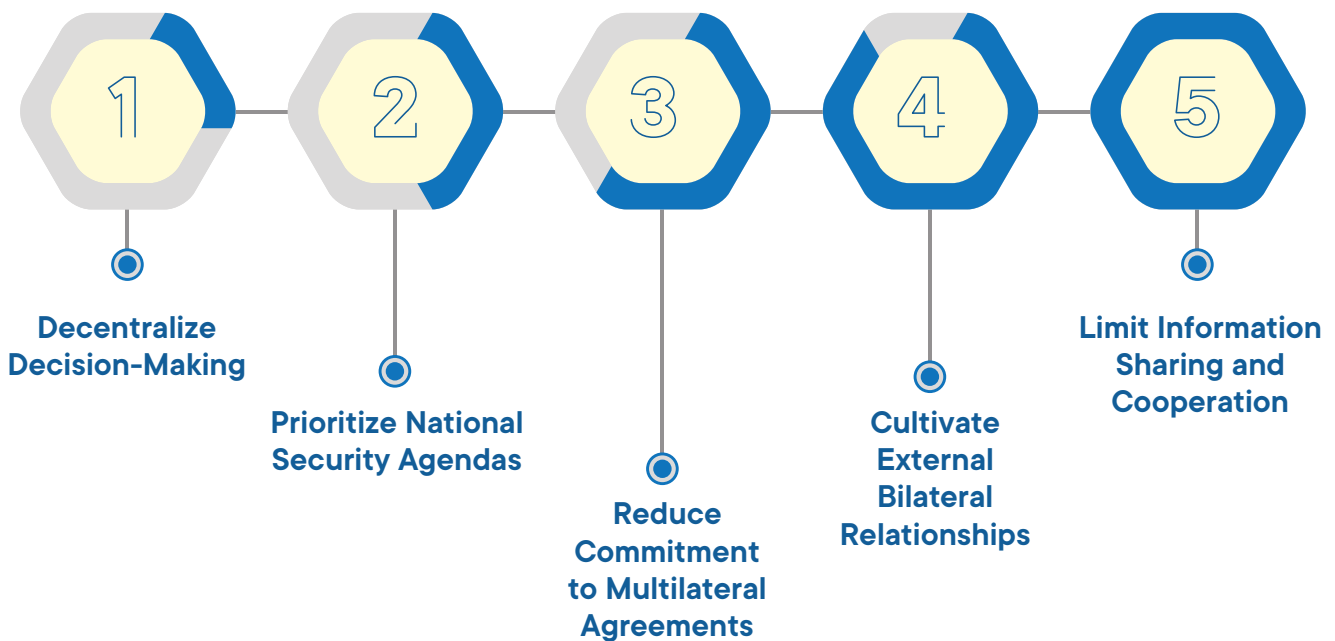


## 2. FRAGMENTATION AND UNILATERALISM

In this scenario, internal divisions, and a lack of consensus on key issues lead to fragmentation within Europe, with nations pursuing unilateral approaches to security.

Key characteristics of the scenario include:

- **Erosion of Multilateral Institutions:** Regional organizations face challenges in maintaining cohesion and effectiveness, leading to a decline in their influence and capabilities.
- **Increased Reliance on National Solutions:** European nations prioritize national security strategies over collective approaches, leading to a patchwork of policies and the potential for conflicting interests and actions.
- **Vulnerability to External Influence:** The lack of a unified front makes Europe more susceptible to external influence and interference, potentially leading to a further erosion of cohesion and stability.



