

EU-Ukraine relations and the security situation in the country

SUMMARY

Since the beginning of 2021, Ukraine has struggled with Russia's attempts to further destabilise the country and intensify tensions in Europe's east, including through repetitive military build-ups along Ukraine's borders. Russia's most recent threatening troop manoeuvres, together with its unsupportable security demands, met with a united response from Western countries, making it clear that a very high price will be paid if Russia attacks Ukraine. The EU and its institutions, including the European Parliament, have been clear in their response to Russia's aggression on Ukrainian territory. The EU does not recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea and regularly calls on Russia to de-escalate and withdraw its forces, and urges Moscow and Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine to adhere to the ceasefire agreement. Currently the situation remains very volatile.

Relations between the European Union and Ukraine continue to be shaped by the 2014 Association Agreement, which includes the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. The long-term relationship between the EU and Ukraine covers a broad range of areas including trade, providing assistance to the country's health sector, support for the country's reform agenda, and support for the fight against hybrid attacks against Ukraine that have been perpetrated by Russia ever since Ukraine made its firm pro-European choice in 2014.

Russia decided to respond aggressively to the Revolution of Dignity – a revolution whose main aim was the signature of the Association Agreement – and immediately after the change of power in Ukraine in 2014 it annexed Crimea and moved to actively support Donbas separatists. Intensive fighting in Donbas in 2014 and early 2015 led to the Minsk agreements, but limited progress in implementing the agreements on the Russian side have led to the prolongation of Western sanctions against Russia. Russia continues its bullying policy towards Ukraine with a wide range of instruments, including disinformation, blackmail and cyber-attacks.



IN THIS BRIEFING

- Background
- Russian military manoeuvres on Ukraine's borders
- Russia's leverage over Ukraine and other possible threats
- Security situation in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions
- Situation in Crimea
- EU support to Ukraine
- EU-Ukraine cooperation on security and defence policy
- European Parliament position

Background

Ukraine – which last year celebrated 30 years of [independence](#) – has, for a long time, been following a path to European integration. After long negotiations, the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA) was to be signed during the Vilnius 2013 Eastern Partnership summit. Only a few days ahead of the summit, then-president Viktor Yanukovich announced, under pressure from Russia, that he was pulling out of the AA. The resulting [Revolution of Dignity](#) overthrew the president, who fled to Russia. The AA and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA, which is part of the AA) were signed in 2014 and, after an initial period of provisional implementation pending ratification, the AA entered fully into force in September 2017. The AA aims to accelerate the process of deepening political and economic relations between Ukraine and the EU, including gradual integration of Ukraine into the EU internal market. This is to be done, inter alia, [through](#) regulatory approximation (the 'deep and comprehensive' component of the DCFTA) and trade liberalisation (the 'free trade' component of the DCFTA).

Losing influence in Ukraine, Russian president [Vladimir Putin](#) moved to annex Crimea in February 2014, in violation of the [1994 Budapest Memorandum](#). Moreover, he sent [troops](#) and [weapons](#) into eastern Ukraine in support of Donbas separatists. The [European Court of Human Rights](#) concluded that Russia has exercised [effective control](#) over Crimea since [27 February 2014](#) – the day when the Supreme Council and the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea were taken over by the '[little green men](#)', military units without insignia, whose state allegiance was [recognised](#) by President Putin only on the first anniversary of the peninsula's annexation. Commenting on these events, then US Vice-President [Joe Biden](#) called Russia's activities 'a brazen military incursion', and annexation of the peninsula 'nothing more than a land grab'.

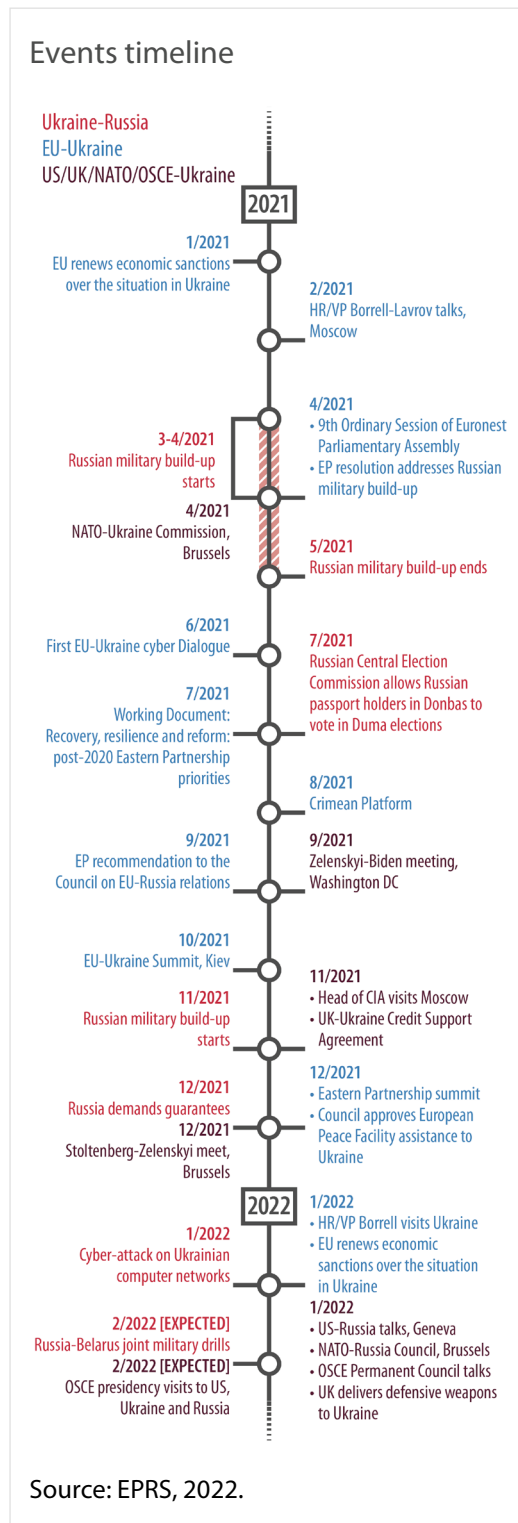
The European Union (EU) supports reforms in Ukraine and the country's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity; these are threatened by Russia's ongoing hybrid warfare against the country, which includes, inter alia, repetitive build-ups, support for separatists, disinformation and cyber-threats. Similarly, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) has [affirmed](#) its commitment to the sovereignty, political independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, and has called upon all states and international organisations to stay away from acknowledging the territorial offence as lawful.

