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(Editors)

PERSPECTIVES OF THE EU' S EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD

Proceedings of the third edition of the international conference

*The European Union's External Relations
and the Global Order (EUXGLOB)*

Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca
Faculty of European Studies
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The EU'S Eastern Neighbourhood Policy: A Geopolitical Conundrum¹

Silviu Nate

Abstract. This chapter examines the complex geopolitical conundrum facing the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood policy, contending with Russian imperial ambitions and civilizational warfare. It argues that the EU must rethink its strategy, adapting to new security threats through closer NATO ties, a smart power approach, and a long-term vision promoting regional connectivity. Overcoming paralysis requires unity of purpose, constraints on resurgent Russian hegemony, and consolidation of a strategic culture anchored in Atlanticist first principles.

Keywords: Eastern Partnership; Ukraine; the Black Sea region; Russia; South Caucasus

Introduction

The Eastern Neighbourhood of the European Union is often associated with interferences or blockages that stand in the way of democratic aspirations but also with the failure to modernise states and societies. The Soviet legacy and the Russian Federation's patronage of the states in the Eastern Neighbourhood are directly related to the Kremlin's self-proclamation of the so-called "spheres of influence". In the absence of its own economic and institutional modernisation, but also of the failure of emancipation in the sense of human autonomy from political power, Russia projected a dominant model, condemning the region to a lower existence of development compared to its level for preserving privileges.

The history of the Greater Black Sea Region, the Caucasus and Central Asia has been marked by political loyalties subservient to Kremlin interests, often operated through informal money and political influence networks. In the absence of modernisation and emancipation, the human spirit and aspirations have been mutilated by denying access to the opportunities an open and free world offers.

Unfortunately, this struggle marked by value contradictions and stakes continues to be waged both from within the societies of the Eastern European neighbourhood and outside them to their domestic environment. Taking as a basis the theories of modernisation and reconstruction, specific research on large batches of states² highlights that economic integration and modernisation have a transformative effect, ultimately leading to social emancipation and democratisation. The cultural and traditional characteristics of a society condition the speed of change. It is worth noting that value transformation is generational, influenced by the experience of younger generations regarding economic freedom and institutional health. Therefore, we can admit that regardless of the legitimate aspirations of the states in the Eastern Neighbourhood, and not considering the current external negative pressures, the reconstruction

¹ This work was supported by Hasso Plattner Foundation through the grant LBUS-UARO-2023, financed by the Knowledge Transfer Centre of the Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu.

² Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

and modernisation processes have a relatively slow pace, influenced by the accumulated historical legacies. Starting from these assumptions, we acknowledge that only long-term strategies are viable, and economic growth and internal reforms drive sustainable democratic institutionalism.

Russian Civilisational War And European Eastern Neighbourhood Drama

The Russian Federation often used its ideology along with Russian Orthodoxy and the idea under the pretext of protecting the rights and identity of Russian populations in other countries to justify its imperial actions. This ideology can be considered an attempt to integrate religious and cultural concepts into its foreign policy.

Alexander Dugin approached Huntington's "cultural fault lines"³ theme in several ways. He is known for supporting an ideology called "Eurasianism", which sees Russia as a bridge between Europe and Asia, with a special mission in the world, and here we witness a type of exceptionalism that rejects multiculturalism. Dugin argues that Russia should be the centre of a "Eurasian civilisation" that opposes Western influence. This concept is based on Huntington's idea of a "clash of civilisations" but with a specific Russian perspective. Dugin sees the cultural rifts between Russia and the West as significant and argues for countering Western influence by promoting an anti-Western current.⁴

This civilisational warfare construct has promoted the idea that Russia should expand its influence in the Eurasian space, including the countries of the former Soviet Union, to create a strong bloc to compete with the West. This expansion can be seen as a reaction to the clash of civilisations and an attempt to shape regional policy according to its Eurasian values and interests. In conclusion, perhaps the most prominent Russian geopolitician, Alexander Dugin, exploited the theme of "cultural fault lines" in Samuel Huntington's theory to promote a Eurasian vision of politics and geopolitics in which Russia plays a central role. However, it is important to note that Dugin's vision is controversial and criticised by many analysts and politicians, both inside and outside Russia.