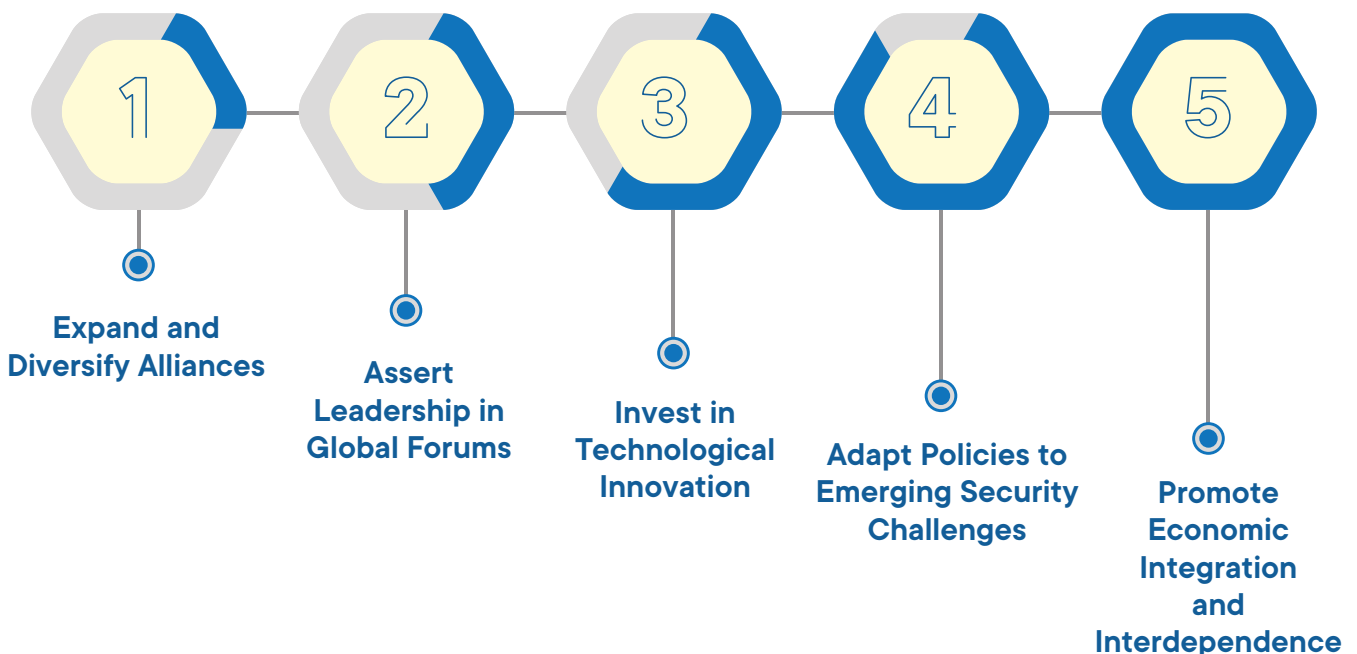
While these steps outline how the scenario of «Fragmentation and Unilateralism» might unfold, it's crucial to approach them with the understanding that such a pathway could lead to increased vulnerabilities, decreased collective strength, and a heightened susceptibility to external influences and instability within the region.

### 3. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND GLOBAL LEADERSHIP

In this scenario, Europe leverages its economic, diplomatic, and military capabilities to forge strategic partnerships and assert itself as a global leader in security cooperation.

Key characteristics of this scenario include:

- **Dynamic Alliances and Partnerships:** Europe strengthens alliances with traditional partners like the United States and engages with emerging powers and regional blocs, creating a network of cooperative relationships that enhance global security.
- **Leadership in Addressing Global Challenges:** Europe takes the lead in addressing critical issues like climate change, migration, and conflict resolution, setting global standards and driving international efforts.
- **Innovation and Adaptation:** European nations invest in technological innovation and adapt their policies and institutions to the changing security landscape, ensuring resilience and preparedness for future challenges.



## NENAD MARKOVIKJ

### ***PRESPA Institute***

Professor Markovikj has established a notable career in political sciences, culminating in his appointment as a Tenured Professor at the Faculty of Law “Justinianus Primus” in Skopje since 2020. He obtained his Ph.D. in Political Sciences and is well-versed in teaching a variety of subjects including Political Theories, Civil Society, Political Philosophy, Good Governance and Management, Political Culture, and Political Mythology. His scientific and research pursuits are broad, encompassing democratization, human rights, good governance and management, nationalism, nation-building, and both theoretical and applied political sciences. This extensive background underlines his commitment and expertise in the field of political studies.

