

# Division and unity: Voter and party perspectives on EU integration under external threat

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## Abstract

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has reshaped European politics, prompting the European Union (EU) to take indirect actions such as aiding Ukraine, accepting refugees, and imposing sanctions on Russia. This special section explores the implications of these events on European unity. Will the war highlight divisions among countries and ideological groups, as “post-functionalists” would predict? Or will the external threat, in line with the “bellicist logic,” and EU solidarity, in line with the “polity formation” literature, foster increased EU policy coordination and centralization? The contributions assess the war’s impact on the supply (political parties) and demand (public opinion) sides of the politics of European integration. The articles show moderate support for the “bellicist” mechanisms of threat and consensus. They also find solidarity and unity for refugee and energy policy, with greater ideological and country divisions over economic policy, defence policy, and appeasement strategies toward Russia.

## Keywords

European integration, Ukraine war, public opinion, party politics, polity-building

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## Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has profoundly shaken the European continent, marking the first major war on European Union (EU) borders since the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s. This unprecedented event brings to the forefront the “bellicist” logic, as articulated by Tilly (1975), which suggests that external threats can drive polity centralization, particularly in defence. Beyond defence, the “polity formation” literature argues that the conflict may activate EU solidarity across policy domains as member states try to support one another economically. As the conflict unfolds, it raises pivotal questions about European public opinion and party politics in a time of crisis. Does this external threat, as the “bellicist” logic and the “polity formation” literature would suggest, foster greater transnational solidarity and a push for further EU integration? Further, as early “neo-functionalism” scholars anticipated, will it lead to more unity (Haas, 1958)? Conversely, will divisions arise among member states over policy responses, especially as costs escalate, aligning with the “post-functionalist” expectations (Hooghe and Marks, 2009)? This special section delves into how the war has influenced public opinion dynamics and party reactions concerning EU politics and policies, probing whether this conflict serves as a critical juncture or “most-likely case” for transformations in public attitudes and party positions, both toward the war itself and the European project more broadly.

Theoretically, the articles in this special section delve into several key debates in the literature on European integration, each anchored in the contributions that analyze public opinion and party responses in the aftermath of Russia’s invasion. Starting with the question of solidarity and integration, the articles explore whether the crisis, in line with the post-functionalist notion of the “constraining dissensus” (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), unveils the limits of solidarity among European publics and parties (De Vries, 2018). Conversely, they also try to answer whether the external threat creates demand for more EU centralization, following a “bellicist” logic (Kelemen and McNamara, 2021). The issue of party convergence is another focal point, examining how the crisis influences the political alignment or divergence between mainstream and more radical parties (Van der Brug et al., 2022; Wagner, 2024). In the realm of European identity and refugees, the contributions shed light on the insights the response to refugees offers about European identity and the norms of burden-sharing (Jeannet et al., 2021). The articles also probe the extent to which economic considerations shape opinion formation, in line with traditional theories of integration. Furthermore, how does the Ukraine conflict relate to wider debates about the effects of crises on European integration (Cross, 2017; Genschel, 2022, 2025; Hoeffler et al., 2024; Jones et al., 2021; Mader et al., 2024)? Lastly, the special section delves into power dynamics, seeking evidence from the Ukraine situation about the power interplay between EU institutions and member states (Moravcsik, 1998; Pollack, 2003).

The articles in the special section aim to address two sets of questions which emerge from the literature. First, they ask whether, in line with the “bellicist” logic, threat perception increases support for Ukraine and EU solidaristic policies, and whether there is wide consensus for policy at both the elite and public opinion

level. Secondly, in line with the “polity formation” literature, they ask whether there is wide support for EU integration in several policy domains, across ideological groups and country divides.

These research questions are explored through a blend of demand-side perspectives, which scrutinize changes in mass attitudes on various issues, and supply-side perspectives, which reveal how parties across the ideological spectrum respond to the crisis. On the demand side, survey data is used to analyze changes in mass attitudes on issues ranging from defense policy to sanctions to refugees. Experiments help uncover individual-level motivations underlying EU policy preferences. Longitudinal surveys reveal opinion dynamics within countries over time. On the supply side, social media and content analysis uncover how parties across the ideological spectrum, and radical right parties in particular, react to the crisis. This combination of demand-side and supply-side perspectives provides a multifaceted understanding of how political actors respond to external shocks. The focus on ongoing opinion and party position changes enables unique insights into real-time shifts as the conflict situation evolves.