Russia has long claimed itself as a European civilisation and extracted benefits, but it has also had painful experiences. It is now moving closer to the Asian world, constrained by its difficulties in fighting the West. Another civilisational explanation is related to the values on which the leadership of a state is built in the sense of its traditions and history. Here, we find a political incompatibility because the Russian civilisational model does not seem capable of supporting democracy.

Avoiding The Strategic Trap

While Russia has approached the Black Sea and South Caucasus coastal states through the prism of a geopolitical project, the European Union has taken a different approach. Although we do not question the nature of the existence of the European Union as a genuine soft power, its good intentions, stabilisation, reform, and democratisation plans for the Eastern

³ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," in Steven Seidman, Jeffrey C. Alexander (eds.), *The New Social Theory Reader*, London: Routledge, 2020, pp. 305-313.

⁴ Alexander Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, London: Arktos, 2012.

neighbourhood have been disproportionate and perhaps even inadequate to the regional hegemonic tendencies of the Russian Federation. Consequently, Russia's hegemonic game could not and still cannot be counterbalanced by the European Union alone.

The harsh lesson received by Europeans after a long strategic hibernation led to the understanding that perpetuating negative dependencies on the Russian Federation and deepening economic relations with Moscow to the detriment of assuming a project with real geopolitical value for the Eastern neighbourhood were tactical traps exploited by the Kremlin.

European tendencies to engage neighbouring states in an integration project have oscillated dominantly between the competition of Chancellor Angela Merkel's leading position and French perspectives.

The marathon for European strategic autonomy and the competition for primacy in the affairs of post-Brexit Europe have weakened the inclusiveness of policies and visions for the Eastern neighbourhood. Also, the issue of security in the Black Sea was a topic largely ignored until the illegal annexation of Crimea, followed by weak reactions from Brussels and a cold shower on February 24, 2022. The European Union's relationship with its eastern neighbourhood has been slow and timidly assumed.

Unfortunately, the costs of non-involvement were determined by different perceptions of European states on insecurity and risks. Geography and physical distance from the E.U.'s eastern border were critical factors to Western countries; Clubs of states that promoted or still promote Europe at several speeds; economic interdependencies with Russia; certain internal political individuals with affinities for Moscow and differentiated objectives prioritisation of national interest did not find convergence in a common foreign and neighbourhood policy agenda.

This pattern has not disappeared definitively, but we have witnessed some awakening of the Union's states, fuelled by the need for a European status quo, reactivated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the memory of the Cold War. However, European coercive diplomacy and the sanctions regime applied to Russia have not had the expected success in inhibiting Moscow's further offensive actions.

Without the primary military assistance of the United States, U.K., and NATO to limit the aggressive actions of the Russian Federation, the European Union would have been doomed to turn its strategic fetishes into strategic deceptions.

The (Un)Conventional Warfare

Russia is not only waging a conventional war with Europe but is using physical aggression to sustain influence operations throughout the European continent.

The blockade of grain exports from Ukraine has exacerbated a food security crisis in the Middle East and Africa, increasing the risk of famine. The overall picture suggests that the Russian Federation is putting significant pressure on certain African states by withdrawing from the grain agreement but also by bombing Ukrainian loading and export facilities on the Danube. These actions have become levers for generating overlapping crises if we associate, for example, military crises or coups d'état in Sudan and Niger. Armed conflicts in Africa and famine eventually cause forced migration, a phenomenon that puts pressure on Europe.

This reality generates public discontent in Europe, with governors often overwhelmed by the situation and many nationalist and far-right parties, some supported by Moscow, gaining adherents amid anti-immigration discourse. Unfortunately, these political parties have the potential to grow on the wave of anti-migration discourse, and Russia has a great ability to provoke anti-system propaganda vectors in Europe. Ultimately, the political fragmentation of the West is in Putin's favour, and more problems for Europe will mean less support for Ukraine.