In addition to his academic accomplishments, Professor Markovikj has held significant roles in various political science associations and institutions. He is a former president of the Macedonian Political Science Society and a founding member of both the Balkan Political Science Association (BPSA) and the Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” – Skopje (IDSCS). His influence extends to the editorial realm as a member of the Editorial Board of the magazine “Political Thought,” published by the “Konrad Adenauer” Foundation – Skopje and IDSCS. Since 2019, he has been a member of the National Security Council, emphasizing his involvement in security matters. As of October 2022, he holds the position of Senior Research Fellow at the PRESPA Institute, furthering his engagement in political science research and analysis.

## VESNA POPOSKA

### ***PRESPA Institute***

Vesna has carved a distinguished path in the field of Law, beginning with her education at the «Justinianus Primus» Faculty of Law in Skopje and advancing through to a Master’s degree in International Law and International Relations. She further elevated her academic credentials by completing her Doctoral Studies at the “General Mihailo Apostolski” Military Academy in Skopje, focusing on the international legal aspects of protecting critical infrastructure from modern security threats. Remarkably, she is the first and only woman to have earned a Ph.D. at this Academy. Professionally, Vesna has been making significant contributions as the Dean of the Faculty of Law at Vision International University since 2021, underscoring her leadership in the academic community.

Vesna’s research interests are centered on International Law, and Foreign and Security Policy. Her involvement with Civil Society has been extensive and varied, addressing democracy, human rights, rule of law, and gender equality. She has worked as a consultant, trainer, facilitator, and researcher on numerous projects, including those under the NATO Science for Peace and Security Program and Public Diplomacy. She has also authored around thirty scientific and professional papers both domestically and internationally. Her educational journey includes notable programs like the School of Politics of the Council of Europe, the Political Academy for Social Democracy, and several other prestigious institutes, highlighting her dedication to continued learning and leadership. Since March 2023, Vesna has been a Senior Research Fellow at the PRESPA Institute, further contributing to her field with her expertise and experience.

## FILIP MILENKOSKI

### ***PRESPA Institute***

Filip is a dedicated professional with a strong background in international relations, diplomacy, and youth engagement. Upon graduating high school in Vienna, he completed his Bachelor studies in International Relations and Diplomacy in Skopje.

Filip is serving as an Education USA Advisor, and a Project Coordinator for the Macedonian United Nations Association.

Fluent in Macedonian, English, and German, he is also active in the youth community, currently serving as a Young European Ambassador, and a member of the U.S. Embassy Youth Council. Filip's interests lie in the domain of international security, as he has conducted various research on the OSCE, and completed the 2023 OSCE Scholarship for Peace and Security training programme on conflict prevention and resolution. Since October 2023, Filip has been a Junior Researcher and Project Coordinator at the PRESPA Institute in Skopje.

## ANDREJA STOJKOVSKI

### ***PRESPA Institute***

Andreja Stojkovski boasts a distinguished academic and professional background in International Law and International Relations, with a degree from the Faculty of Law at the University Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje and a Master's in EU Law from the University Carlos III in Madrid. His journey includes fellowships such as the Open World Fellow of the Congressional Office for International Leadership and the Exchange Alumni of the State Department. Professionally, he brings over two decades of experience in Civil Society and Institutional roles. His expertise in Environmental Law and higher education, combined with his early career at the Unit for European Integration at the General Secretariat of the Government, highlights his focus on justice, home affairs, and legislative harmonization. From 2006 to 2018, as part of a think-tank community, he championed EU Society Europeanisation and accession, playing a key role in overseeing police, security, and intelligence agencies reform processes.