## **The EU’s involvement in the Russian war in Ukraine**

The European Union’s response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine of February 24th 2022 was swift and decisive. The EU, which had various sanction regimes imposed on Russia following its 2014 annexation of Crimea, deployed initial sanctions in the days prior to the invasion, in response to Russian troops amassing on the border and into previously occupied areas (Erlanger and Stevis-Gridneff, 2022). In the days following the invasion, EU member states, in an unprecedented show of unity, imposed immediate sanctions on the Russian state and its elites. An initial list of sanctions was drawn on the day of the invasion. This was followed on February 28th by a package banning transactions with the Russian Central Bank, as well as a 500 million Euro initial military aid package to Ukraine (Commission, 2023b). On March 2nd came the SWIFT ban on seven Russian banks, which excluded them from international transactions. EU member states were comparatively slower and more gradual in imposing sanctions on Russian energy, for reasons elaborated in the piece by Oana et al. (2025). On April 8th came the first set of energy sanctions, as the EU banned imports of coal and other solid fossil fuels, as well as several other imports and exports from and to Russia. This was followed on May 30-31st by bans on crude oil and petroleum products (with an exception for pipelines) (Strupczewski, 2022). Sanctions were continuously updated and expanded as the war progressed. On December 3rd, 2022, EU member states agreed on a price cap of 60 USD per barrel of oil, further expanded in February 2023.

Just as EU member states showed unity with regards to sanctions on Russia, so too did they show unity when it came to solidarity with Ukraine. EU countries quickly embraced Ukrainian refugees, and on March 4th the Council activated the Temporary Protection Directive, automatically granting Ukrainians residency permits, access to employment and social welfare for up to three years (Moise et al., 2023). Over four million refugees benefit from protection inside EU countries, the majority (over two million) in Germany and Poland. The EU also provided, together with other Western allies, critical military,

humanitarian, and economic aid, amounting to 67 billion EUR in the first year following the invasion (Commission, 2023a), offering another 50 billion in support through 2027 (Baczynska, 2023).

Thus, while the EU is not a direct belligerent, it is deeply involved in Russia's war against Ukraine. It has taken a clear adversarial position against Russian aggression, against which it has imposed sanctions that also hurt member state economies. The EU has taken extraordinary measures to aid Ukraine. Member states continue to deal with the repercussions from rising energy prices. The security crisis created by the war has also upended decades of EU foreign policy, and military policy consensus in member states. Against this backdrop, we ask how such a momentous event might impact the structure of the European polity itself.

### **Rokkan vs. Tilly: European polity-formation in times of crisis**

How should we expect the EU's political structure to be affected in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine? Working in the Rokkanian tradition, Ferrera et al. (2024) start from the observation that rather than being weakened by the many crises it has faced in the past 15 years (financial, euro-zone, refugees, Brexit, COVID), the EU has shown remarkable resilience and even further strengthened itself. In order to explain this resilience, this "polity formation" literature studies the endogenous processes that lead polities to centralize or disintegrate. Following Rokkan (1999) and Hirschman (1970), it argues that states form by building boundaries which discourage exit options, and by building representation which empowers voice. Fulfilling these roles in turn generates system loyalty and identification. Crises come as disruptors. The dynamics of a crisis impact the competency distribution between the EU and member states. The emerging conflict configurations determine the scope of policy response and the subsequent distribution of competences (Truchlewski et al., 2024). For instance, Wang and Moise (2023) find that perceived short-term and long-term threats amplify public demand for more centralized and unified EU foreign and security policies in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, supporting the "polity formation" logic in times of crisis. Importantly, this "polity-formation" literature is agnostic as to whether these processes lead to more or less polity-building, which depends on these dynamics.