In summary, we can say that food insecurity and support for coups in Africa are becoming political weapons at Moscow's fingertips in its "unseen" or unconventional war with Europe. By keeping the flow of grain exports open, Romania alleviates the pressure put by Russia on African states and implicitly on Western Europe but also supports Ukraine's economy. Romania's effort, which provides 70% of Ukrainian grain export flows, contributes to the European political balance, while Russia pursues political changes through conventional and unconventional means.

Europe's eastern neighbourhood is not exempted from challenges, but regional anarchy will increase without the committed and coordinated involvement of extra-regional actors in an extended format. Russia has always promoted buffer zones by claiming them as part of its sphere of influence. Grey areas and frozen conflicts are precursors for confiscating states' sovereignty, and insecurity in the Wider Black Sea Region generates a contagious effect on European insecurity, the grain crisis being just one example of many other harmful phenomena.

Acknowledging a changing geopolitical and security environment in the region, especially in the Black Sea, the European Union must adapt, living for a while with war. Due to Russia's ability to channel its economic resources into war, this situation may also have adverse consequences, which require reinvention and expansion of the European Union's functions, and profile change is necessary so it can adjust its roles for projecting stability in the neighbourhood.

The South Caucasus And Black Sea Area Geopolitical Constraints

The way the Eastern Partnership functioned through assistance in implementing reforms and economic diplomacy was insufficient, and after Russia's invasion triggered on February 24, 2022, Brussels became more aware that the security issue must be integrated. It is essential to rethink the Eastern Partnership to become a support vector for winning the war while developing infrastructure and connectivity projects from Europe to the South Caucasus and Central Asia. If it existed, the previous European geopolitical perspective is no longer feasible; the overall picture has changed while considering the indispensable but ambivalent roles of Azerbaijan and Turkey, which have created certain dependencies on Russia.

By de-escalating the conflict in Nagorno Karabakh, Erdoğan sees the Lachin corridor as an opportunity for connectivity and long-term economic benefits, acting cautiously. Turkey's position is for Russia to withdraw its troops, Ankara winning a veto, but Russia will not leave the region in the way it is discussed and will seek to control Armenia. The war in Ukraine has prompted a rethinking of Russia's targeted trade routes in the South Caucasus. New prospects indicate Moscow's increased interest in a north-south route to Iran via Azerbaijan and more transit routes to Turkey.

Turkey's interest in an open Azeri-Armenian border is based on economic and security reasons. Therefore, Turkey has no reason to encourage a new war in the South Caucasus.

Amid the background of the war in Ukraine, geopolitical changes show that Russia no longer wants and can no longer support the strategic balance in the South Caucasus region, while Israel's role has greatly increased in the area by capitalising on the strategic partnership with Azerbaijan.

Reducing Russian military influence is an action that will aim for larger goals. On the one hand, achieving transit routes was discussed with Iran. On the other hand, because Russia has never been an altruistic power, the area's status remains unclear in the absence of a peace agreement and clear territorial delimitations. But there are also certain shortcomings because Turkey supports this corridor, and Erdoğan has clarified that Iran opposes the increase in Azerbaijan's power with an adversarial approach. Limited Western involvement has indirectly favoured the current situation, leading to Baku's denial of Armenia's statehood, setting an impermissible precedent.

Armenia appears to be the country farthest from the West, dependent on energy supplied by Russia. It has established military cooperation with Russia by hosting a Russian military facility on its territory and other acute economic exchanges. Given these variables, Russia could transform Armenia into a new buffer zone or frozen conflict if it moves away from Moscow's goals. To limit Russia's additional leverage, Azerbaijan should be reined in, and Armenia close to the West through concrete mechanisms, but Yerevan is overwhelmed by the influence of the FSB and Iran. The economic and political alternatives in the region are led by the U.S. and Germany, which does not shy away from assuming European leadership, showing pragmatic and efficient approaches. Amid these complicated relations in the South Caucasus, the E.U. can be a powerful vector to limit authoritarian tendencies using coercive diplomacy.