Russia's most recent [demands](#) – to exclude the possibility of Ukraine becoming a member of NATO – met with a firm [refusal](#) by NATO and its members, many of them also EU Member States, as the demands undermine nations' rights to self-determination and free choice of alliances, both for NATO countries and aspiring states. However, while NATO's [2008 Bucharest summit declaration](#) stated that both Ukraine and Georgia will become NATO members, their NATO membership has not materialised, as NATO was [reluctant](#) to trigger further Russian aggression and has not granted them the Membership Action Plan, the next step on the membership path for the two countries.

The Council of the European Union discussed the European security situation on 24 January 2022 and approved [conclusions](#) which emphasised the indivisibility of European security: 'Any challenge to the European security order affects the security of the EU and its Member States'. The Council rejected notions of 'spheres of influence', condemned Russia's continued aggressive actions and threats against Ukraine and called on Russia to de-escalate, abide by international law and engage constructively in dialogue. The Council reiterated the [European Council](#) conclusions of 16 December 2021, stating 'that any further military aggression by Russia against Ukraine will have massive consequences and severe costs'.

Russian military manoeuvres on Ukraine's borders

Military build-up of Russian forces in 2021 and 2022



A threatening military build-up of Russian forces on the Russia-Ukraine border and in occupied Crimea took place in the [spring of 2021](#). It was estimated to include [100 000 soldiers](#) and finished with Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu's [announcement](#) that Russia would withdraw its troops by 1 May 2021. While some military units were actually withdrawn to their permanent deployment locations, it was also [reported](#) that their equipment, including trucks and armoured vehicles, were left there. Should the need to use them arise, it would only require the transporting of soldiers back to the border.

The latest strengthening of Russia's [military posture](#) near the border with Ukraine since the end of October 2021 has set off alarm bells in Brussels, Washington, and foremost in Kyiv. The number of Russian personnel at the border with Ukraine rose to [100 000 troops](#) according to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. According to Jane's [force monitoring](#), on 28-29 October Russia deployed forces near the northern Ukrainian border. Equipment belonging to the 1st Guards Tank Army was also believed to have been sent to the same location. The deployment of troops 'marks a clear deviation from the 1st Guards Tank Army's standard training pattern', the analysis notes.

In contrast to the build-up of March-April 2021, this recent massing of troops does not seem to be aligned with a military exercise. Moreover, Russia blocked almost 70 % of the [Sea of Azov](#) in December 2021 and announced that joint military exercises would take place in February 2022 with Belarus along the latter country's [borders](#) with Ukraine and the EU. The transfer of Russian soldiers and military equipment started to arrive in [Belarus](#) in January 2022.

In response, Ukraine [deployed](#) 8 500 troops in November 2021 to its border with Belarus under a 'special operation', as it feared Russia might stage a military assault through Belarus. Ukraine conducted a military [drill](#) to the north-west of Crimea to prepare for any emergency situations in late January 2022, and is organising [Territorial Defence Forces](#) (TDF) in each of the country's regions. The TDF should first reach its permanent size of 10 000 troops for peacetime, then it

will be extended to 130 000 reservists for special periods. The United Kingdom has provided Ukraine with light anti-armour weapons.

At the time of writing, tensions are high, with US intelligence identifying the preparation of [provocative false flag actions](#) on Ukrainian territory. There are also suggestions that the most recent

cyber-attack of 14 January 2022 contained, among other possible purposes, [false flag](#) elements aimed at creating nationalist hatred, most probably in both Ukraine and Poland. The British government shared [intelligence](#) indicating that Russia is preparing to install a pro-Russian government in Ukraine; Russia, as in [2014](#), repeatedly [denies](#) it has any intention to invade Ukraine.

Diplomatic actions

The above-mentioned actions were followed by a series of diplomatic exchanges around New Year.