What is crucial is the crisis dynamic. Crises which hit all member states symmetrically, and which are perceived to be outside the control of member states, are more likely to elicit cooperative and solidaristic responses from member states, empowering the center to take action (Ferrara and Kriesi, 2022). Common threats create a sense of transnational compassion which facilitates joint-decision making (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2021). The Russian invasion of Ukraine clearly fulfills the criteria of being externally generated, outside the control of member states. In terms of symmetry, the picture is more complex and policy-dependent. On the energy front, all member states were hit with energy price hikes. However, some member states had higher reliance on Russian energy than others, which meant that they had the added burden of finding new energy sources in the face of shortages (Oana et al., 2025). In terms of refugees, frontline states (Poland, Hungary, Romania) were harder hit in the short term by

transiting refugees, while destination states (primarily Poland and Germany) took a higher burden of refugees in the long term. Some asymmetries are also visible in the defense realm. Countries such as Poland and Romania feel more exposed to Russian aggression and vulnerable to spill-overs, while non-NATO countries, such as Austria and Sweden (as of yet not accepted into NATO), cannot rely on NATO security guarantees.

Nonetheless, while some degree of asymmetry exists, it may be overcome by the shared sense of threat and involvement in the conflict. As several contributions to the special section argue, in particular (Moise et al., 2025), the Russian invasion of Ukraine adds another dimension to the crisis dynamics, besides symmetry and exogeneity. What sets the war apart from COVID, with which it shares the initial two characteristics, is that it is a geopolitical struggle with an actor (Russia) with strategic interests against the EU. Threat from a strategic actor is different from the threat of a mindless virus. The actor can adapt to your measures, escalate, and generally attempt to outmaneuver you. This type of threat therefore requires more systematic coordination, quicker response times, and strategic long-term planning.

This logic is better captured in the bellicist literature, started by Riker (1964) and developed by Tilly (1985). In short, the Tillyans argue that “war made the state and the state made war” (Tilly, 1975: 42). The threat of war pushes small political units to bind together in order to survive the threat (Cederman et al., 2023). The benefits of centralization outweigh the costs and loss of sovereignty (Moise et al., 2024). The mechanism runs through taxation, necessary to maintain a standing army, which then creates demand for representation. More recently, and prior to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Kelemen and McNamara (2021) have argued that it was the lack of external threat that has resulted in an imbalanced EU, which was focused on market-making but lacks coercive power. The “bellicist logic” makes two specific claims which the articles in this special section aim to test. The first, the “threat mechanism,” claims that greater threat increases both elite and public support for integration. The second, the “consensus mechanism,” claims that the war should create greater unity among both elites and the public (Steiner et al., 2023).

This argument has been criticized from several directions when applied to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. First, the EU was not directly attacked and does not face an imminent military threat. Nonetheless, as elaborated in the previous section, the EU is heavily affected by the war and is heavily involved in it, taking a clear side. As the contribution by Moise and Wang (2025) makes clear, the level of threat perception by EU citizens is quite high. Second, EU member states differ from sub-units that would go on to form nation-states by the fact that they already have well developed state powers, including armies, taxation, and welfare (Ferrera, 2005). Finally, given that most EU countries are members of NATO, and all benefit from US security guarantees, the functional pressure to develop military competences is low (Genschel, 2022).

The articles in this special section go further in this debate by unpacking how a “bellicist” mechanism might work across different policy fields, and how it might impact both public opinion and political parties. They also show the limits of such a mechanism, as unity may be undermined by the costs of the war, politicization, and internal conflict.

The “polity formation” literature complements the “bellicist” logic by showing how integration may be spurred in domains other than defence. Following a “social-security logic” (Ferrera and Schelkle, 2023; Moise et al., 2023), the war may be bringing EU member states together in order to compensate for the costs of the war and EU policy aiding Ukraine. This might imply direct compensation to countries that are harder hit by the crisis (e.g. Poland and Germany for taking in most refugees) or EU-wide measures to attenuate the impact of higher energy prices. Previous literature has found high support among the public for measures targeting social security at the EU level due to the war (Natili and Visconti, 2023). Market integration fuels high expectations of social security among citizens (Ferrera, 2020). To the degree that the war exacerbates EU economic vulnerabilities, such a mechanism may generate higher demand for compensation at the EU level.