Azerbaijan is proving to be an energy partner for Europe and, at the same time, a problematic actor, as the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh puts additional pressure on the European Union. Russia, Turkey, and Iran want to keep the Lachin corridor open for trade reasons, while Azerbaijan has ambitions as an occupier in the region. As previously stated, Russia's so-called decoupling from Europe is linked to regional and economic competitive arguments for Turkey's ambitions. Russia is interested in developing its economic relevance in the Caucasus and the Middle East by implementing routes with the participation of Iran. Under the pretext of importing Russian gas for national demand, Azerbaijan is susceptible to rerouting⁵ Russian gas to Europe by signing 1 billion cubic meters of gas agreement with Gazprom in November 2022, but also by using possible subsidiary agreements with Russia, importing 1.5-2 billion cubic meters of natural gas from Turkmenistan, via Iran. Such situations create additional obstacles in the EU-Azerbaijan relationship, with Brussels ignoring the

⁵ Adrien Pécout, Faustine Vincent, "Rising Gas Imports from Azerbaijan Embarrass Europe," *Le Monde.fr*, October 9, 2023, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/economy/article/2023/10/08/rising-gas-imports-from-azerbaijan-embarrass-europe_6157430_19.html.

undermining effect of the E.U.'s objective⁶ of limiting Russia's ability to sell gas on the global market. Russia's coordination with Azerbaijan is justified both by energy interests and by Moscow's need to move its "peacekeeping forces" from Nagorno-Karabakh to the Ukrainian theatre of war, abandoning Armenia to Azerbaijan without credible security guarantees. It will be challenging for the European Union to get Armenia out of the traps placed by Russia.

Although Georgia has proposed candidate status to join the European Union, it is facing a democratic and institutional decline, incompatible with the majority desire of Georgian society to join the Euro-Atlantic world. Georgia's exit from the trio with Ukraine and Moldova has created an inopportune gap in E.U. accession aspirations.

In Europe, the second word used after *war* is *resilience*. In the case of Ukraine, without a functioning economy and ensuring the usual flows of existence, the army cannot be sustained.

Regionally and locally, the Russo-Ukrainian War is primarily about the Kremlin's political stakes and control of political regimes.

In a broader geographical version, the war is aimed at the total conquest of Ukraine, controlling Belarus, and isolating the Baltic states from the Western bloc under the pretext of defending ethnic Russians, providing a land bridge to the Kaliningrad exclave and a reinforced military corridor from the mouth of the Danube to the Baltic Sea. Therefore, the broader stakes of the Russian invasion aim to cancel military, commercial and energy projections in the Black Sea, but especially to problematise European security and obtain leverage to condition economic and state affairs to Europe and the U.S. – a return of Russia to the circuit of great powers.

And precisely because Putin is not giving up on his goals, coalition members supporting Ukraine must also adopt a long-term strategy. Kyiv needs long-range weapons, electronic warfare, drone reconnaissance and surveillance, and air supremacy capabilities to strike deep on the enemy front. Unfortunately, if Western support for Ukraine does not improve significantly, the Russian military will exploit this moment of vulnerability.

When talking about Russia's larger stakes and challenging the European security architecture, one of Putin's goals is to discredit the U.S. ability to contribute to Europe's defence, with a desire to fracture the transatlantic relationship within NATO. Moreover, losing the war to Ukraine would jeopardise the rules-based international order.⁷ A Russian victory would encourage other states ruled by authoritarian regimes to use military force to resolve political disputes while helping to increase the arc of global instability.

Georgia Meloni's statement is also eloquent: "If Russia had not invaded Ukraine, Hamas would most likely not have launched such an attack against Israel."⁸

Europeans aim for a survival policy, not reconstruction for Ukraine, with somewhat more integrated approaches to the country's Western region. European engagement is based

⁶ William Howey, "Azerbaijan's Gas Exports to the EU Face Challenges," Economist Intelligence Unit, July 10, 2023, <https://www.eiu.com/n/azerbajjans-gas-exports-to-the-eu-face-challenges>.