On 17 December 2021, Russia [demanded](#) binding guarantees that Ukraine and Georgia will not become NATO members, as well as limitations on NATO's military presence in eastern and central European countries which already belong to the Alliance. The Russian and American [presidents](#) talked by phone on 30 December 2021, and agreed on a set of meetings which took place during the second week of 2022. These included: the [US-Russia Strategic Stability Dialogue \(SSD\)](#) in Geneva on 10 January 2022, a continuation of a security dialogue created in [June 2021](#) to [address](#) arms-control and risk-reduction measures; the [NATO-Russia Council](#) in Brussels on 12 January and the [OSCE's Permanent Council](#) meeting in Vienna on 13 January. During these meetings, Russia's initial requests, equating to Putin's red lines, were [rejected](#) by the Western countries. The NATO allies proposed a dialogue on arms control, military transparency, and preventing military incidents; this was assessed by Russia as not sufficient, addressing only topics of secondary interest to the country.

During bilateral talks with Russia, the United States [coordinated](#) its position with [Ukraine](#) and [European](#) allies and [excluded](#) discussing European security without European allies and partners, as stated by the US Deputy Secretary of State, Wendy Sherman. This was preceded by EU High Representative Josep Borrell's statement, which underlined the need to [involve](#) the EU in the talks – an aim in clear contrast to Vladimir Putin's willingness to return to Cold War bi-polar logic, in which only Russia and the US would be granted a place in negotiations. HR/VP Borrell visited Ukraine from 4 to 6 January. In eastern Ukraine, he [reaffirmed](#) the EU's 'full support to Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity', adding that the main purpose is to de-escalate through both negotiations and 'strong stands and firm positions on supporting Ukraine'. He also declared that 'there is no security in Europe without the security of Ukraine'. The 'Gymnich' format, informal meetings of EU foreign ministers, took place on [13 and 14 January 2022](#), and reconfirmed this policy based on two courses of action: a strong determination to introduce 'large-scale sanctions in the event of any violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity'; and continuation of diplomatic talks with Russia, including in the 'Normandy format'.

The diplomatic process continued with German Foreign Minister [Annalena Baerbock](#)'s visit to Moscow on 18 January and the meeting between US Secretary of State [Antony Blinken](#) and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Geneva on 21 January 2022. Further diplomatic exchanges are expected, and the OSCE's Polish presidency is planning to visit Washington, Kiev and Moscow to continue talks during February, an initiative [welcomed](#) by Russia.

NATO reaction

Following the [NATO-Russia Council](#) on 12 January 2022, NATO's Secretary-General reaffirmed NATO's open door policy, as each nation has the right to choose its security arrangements. NATO called on Russia to de-escalate immediately and to refrain from aggressive and malign behaviour. On 30 November 2021, NATO's Secretary-General and foreign ministers [reiterated](#) NATO's support for Ukraine's path towards membership and further Euro-Atlantic integration. On top of the practical support Ukraine has received, including trust funds, equipment and training, the Secretary-General stated that 'any future Russian aggression against Ukraine would come at a high price'. In a subsequent meeting of NATO's foreign ministers with the representatives of Ukraine and Georgia on 1 December, the [ministers](#) dismissed the concept of Russia's sphere of influence over independent sovereign states, such as Ukraine, which they deemed to be unacceptable.

Ukraine and NATO

In 2017, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted legislation designating [membership in NATO](#) as a strategic foreign and security policy objective, while Ukraine's national security strategy also designates NATO membership as an aim. In April 2021, during Russia's military build-up in eastern Ukraine, President Zelenskyy [spoke](#) with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, referring to NATO as the only way to end the war in Donbas, and adding that a NATO [Membership Action Plan](#) (MAP) for Ukraine would be a 'real signal for Russia'. Since 2016, NATO has supported Ukraine through the [Comprehensive Assistance Package](#) (CAP): this includes technical capabilities to counter cyber-threats, assistance with modernising command and control structures, and exchanging best practice and training on energy security. The CAP currently comprises the advisory mission at the NATO Representation to Ukraine, as well as 16 capacity-building programmes and trust funds. Ukraine is the first partner country participating in [NATO's Response Force](#) and one of six non-NATO members (along with Australia, Finland, Sweden, Georgia and Jordan) to hold the special status of [NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner](#).

US reactions

During a phone conversation on [2 January 2022](#) between the US and Ukrainian presidents, President Biden declared that the US and its allies 'will respond decisively if Russia further invades Ukraine'. Already during his candidacy, Joe Biden was outspoken about Ukraine's role in US foreign policy and [acknowledged](#) the possibility of providing security assistance and weapons. President Zelenskyy visited Washington in September 2021 and met President Biden. The [Joint Statement on the US-Ukraine Strategic Partnership](#) reaffirmed US support for 'Ukraine's right to decide its own future foreign policy course free from outside interference, including with respect to Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO'. Moreover, President Biden [announced](#) a US\$60 million security assistance package, including additional [Javelin anti-armour systems](#) and forthcoming joint hardware production through [UkrOboronprom](#). Washington [recognises](#) Ukraine as 'central to the global struggle between democracy and autocracy'. In late December 2021, defensive military aid worth [US\\$200 million](#) was approved, with deliveries already [arriving](#). In January 2022, the US [approved](#) the sending of American-made anti-tank and anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine by the Baltic States.