The contributions to this special section combine these different perspectives. Ultimately, the differences between the Rokkanian and Tillian perspectives need not be irreconcilable. Indeed, as argued by (Moise et al., 2025) the Tillian bellicist logic need not operate solely through taxation, but rather can activate different vulnerabilities of a polity. Fabbrini (2023) argues that the war in Ukraine has strengthened the rationale for expanding the NGEU fund due to fiscal pressure created by the war. He argues that the EU response to the Russian invasion would have been stronger had it not been for structural weaknesses in fiscal policy, thus creating pressure for reform. Additionally, member states may require further aid to cover the costs of energy transition and humanitarian assistance to refugees. Thus, while some functionalist arguments point to the fact that the EU may not develop defense functions (Genschel and Schimmelfennig, 2022), the war may nonetheless spur further integration in fiscal policy, to “safeguard the European economy and strategic autonomy” (Fabbrini, 2023: 157). Conversely, the Rokkanian mechanism of generating system loyalty by promising protection through boundary-building may become activated as the EU may be seen as (partly) responsible for the security of citizens. Similarly to COVID, the Russian war in Ukraine may trigger a response meant to address the weaknesses of the EU and the possible negative effects on the union through inaction, through polity maintenance (Alexander-Shaw et al., 2023; Ferrera et al., 2021).

The conditions under which polity maintenance can be activated during the Russian war in Ukraine remain to be theorized and tested. We posit two mechanisms: increase in problem pressure and increase in political pressure. Problem pressure refers to increased threat to the polity. When EU member states were facing energy shortages and price hikes due to sanctions and Russia cutting off energy flows, their energy ministers came together and agreed on energy price caps in order to lower costs (Abnett, 2022). Increasing problem pressure might also come from an escalation in the conflict. Oana et al. (2025) test this hypothesis in an experimental design to see if Russian escalation results in higher demand for EU energy solidarity. Other sources may be the long-term burden of hosting refugees or spiraling inflation. The second mechanism, increasing political pressure, may be activated by increasing the salience of the war. This may come about if the dynamic of the war shifts dramatically, particularly in Russia’s favor, threatening EU allies and geopolitical interests. Political pressure can be activated when elites

politicize policy responses. Most crucially for the crisis at hand, it remains to be seen to what degree the far right can capitalize on public frustrations over the costs of EU support in the war.

Ultimately, problem pressure and political pressure resulting from the crisis situation do not translate directly into policy and polity changes. Political actors, constrained by public opinion, are the ones who make the binding decisions for how to deal with the crisis. Integration need not mean centralization, but strengthening of the member states (Genschel and Jachtenfuchs, 2014; Milward, 1992). The following section elaborates on how the contributions in this special section contribute to these debates, focusing first on the supply side of policy (i.e. political parties), and then the demand side (i.e. public opinion).

## **Supply and demand in the politics of European integration**

National political parties stand as pivotal actors in the politicization of European integration. Their stances and responses to the European project, as explored by Almeida (2012), have been shown to vary significantly across party families and countries. For instance, while some parties have historically been more favorable toward integration, others, especially radical right and national-conservative factions, have often mobilized national identities against it. This divergence in party responses has been further complicated by the potential disconnect between the positions of MEPs and the preferences of the national electorates they represent. The Europeanization of politics, as discussed by Caramani (2015), has also led to shifts in electoral integration, party systems, and even ideological convergence within European party families. Furthermore, issues like immigration have added layers of complexity to party politics in the EU, leading to changing dynamics in party competition and increased ideological uncertainty (Odmalm, 2014). Given the relative weakness of the party system at the European level, these parties, especially those leaning toward the radical right, have been particularly active at the member state level, aiming to influence national positions on European matters.

The study presented by Wang and Altiparmakis (2025) offers a deep dive into the evolving dynamics of radical right parties, especially those previously sympathetic to Putin. By utilizing large language models (LLMs) to analyze a decade's worth of Facebook posts from eleven European radical right parties, the paper provides insights into these parties' shifting stances concerning Russia and the EU. The findings suggest a strategy of obfuscation post-invasion. Most radical right parties altered their pro-Russia stance, and these parties navigate the complex waters of public opinion by deflecting attention from the war, leveraging the Ukrainian events to reinforce their anti-EU narratives. This obfuscation strategy resonates with the broader theoretical framework of "constraining dissensus" (Hooghe and Marks, 2009), where external pressures lead to strategic political maneuvering. As European integration becomes more salient and politicized, public opinion becomes more polarized, constraining elite actions. In the context of the Ukraine crisis, these parties strategically navigate the polarized landscape, avoiding a clear stance that might alienate their base or appear out of touch with broader public sentiment.