⁷ German Council on Foreign Relations, "Two Years After Russia's Full-Scale Invasion: Ukrainian Resilience and European Support," February 22, 2024, <https://dgap.org/en/media/15907>.

⁸ Jones Hayden, "Italy's Meloni: If Russia Hadn't Invaded Ukraine, Hamas Wouldn't Have Attacked Israel," POLITICO, February 25, 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/italys-meloni-if-russia-hadnt-invaded-ukraine-hamas-wouldnt-have-attacked-israel>.

on caution, requiring coordination and a long-term perspective. Rather it is about maintaining Ukraine's vital functions: a functional economy, necessary punctual repairs (shelters, energy infrastructure), and societal resilience to resist military aggression. Therefore, practical discussions at the European level are limited for now to recovery and repair.

Germany has financial capacity and a stronger commitment to capitalise on the role of private capital in the reconstruction process, framing it as a key role, and sees opportunities for business by identifying partners in Ukraine.

The German perspective suggests agenda formulas for providing support for reforms, engaging municipalities, the human dimension and strengthening human capital in Ukraine - including diaspora and refugees, building democracy and resilience, administrative modernisation through de-bureaucratisation and digitalisation.

A long-term conflict implies that investments in reconstruction are conditioned by a stable security environment.

The three main lines of work discussed at the level of European envoys⁹ for Ukraine aim at:

1. keeping the economy and society functioning.
2. Infrastructural repairs, maintenance, and resilience.
3. Ukraine's accommodation with the European Union.

In parallel, both bilaterally with Ukraine and at the level of the European Union, efforts are being made to optimise defence industries and ensure Ukraine's war capabilities. Fearing an escalation of a Russia-NATO conflict, the subject of security guarantees for Ukraine has moved to a peripheral spectrum.

Both the war and the projects rely on the contribution of civil society, which will also be the main beneficiary of Ukraine's recovery. Although the war has not been won, Ukraine needs to adapt to European conditionalities on decentralisation and thus respect cooperation with civil society to have continuity with the E.U. Civil society is an integral part of global governance, which requires more decision-making transparency, but martial law limits this. Participatory budgets are suitable, but society is unprepared and prefers to support the armed forces. Beyond the need for survival, attention is focused on economic rebuilding and maintaining the Ukrainian maritime corridor for grain and steel exporting. While few solutions are available, Ukraine's recovery requires a plan based on a coherent concept, capabilities, capital, and coordination. Civil society is important in reporting problems and drafting laws; institutional resilience increases through collaborative governance and decentralisation, attracting more beneficiaries.

We, therefore, understand that the instrumentation of the E.U.'s agenda for the Eastern Neighbourhood remains complex and complicated. Moreover, Russia's regional hegemonic decline is associated with more instability and competing regional blocks, forcing the E.U. to fill the vacuum left and avoid escalating conflicts with potentially broader implications.

⁹ New Strategy Centre, "Panel I. Messages from Romanian and Ukrainian Prime Ministers (RO)," YouTube, December 13, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T91NGa1utI4>.

Welcoming Central Asia's Geoeconomic Competition

Amid Russia's hegemonic decline and weakening geopolitical influence, Central Asia has recently become an area of competing external influences, which include China, America, the European Union, and India.

China had hoped to monopolise the Middle Corridor as part of its expanding Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). But countries have grown increasingly wary of participating in it. They've seen China leave many of its BRI promises unfulfilled. And they also worry that involvement comes with too many geopolitical strings attached and can lead to debt traps.¹⁰

Strategic economic competition aims to design large east-west trade corridors, and this theme will acquire greater centrality than in the past. The "New War of Corridors" integrates major Western infrastructure projects for energy, transport, trade, and digitalisation from Kazakhstan to the Black Sea (Middle Corridor) and from India through the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel to the Mediterranean Sea and further to Greece, Italy, France, and Germany – a route already assumed within the G20 (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor).