Russia's leverage over Ukraine and other possible threats

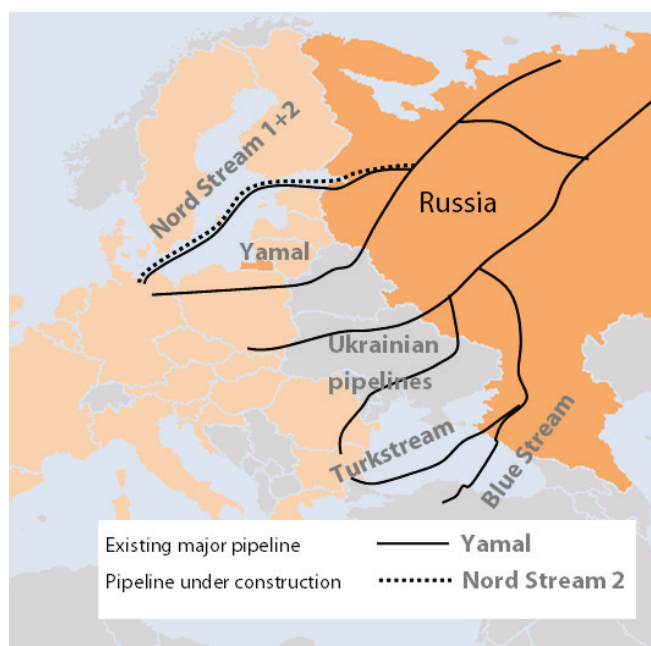
Russia's hybrid warfare against Ukraine has different [dimensions](#): disinformation, economic pressure, including energy, and cyber-attacks play the most prominent role. This flexibility means that permanent, multidimensional monitoring of the situation is necessary.

Economy and gas supplies

While Ukraine's trade has successfully been redirected to the EU, and Ukraine is integrating with [European value chains](#), its trade with Russia dropped significantly from a [27 %](#) share of Ukraine's international trade in 2013 to [7 %](#) in 2020. This considerably [diminished](#) the level of Russian leverage over Ukraine. However, Ukraine's role as a transit country for Russian gas exports has also diminished considerably.

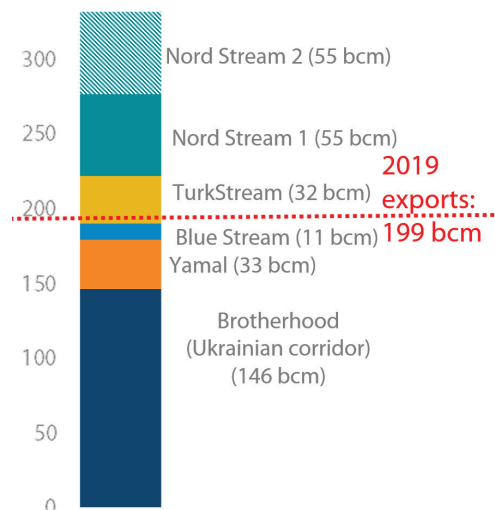
Over the years, gas that transited through Ukraine was diverted to newer pipelines such as Yamal (through Belarus), the first Nord Stream pipeline (under the Baltic), and TurkStream (under the Baltic Sea). In 2020, just 40 billion cubic metres (bcm) of Russian gas transited Ukraine, using less than one third of the country's annual transit capacity of 146 bcm. Even so, this was enough to earn Ukraine [US\\$2.11 billion](#) in transit fees. If it starts operating commercially, Nord Stream 2 would have 55 bcm of capacity, giving Russia the option of bypassing Ukraine altogether. Ending Ukraine's role as a gas transit country would deprive its faltering economy of an important source of income (equivalent to [1.35 %](#) of the country's GDP) and also remove one of the main deterrents to a Russian invasion, i.e. disruption to Moscow's gas exports. Several experts already accuse Russia of [weaponising](#) gas supplies, as Russia would like to receive certification of Nord Stream 2, a necessary precondition to start commercial deliveries, without the need to follow EU internal market competition rules.

Main Russian pipelines to Europe and Turkey



Pipeline design capacity vs exports to Europe / Turkey (not including ex-Soviet Union)

(billion cubic metres (bcm)/year)



(actual capacity may be less than design capacity)

Source: [EPRS](#), based on [ENTSO-G](#).Data source: based on [Gazprom](#), [TurkStream](#), [Gas Transmission System Operator of Ukraine](#).

While the [Russian ambassador](#) to the EU linked gas supply shortages with lukewarm EU-Russia relations, at the same time President Putin officially [denied](#) weaponising gas. In July 2021, the US and Germany issued a [joint statement](#) which reiterated that Germany will 'press for effective measures' at EU level, 'including sanctions, to limit Russian export capabilities to Europe in the energy sector, including gas, and/or in other economically relevant sectors', should Russia pursue further efforts 'to use energy as a weapon or commit further aggressive acts against Ukraine'. During the EU-Ukraine summit, [Commission President Ursula von der Leyen](#) stated that the 2019 Gas Directive and the third energy package fully apply to [Nord Stream 2](#), while 'Ukraine remains and must remain a reliable transit country'. The head of the International Energy Agency noted that [limitations](#) of Russian gas supplies to Europe 'coincide with heightened geopolitical tensions over Ukraine', despite high gas prices which would normally lead to increased deliveries, hinting at a geopolitical rather than commercial approach to the supply of gas by Russia.