Building on these party-specific analyses, Sojka et al. (2025) offers a broader perspective on the Europeanization of political discourse post-invasion. By analyzing a unique dataset of 591,472 Facebook posts from 175 national political parties in the EU from 2019 to 2023, the study sheds light on how the war has influenced European political dialogue. The evident rise in mentions of European institutions in domestic political discussions post-invasion underscores the European dimension of the conflict. This trend, juxtaposed against the strategies of specific party groups, paints a comprehensive picture of the evolving political landscape in Europe, echoing the earlier discussions on neo-functionalism which anticipates that external threats might foster greater transnational solidarity and support for further EU integration. The conflict, by emphasizing the European dimension, might be fostering a sense of transnational solidarity, as parties and the public alike recognize the need for a collective European response.

These contributions on the supply side illuminate the intricate interplay between party politics and broader European integration narratives. The Ukraine conflict, as these studies reveal, has not only reshaped individual party strategies but has also influenced the broader discourse on European integration, with implications that will likely reverberate for years to come. At the same time, the partisan difference also has significant implications for understanding individuals' attitudes on the demand side (De Vries and Edwards, 2009). It has been shown that people rely on their party affiliation as a guide when forming opinions on and these cues then influence voters to align with their party's position (Kam, 2005; Petersen et al., 2013).

Turning to the demand side, European politics is often considered low salience for voters, as highlighted by the lower turnout for European elections compared to national ones. On top of this, EU policy-making is highly technical and complex, while information is scarce (Marks and Steenbergen, 2002). However, in crisis times, European politics may take on additional salience, as EU issues get debated in both the national and EU arena, and headlines focus on the crisis. The war in Ukraine, similar to COVID, dominated headlines and brought renewed attention to common European decision-making (Barthel and Bürkner, 2020).

Moise and Wang (2025) analyze the dynamics of European citizens' support for Ukraine in the conflict. They analyze the determinants for support for de-escalation strategies that would offer concessions to Russia (such as trading Ukrainian territory for peace, or limiting military aid). Using panel data, they distinguish between utilitarian and ideological considerations. They find that ideological factors, primarily trust in Ukraine and Russia but also political ideology and national identity, are the most important in determining support for such strategies. Utilitarian and material concerns have an important, but smaller effect, as individuals who perceive higher threat and personal economic costs for the war are more likely to support appeasement. Ultimately, they show that support for Ukraine remains strong (with the exception of Hungary), with small divisions based on partisan lines.

Two articles dive deeper into public support of specific policies at the EU level, utilizing experimental designs. Moise et al. (2025) build on the "bellicist" literature and theorize that external threats can drive polity-formation in diverse policy fields, not just defense or taxation. Threats expose vulnerabilities, leading to benefits of centralizing



affected domains. They posit two types of challenges that emerge from threats: a direct one posed by the geopolitical challenge of Russia, and an indirect one of maintaining unity among member states. They test the theory utilizing a conjoint experiment in five pivotal countries. The design evaluates which policy areas EU citizens prefer more coordination in and which areas influence their political program choices. Findings reveal a strong consensus for sharing refugee costs across different ideologies and nations. However, agreement in other policy areas is more divisive, indicating that consensus-building is essential before implementing broader polity-formation measures. Oana et al. (2025) focus on sharing the burden of energy costs at the EU level and energy sanctions on Russia. They start from the asymmetry between countries when it comes to public debt and energy dependence on Russia, providing a test of whether the asymmetric aspects of the war divide member state publics. Among seven countries in the experimental study, only Hungarians prefer, on average, to continue Russian energy imports. They show that increasing problem pressure, escalation of the conflict by Russia, increases acceptance of sanctions, as does burden-sharing at the EU level. Importantly, while there is wide consensus between countries, there are strong ideological divisions within countries, that may yet undermine unity.

## Discussion and conclusion

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has undeniably reshaped the European political landscape, prompting a reevaluation of the European Union's role, its internal dynamics, and its relationship with external actors. This special section has delved deep into the multifaceted implications of the conflict, offering insights into the intricate interplay between public opinion, party politics, and the broader narratives of European integration.