In addition to his academic tenure as a Teaching Assistant at the University American College Skopje from 2009 to 2016, Stojkovski also served as an Advisor and Deputy to the Chief Technical Negotiator in the Cabinet of the former Prime Minister of North Macedonia, Zoran Zaev. His representation of the PRESPA Institute led to his membership in the Permanent Strategic Council of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of North Macedonia and the Project Committee MKD-NATO2030 of the Ministry of Defense, where he chairs the Military Diplomacy Sub-Committee. He was appointed by H.E. Dr. Bujar Osmani, Minister of Foreign Affairs, as the OSCE 2023 Chairperson in Office's Special Representative for Civil Society. Since February 2020, Stojkovski has been serving as the Executive Director of the PRESPA Institute, a position that underscores his ongoing commitment to civil society and international relations.

## PHILIP T. REEKER

### *The Wilson Center*

Ambassador (ret.) Philip T. Reeker is the Chair of the Wilson Center's Global Europe Program and Partner and Lead of the Europe & Eurasia practice at Albright Stonebridge Group.

Before joining the Wilson Center, Ambassador Reeker served as Chargé d'Affaires at the U.S. Embassy in the United Kingdom (2021-22), and was Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia (2019-21). Before retiring from the Foreign Service, he was the Secretary of State's Senior Advisor for Caucasus Negotiations. Earlier in Ambassador Reeker's extensive diplomatic career, he was the U.S. Ambassador to North Macedonia, Civilian Deputy and Policy Advisor to the Commander of U.S. European Command based in Germany, U.S. Consul General in Milan (responsible for northern Italy), and Deputy Chief of Mission in Budapest, Hungary. In Washington, he also served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central Europe, the Balkans, and Holocaust Issues; as Director of Press Relations; and as Deputy Spokesperson of the State Department.

Ambassador Reeker received numerous awards during his distinguished career, including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Distinguished Civilian Service Award) and the American Citizens Abroad Thomas Jefferson Award. He was also named a Commander of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic.

Ambassador Reeker earned his B.A. from Yale University and a Master of International Management/MBA from the Thunderbird School of Global Management at Arizona State University. He is proficient in Italian, Hungarian, Macedonian, and German.

## MATTEO BONOMI

### *Institute for International Affairs*

Matteo Bonomi (Ph.D.) is senior fellow in the "EU, politics and institutions" programme at Istituto Affari Internazionali. His work focuses on European integration and EU enlargement policy. He has been an expert or consultant for a number of institutes, think tanks, foundations, and public agencies across Europe. He has published academic and policy papers on various aspects of EU differentiated integration, Western Balkan-EU relations, and the political economy of EU enlargement. He is member of the "Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group" (BiEPAG) and of the Editorial Committee of the academic journal "The International Spectator." He holds a PhD in «Politics, Human Rights and Sustainability» from the Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna in Pisa, Italy.

## STEFANIA KOLARZ

### ***Polish Institute for International Affairs***

Stefania Kolarz holds the position of Senior Analyst for the OSCE, EU, and International Law within the Global Affairs program at the Polish Institute of International Affairs. Her academic journey includes a Master's degree in law from the University of Wrocław, Poland, a specialization in international and European commercial law from Paris-Dauphine University, France, and further studies in EU diplomacy and international relations at the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium. She is in the advanced stages of her academic career, currently finalizing her PhD thesis, which delves into the international legal status of so-called 'de facto states', with a specific focus on Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Transnistria.

## KARSTEN FRIIS

### ***Norwegian Institute of International Affairs***

Dr. Karsten Friis is a Research Professor at The Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. His research area is security and defense policies in Europe, with an emphasis on NATO, the Nordic region, the Arctic, transatlantic relations, intelligence, cyber security, and the Western Balkans. He is a political scientist with a PhD from the University of Groningen, a Cand. Polit from the University of Oslo and an MSc from the London School of Economics.