For its internal consumption, Ukraine [produces](#) gas which covers 70 % of its annual needs, and buys the remaining gas from EU countries. This gas, even if not bought directly from Russia – which has a track record of [cutting gas](#) supplies to Ukraine – is frequently Russian. Slovakia's reverse gas flow to Ukraine hugely [improves](#) the situation, but would not be sufficient during the winter peak of gas consumption. The European Commission is working with Ukraine on different [scenarios](#) aimed at increasing gas supply capacity from EU Member States. It should also be noted that Ukraine is working continuously to reduce its domestic gas consumption, and succeeded in reducing its consumption by around [50 %](#) between 2010 and 2019.

Disinformation

Russian disinformation operations against Ukraine are addressed by the 2017 Ukrainian [Doctrine of Information Security](#). The document lists disinformation threats, which include, inter alia, conducting special information operations aimed at [inciting ethnic and religious conflict](#) in Ukraine, creating a negative image of Ukraine abroad and lowering the Ukrainian army's [morale](#). As well as

these threats, other authors [add](#) the following: political and lobbying activities in the West against Ukraine, as well as activities undermining Ukrainians' positive perception of the EU; the isolation, in terms of the information they receive, of occupied territories from Ukraine; the forming of Russian channels of information and propaganda which over-use freedom of speech to discredit Ukraine and disseminate information products with the aim of dividing society and preparing a social base for new protests and provocations. Counter-disinformation measures associated with the conflict in Donbas, in particular, have been employed with [assistance](#) from the EU.

Cyber-attacks

Following Russia's talks with the US, NATO and within the OSCE format, a massive [attack](#) targeted Ukrainian government websites on [14 January 2022](#). Large-scale cyber-attacks have also taken place in the past, including in December 2015 when Ukraine experienced an unprecedented [cyber-attack](#), which cut electricity to over 225 000 Ukrainians. According to a 2015 [publication](#) by NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE), SandWorm, linked to [Russian military intelligence](#) and [identified](#) as responsible for the attack, has previously targeted NATO, European energy and telecommunications firms, and the Ukrainian government. In late 2016, another [cyber-attack](#) caused large-scale power cuts in Kyiv. With the rise in cyber-attacks, the head of the State Service of Communications, Yuriy Schygol, estimates that [90 % of all incidents](#) have been undertaken by hackers financed by Russia.

Russia's encroachment on Ukraine's borders from 2014 onwards, foremost in Crimea, has been intertwined with an active campaign to [undermine](#) important infrastructure and telecommunications networks. A Ukrainian expert on cybersecurity [points out](#) that 'Ukraine is in a state of cyber war with Russia'. In June 2017, Ukraine also reported an [attack](#) on its energy system, using the NotPetya virus which allowed hackers to gain access to the internal networks of several financial institutions. In 2020, Ukrainian officials [noted](#) that cyber-attacks of one sort or another have been reported almost daily. The NATO CCDCOE's 2021 [report](#) on Russia's cyber capabilities vis-à-vis Ukraine states that Russia has been pursuing 'information confrontation' (e.g. disabling the real-time vote count of the Central Electoral Committee around the May 2014 presidential election) and disruptive cyber-attacks causing power cuts.

Ukraine's [Cybersecurity Strategy](#) for 2021-2025, coordinated by the National Coordination Centre for Cybersecurity, aims to facilitate 'conditions for safe functioning of cyberspace'. The document touches upon the concepts of deterrence, resilience and interaction in relation to Ukraine's cyberspace. On 25 October 2021, Ukraine's National Security and Defence Council (NSDC) [proposed](#) to establish a sectoral cybersecurity centre that would focus on protecting critical energy infrastructure (e.g. power, oil and gas).

Ukraine is projected to seek further support from the EU and NATO amidst the elevated threats of targeting such core assets, according to Jane's. Ukraine has already [expressed](#) interest in joining the NATO CCDCOE.

The EU has established a dedicated [Cyber Dialogue](#) with Ukraine that focuses on stable and secure cyberspace. Its first round took place on 3 June 2021, while the [next](#) round is scheduled for the second quarter of 2022. As previously mentioned, financing from the EPF will also support the Ukrainian army's cyber-defence capacities. The EU and Ukraine likewise aim to [promote](#) a [Programme of Action](#) within the United Nations to foster responsible state behaviour in the cyber domain.

The European Parliament's [resolution](#) on the implementation of the EU-Ukraine AA of February 2021 highlights the need to initiate a dialogue on cyber-issues; reiterates that the EU should provide assistance to counter hybrid threats (e.g. cyber-attacks and disinformation); and supports greater investment in Ukraine's cyber security.