The articles in the special section have sought to test key implications of two key theories, "the bellicist logic" and the "polity-formation logic," when it comes to political integration in the EU in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. First, they analyzed the key implications of the "bellicist logic", namely that greater threat leads to greater unity among elites and the public and to greater demand for political integration. On the supply side, Sojka et al. (2025) found that the war increased the degree of vertical Europeanisation of political discourse, in line with the threat mechanism. In addition, supported also by the findings of Wang and Altiparmakis (2025), the far right has grown more silent as it tried to hide its affinities with Putin's regime. Nonetheless, they show evidence which contradicts the consensus mechanism, by showing that there are important ideological differences at the elite level.

At the public opinion level, the articles show that the role of threat is nuanced. Oana et al. (2025) demonstrate experimentally that a severe Russian escalation in the war is associated with greater support for energy sanctions. However, a temporal increase in the threat perception of individuals makes them more likely to want to stop support for Ukraine (Moise and Wang, 2025). Thus, greater problem pressure in the form of higher threat increases within-EU solidarity but appears to limit solidarity with Ukraine. Ultimately, the evidence for the threat mechanism is mixed. Moreover, in line with recent findings at the party level (Hooghe et al., 2024), the articles in the

special section find that the effect of threat is less important when compared to ideological divides and views on the war. The public opinion articles also offer some evidence against the consensus mechanism of the “bellicist logic” by showing that there is heterogeneity in support for EU policies, in particular for defence policy and appeasement toward Russia.

The Rokkanian “polity-formation” approach offers several implications tested by the articles. First, the external nature of the crisis, despite some asymmetries in how countries are affected across policy fields, has resulted in limited cross-national differences in public support for common EU policies and further centralization, in particular for refugee and energy policy (Moise et al., 2025; Oana et al., 2025). On the elite level, Sojka et al. (2025) show only modest differences between parties in countries that are close to the conflict and those that are further away. Second, Moise et al. (2025) argue that a “polity-maintenance logic,” on top of a “bellicist logic” is responsible for the differential support for EU integration across policy fields. Support for sharing costs for refugees or energy has important implications for polity-formation, as it implies increasing resources at the EU level and transferring of competences. On the other hand, there is less consensus in favor of centralizing foreign or defense policy across countries.

Second, the different examinations also investigate the degree of heterogeneity within countries in order to evaluate the extent of the political pressure faced by elites. Moise et al. (2025) find that support for refugee policy, and to a lesser degree energy policy, cuts across ideological lines. Energy solidarity is also supported by Oana et al. (2025) who, despite finding some ideological divides, show that all groups support energy sanctions. Divisions are, however, larger for foreign policy, defense policy, and regarding appeasement strategies (Moise and Wang, 2025). Coupled with the findings from political parties, showing the timid reaction of the far right, we conclude that both the demand and supply side show little prospect for forming a strong “constraining dissensus” on integration following the start of the war. Thus, political pressure is low, and conditions are ripe for elites to push integration forward. The question remains as to whether elites would be incentivized to do so.

The external threat posed by the war in Ukraine has also reignited debates on the EU’s competencies and its role in addressing such challenges. The bellicist literature, which posits that external threats drive polity-formation, finds resonance in the EU’s response to the war. While the EU may not directly develop defense functions, the conflict has spurred discussions on deeper integration in other areas, such as fiscal policy and energy security, as predicted by the social-security logic and the polity-maintenance mechanism of the Rokkanian approach.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has presented the European Union with one of its most significant challenges in recent history. The contributions in this special section offer an exploration of the conflict’s implications for European integration, public opinion, and party politics. While the path forward is uncertain, the discussions in this issue underscore the resilience of the European project and the potential for deeper integration in the face of external threats.

Looking ahead, the reelection of Donald Trump in 2024 raises additional questions about the EU’s trajectory. Trump’s first term reshaped transatlantic relations, undermining trust in traditional alliances like NATO and the broader multilateral order. A second

term could amplify these dynamics, potentially reducing U.S. support for Ukraine, weakening NATO, and further isolating the EU as a geopolitical actor. Whether this scenario will serve as a critical juncture—compelling the EU to accelerate its path toward strategic autonomy in defense, energy security, and fiscal coordination—remains to be seen. The findings in this special section thus provide crucial insights into how the EU might navigate these geopolitical challenges, balancing internal unity with external resilience in an increasingly uncertain global order.

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The authors contributed equally to this article.

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### Data availability statement

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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