Friis has been associated with NUPI since 2007. Before that, he was a political adviser to the OSCE Mission to Serbia (2004 to 2007), the OSCE in Montenegro (2001) and in Kosovo (1999). In addition, Friis has worked for several years in the Norwegian Armed Forces and served at NATO/KFOR in Kosovo. He is also a frequently used commentator in the public discourse - not least in relation to Russia's war against Ukraine.

## LOÏC SIMONET

### ***Austrian Institute for International Affairs***

Dr. Loïc Simonet started his career at the French Ministry of Defence in Paris. In 2008, he was appointed as Politico-Military Counsellor of the French Permanent Representation to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) in Vienna and, in 2013, he joined the Secretariat of the OSCE as Senior External Co-operation Officer, until June 2021. In this capacity, he liaised with the European Union and NATO.

In 2021, Dr. Simonet joined the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (OIIIP) as Researcher. He is the author of numerous academic contributions and op-ed pieces on European Security, the OSCE, multilateralism, Arms Control and the geopolitics of Energy.

## IOANNIS ARMAKOLAS

### ***Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP)***

Ioannis Armakolas, Ph.D., (Cantab), is Associate Professor in Comparative Politics of South East Europe at the Department of Balkan, Slavic and Oriental Studies, University of Macedonia and Senior Research Fellow & Head of the South-East Europe Programme at the Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP).

He's also a Visiting Fellow at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies of the European University Institute in Florence, a member of the Europe's Futures network of the Erste Foundation, and a member of the Independent Tripartite High Level Group on EU Neighbourhood Interdependencies.

## **PATRIC PIERCEY**

### ***Jackson School of Global Affairs – Yale University***

Rear Admiral Patrick Piercey is a seasoned senior executive and national security professional with a remarkable career spanning over 35 years in the Department of Defense (DoD). His expertise encompasses a wide range of areas including joint military and naval policy, planning, strategy, operations, and force generation and readiness. Piercey's significant contributions have been recognized in several key positions within the Pentagon and across the globe, with a particular focus on the Indo-Pacific and Europe. Notably, he has held prestigious roles such as the chief of staff for the U.S. European Command and the director of operations for the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, overseeing military operations throughout the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

Piercey's command experience is extensive, having held the position four times, which has enabled him to develop deep strategic, operational, and planning expertise. His critical involvement in shaping and executing DoD strategy in Europe and Asia, alongside managing crises like Russia's invasion of Ukraine and annexation of Crimea, North Korean provocations, and China's activities in the South China Sea, has demonstrated his capability in high-stakes environments. Academically, he holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Systems Engineering from the U.S. Naval Academy, graduating with distinction, and a Masters of Military Arts and Science degree from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Additionally, his experience as a White House Fellow in the Office of Management and Budget and his involvement in rowing at the Naval Academy, being part of the 1984 men's heavyweight IRA national championship crew, further highlight his diverse skill set. Currently, Pat serves as a Highly Qualified Expert – Senior Mentor for the Joint Staff, an independent consultant, and a lecturer at Yale University, contributing his knowledge as an undergraduate capstone faculty member at the Jackson School of Global Affairs for the academic year 2023-2024.

## special thanks

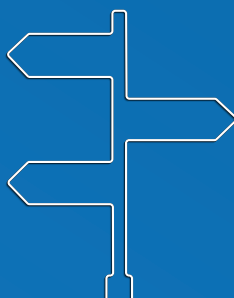
**W**e express our profound appreciation to the myriad of colleagues and institutes involved in this significant endeavor. Special thanks are extended to the OSCE Chairmanship 2023 of North Macedonia, particularly to Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Dr. Bujar Osmani, for his invaluable support. We also acknowledge the crucial support of the FES Regional Office for International Cooperation, whose financial backing and assistance was vital in the organization of the conference that led to this study. Additionally, we are deeply indebted to the Open Society Foundations Western Balkans for their generous financial backing, without which the conference and this study would not have been possible.







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