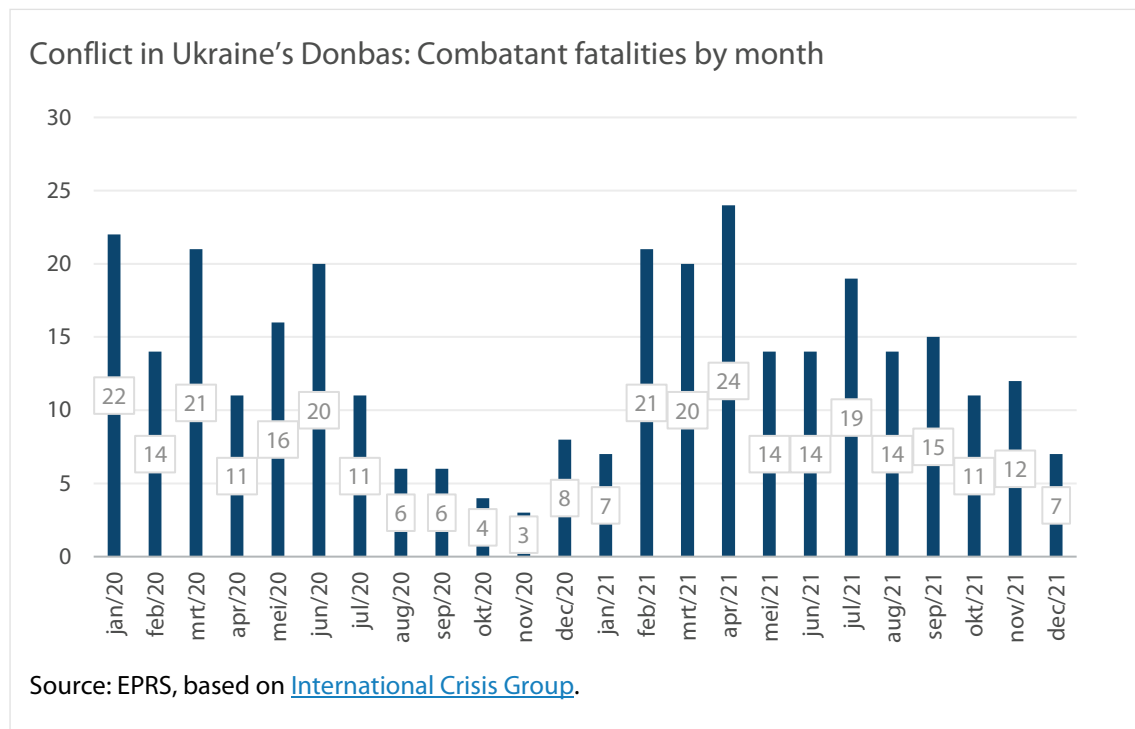
Security situation in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions



Following the 2014-2015 fighting started by Russian-backed separatists, the separatists took control of approximately a [third](#) of the territory of Donbas in eastern Ukraine, adjacent to the south-eastern Ukraine-Russia border. Since 2014, when the [Minsk Protocol](#) – the [peace plan for Ukraine](#) (later [supplemented](#) by the 'Minsk II' agreement) – was agreed, and the 2015 formation of the 'Normandy Four' group of France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine [agreed](#) on a new ceasefire and implementation of additional [measures](#), progress has been [limited](#). However, a renewed ceasefire in July 2020 caused a sharp decline in the intensity of violence in the second half of 2020.

Unfortunately, this positive trend was reversed in early 2021. The OSCE reports a death toll of over [14 000](#) people. Since the start of the conflict, almost [1.5 million](#) people have been displaced and [3.4 million](#) people have been identified as in need of humanitarian assistance. In 2021, the EU dedicated [€25.4 million](#) for the conflict-affected population.

In 2020 alone, the OSCE [reported](#) more than 134 000 violations of the pre-agreed ceasefire, including 3 200 instances of use of explosive devices and 850 [access restrictions undermining](#) fulfilment of the [mandate](#) given to the OSCE's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) and posing a threat to civilians. Furthermore, armed formations in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions frequently [deny the SMM access](#) to areas adjacent to the Ukraine-Russia border but which are outside the government's control, thus undermining efforts to stop the influx of weapons and militants into Ukraine, as mandated by the OSCE. Following his January 2022 trip to eastern Ukraine, HR/VP Josep Borrell [underlined](#) that 'Russia is a party to this conflict, and not a mediator as it often claims'.



Situation in Crimea

Crimean Platform

The Crimean Platform was inaugurated in Kiev on 23 August 2021 at a summit with [46 participants](#), including the President of the European Council, [Charles Michel](#), the Vice-President of the European Commission, [Valdis Dombrovskis](#), Heads of State or Government of 11 EU Member States, and 10 Member States' foreign affairs ministers. It is [convened](#) as a new international consultation and coordination format that aims to increase the effectiveness of the international response to the ongoing occupation of Crimea. It is supposed to work on [three levels](#): governmental, parliamentary and expert level. Its final aim is to end the illegal occupation of Crimea and enable Ukraine to regain control over the peninsula. The participants in the Crimean Platform [decided](#), inter alia, to continue implementing the policy of not recognising the annexation, and condemn violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms against Crimean inhabitants and impediments to navigational rights and freedoms. The parties also decided to consider further political, diplomatic and restrictive measures should Russia's actions so require, and 'to address emerging challenges and evolving hybrid threats resulting from the ongoing militarization of Crimea'.

Human rights situation in Crimea

Since the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, the situation in the peninsula has severely [deteriorated](#). Contrary to [international humanitarian law](#), the occupier's State law is being implemented. This means that Russian criminal law is applied, [forced military conscription](#) takes place regularly, Russian passports are issued in Crimea and those who refuse them are [punished](#), and new inhabitants are brought to Crimea, with the aim of changing its ethnic structure. An estimated [247 000](#) Russians have arrived in the peninsula since 2014 and up to [140 000](#) people – mainly Crimean Tatars and Ukrainians – have left.

Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians, and Jehovah's Witnesses, among other minority groups, are subject to [politically motivated persecution](#). While [torture](#) and ill-treatment take place, the prosecution of human rights abusers, despite their being clearly identified, is refused or seriously delayed. It is to be noted that severe politically motivated sentences are served in full, as was the case for [Oleksii Chyrynii](#) – a teacher accused of being part of [Oleg Sentsov's](#) (2018 Sakharov Prize laureate) cell – sentenced in 2014 to 7 years' imprisonment and released only in May 2021, without a right to return to Crimea. Another example of a harsh judicial verdict is [Server Mustafayev](#), human rights defender and former coordinator of Crimean Solidarity, sentenced to 14 years' imprisonment in 2020.

The cultural heritage of the [Crimean Tatars](#) – an [indigenous](#) people with a long [history](#) – is seriously [endangered](#). Their media outlets are being shut down, the Mejlis (their self-governing body) has been banned, and historic sites are being destroyed, while many activists are arrested or go into exile. Those who wish to organise the traditional remembrance of Stalin's [1944 Crimean Tatar deportations](#) receive formal [warnings](#) of 'inadmissibility of extremist activities' and face possible [arrest](#), should they wish to participate.

Freedom of navigation in the Black Sea

Map of Azov and Black Sea



Source: Hromadske and [EPRS](#).

After [closing off](#) parts of the Black Sea to non-Russian warships, tankers and vessels in April 2021, Ukraine condemned Russia's actions in impeding international maritime traffic, as the Kerch Strait presents a strategic crossing point for regional trade. The temporary closure of three entry points is in violation of the Russian-Ukrainian [2003 agreement](#) recognising the importance of the Sea of Azov, and in turn the Kerch Strait, as being vital to the economic development of both countries, as well as freedom of navigation in the Kerch-Azov area. In 2018, Russia demonstrated its capacity to close the waterway when it partially [halted](#) shipping to the Ukrainian ports of Mariupol and Berdyansk, which resulted in a decline in transshipment

to the ports of [8.9 %](#) and [22 %](#), respectively.

Aside from freedom of navigation being undermined, which is in contrast to the guarantees of the [UN Convention on the Law of the Sea](#), passage is further hampered by Russia's construction of the 19 km [Kerch Bridge](#), completed in 2018, directly connecting mainland Russia with the Crimean peninsula. The Russian-controlled bridge [restricts](#) the size and height of foreign or Ukrainian vessels attempting to pass through the strait. Back in [2018](#), this allowed Russia to prevent Ukrainian navy vessels from entering the area and to seize Ukrainian navy vessels while detaining their service personnel. The EU has repeatedly condemned the construction, and [imposed sanctions](#) in October 2020 on individuals and entities implicated. A similar move was [taken](#) by the US Department of the Treasury in April 2021. The limitations in the Black Sea add to the [losses](#), namely the 75 % of naval personnel and 70 % of critical navy infrastructure, that Ukraine suffered as a consequence of the Crimea annexation. However, Ukraine plans to advance its naval forces and reinvigorate its naval capabilities by 2023 amidst the projected threats arising from the very real [possibility](#) of war with Russia, since Moscow conducts readiness checks on the peninsula, such as [deploying an inter-service grouping of forces in an operational direction](#) in May 2021 and [live-fire exercises](#) involving 1 200 paratroopers in December 2021.

EU support to Ukraine

To address the financial needs caused by Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine, and to 'strengthen Ukraine's state-building and resilience efforts', European Commission President [Ursula von der Leyen](#) proposed a new emergency macro-financial assistance (MFA) package worth €1.2 billion. Once this is approved by the European Parliament and Council, the first tranche of €600 million will be rapidly disbursed. Moreover, President von der Leyen announced that bilateral assistance to Ukraine will be doubled in 2022, by an additional €120 million. Since 2014, grants and loans from the EU and European financial institutions to support reform processes have totalled more than [€17 billion](#). These resources are subject to strong conditionality in terms of the continued reform progress. The amount includes [€4.4 billion](#) in the form of MFA loans, including [€1.2 billion](#) to help mitigate the economic and social consequences of the coronavirus pandemic, as well as €190 million for immediate and short-term needs arising from the pandemic. Moreover, the December 2021 [EaP summit](#) agreed on [post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities](#), including an Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) and five flagship initiatives for Ukraine. The initiatives, aimed at supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), small farms, digital transition and energy efficiency, will together be worth up to €1.6 billion, while the EIP has the potential to mobilise up to €6.5 billion in Ukraine 'in public and private investments to boost economic development and support post-pandemic recovery'.

Flagship initiatives for Ukraine

	Flagship initiatives	Value up to
Flagship 1	Supporting a sustainable, innovative, green and competitive economy – direct support for 100 000 SMEs	€500 million
Flagship 2	Economic transition for rural areas – assistance to over 10 000 small farms	€600 million
Flagship 3	Improving connectivity by upgrading border crossing points	€300 million
Flagship 4	Boosting the digital transition – modernising public IT infrastructure	€80 million
Flagship 5	Increasing energy efficiency support for renewable hydrogen	€120 million

Source: [European Commission](#), 2021.

The EU has delivered at least [7.4 million vaccine doses](#) to Ukraine through [COVAX](#) – the vaccine sharing mechanism – since March 2021. Moreover, the EU has [supported](#) Ukraine with over 3 million vaccines, 36 million items of personal protective equipment, three ambulances and other critical medical equipment and knowledge transfers. In August 2021, the European Commission increased its assistance package to deploy Covid-19 vaccines and speed up the vaccination campaign from €40 million to €75 million for all six Eastern Partnership countries.

EU-Ukraine cooperation on security and defence policy

Following Ukraine's [July 2021](#) request for support for its army's modernisation and to strengthen cooperation in the field of CSDP, six EU Member States (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Poland and Slovakia) proposed, in August 2021, to deploy an EU training or advisory mission to Ukraine. Taking into account the current situation, the Council conclusions of [24 January 2022](#) stated that 'the EU is defining modalities of support to Ukraine also in the area of professional military education'. For the time being, the Council has [decided](#) to grant Ukraine €31 million in assistance from the [European Peace Facility](#) for a period of 3 years to strengthen the capacities of the Ukrainian army's medical, engineering, mobility and logistics, as well as its cyber-defence unit. Moreover, as of 2014 the EU maintains an EU Advisory Mission Ukraine ([EUAM](#)) under its common security and defence policy with the [objective](#) of supporting Ukraine 'in developing sustainable, accountable and efficient civilian security services in Ukraine, which strengthens the rule of law'. The mandate is [implemented](#) through strategic advice on civilian security sector reform and support for the implementation of reforms, and was recently [prolonged](#) until 31 May 2024.

To facilitate deeper policy convergence, the EU-Ukraine summit in October 2021 welcomed Ukraine's forthcoming participation in the [EUFOR Althea](#) mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a [decision](#) accepted in July 2020. The EU has also acknowledged Ukraine's willingness to join individual [PESCO](#) projects. Ukraine has had an administrative arrangement with the European Defence Agency (EDA) since 2015. This pre-PESCO era [document](#) formalises the relationship between the EDA and the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine, and enables Ukraine to participate in military-technological projects and programmes run by the EDA. To support resilience-building, the EU also seeks to deepen EU-Ukraine [cooperation on cybersecurity](#).

European Parliament position

In a [resolution](#) adopted on 16 December 2021, the European Parliament (EP) condemned Russian behaviour, urged Russia and Russian-backed separatists to uphold the ceasefire agreement, and insisted on remaining prepared to 'agree swiftly on further joint action', including severe sanctions 'in order to address immediate and credible threats posed by Russia'. In such a case, the sanctions should include, inter alia, Russia's exclusion from the SWIFT payment system, an assets freeze and visa cancellations against oligarchs close to the Kremlin and Russian officers involved in the invasion planning. The EP is a [long-time opponent](#) of Nord Stream 2, as the project presents political,

economic and security risks, and does not help to lessen the EU's dependency on Russian energy. In September 2021, in its recommendation to the Council on EU-Russia relations, the EP [noted](#) that, while 'the [five EU guiding principles](#) for relations with Russia have contained further aggression against Ukraine by the Kremlin regime', they would need to be complemented in order to contain the Kremlin's destabilising activities. The EP [resolution](#) of 11 February 2021 on the implementation of the EU Association Agreement with Ukraine underlines that the 'EU's assistance to Ukraine is subject to strict conditionality' and underlines the necessity of pro-democratic reforms. In May 2020, the EP [expressed](#) the need for the Union to 'act quickly and decisively' to support the neighbouring economies with MFA assistance in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In a joint meeting of the EP's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE) in January 2022, members [debated](#) the security architecture of Europe in the light of 'the ongoing crisis in Eastern Ukraine and along the Russia-Ukraine border' with the HR/VP. This was followed by a decision to send a joint AFET/SEDE ad hoc [fact-finding mission](#) to Ukraine; this mission, led by the AFET and SEDE chairs, [took place](#) from 30 January to 2 February 2022.

MAIN REFERENCES

[Council conclusions on the European security situation](#), Council of the European Union, January 2022.
 Grajewski, M., [The EU and Russia: A fragile neighbourhood](#), EPRS, December 2021.
 Menkiszak, M., [Russia's Ukrainian dilemma: Moscow's strategy towards Kyiv](#), OSW, November 2021.
 Russell, M., [Is Russia about to start a new war in Ukraine?](#), EPRS, December 2021.

DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT

This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament.

Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.

© European Union, 2022.

Photo credits: © Denis Rozhnovsky / Adobe Stock.

eprs@ep.europa.eu (contact)

www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu (intranet)

www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank (internet)

<http://epthinktank.eu> (blog)