The new geoeconomic reconfigurations will suggest the structure and reliability of future strategic alliances, a vital theme to internalise for Romanian decision-makers. Although looking from a distance, there could be a feeling of decoupling of some Western states from Ukraine, assuming a Eurasian geoeconomic macro-project would aim at reconstructing Ukraine by placing it on the route of strategic connectivity between the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. From this point, there would be additional arguments for Ukraine's security, but until such a moment, the Russian provocation remains the main working topic.

East-West interconnection projects advance the economic rationale to compete with Russia and China, seeking Western development and security parity between the Pacific and the Mediterranean. This geopolitical modelling will temper Russia's ambitions to instrumentalise its southern strategy of using Central Asia as a gateway to Islamic and Asian states to use destabilising proxies for Red Sea maritime trade routes, as well as project its strategic energy interests.

The precondition of East-West interconnection is the guarantee of free navigation in the Black Sea, which can ultimately be the result of a type of thinking based on Europe's direct interdependence with Central Asia and the West's interest in integrating the Black Sea region into a winning strategic equation; however, to materialise these ambitions, a Cold War thinking is much more necessary now than being thrown by Russia into this scenario with new borders, stretching as far as Poland and Romania, at the risk of generating additional fronts for the U.S. and weakening its presence in the Pacific.¹¹

¹⁰ Silviu Nate, James Jay Carafano, "The West Should Welcome the Middle Corridor," *The National Interest*, October 1, 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/west-should-welcome-middle-corridor-205085>.

¹¹ Silviu Nate, "Navigând printre umbrele 'autismului strategic' sau câteva considerații privind locul anului 2024 pe harta provocărilor globale" (Navigating among the shadows of "strategic autism" or a few considerations on the place of 2024 on the global challenges map), *Contributors*, December 30, 2023, <https://www.contributors.ro/navigand-printre-umbrele-autismului-strategic-sau-cateva-consideratii-privind-lucul-anului-2024-pe-harta-provocarilor-globale/>.

Upcoming Challenges

According to NATO's Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, defeating Russia means deterring Russia from attacking NATO. Ukraine must be a sovereign nation, and the price of control for Putin must become too high. It also means that Ukraine liberates territory and is able to create a corridor in the Black Sea to repel the Russian Fleet. Inflicting heavy on the Russian army and "if there are high costs for Putin, he will sit down at the negotiating table, the message being that Russia cannot control Ukraine".¹²

Although Germany's economic strength is far-reaching and the current German leadership is characterised by strategic vision, the geoeconomic perspective will not secure the region and long-term investments. This standpoint suggests the need for complementarity and commitment from hard power actors who can properly assist Ukraine. One can hope that *Zeitenwende* is a long-lasting commitment.

The new Silk Road to Europe will also come through the South Caucasus, Georgia, and Turkey. For the first time, on October 25, 2023, congressional hearings¹³ raised whether China would participate in the reconstruction of Ukraine. These issues are important because China's long-term economic profile in the region might gain strategic valence.

Another challenge relates to Ukraine's future and the red lines that will be negotiated with Russia. Future questions arise! What levers of regional coercion will Russia keep in the region? What will support for Ukraine consist of for reconstruction, security, and defence guarantees?

Possible political changes in Europe and the United States following the 2024 elections may accentuate weaknesses that non-democratic powers will exploit in various ways. Therefore, Europe and the U.S. must be healthy at home to be effective abroad.

Suggesting The EU's Strategic Imperatives

The E.U. has the profile of a credible political actor and mediator but needs to be a complete guarantor because it lacks coercive instruments of hard power. Combining soft and hard capabilities brings us to Joseph Nye's smart power concept. Therefore, by enhancing complementarity with NATO, the E.U. can advance a geopolitical vision by engaging in a smart-power strategy with defensive military elements and active economic and diplomatic actions in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

The E.U. alone cannot assume a geopolitical project for the Eastern neighbourhood but can co-opt extra-regional democratic partners who can implement a comprehensive security project.

On the other hand, China's deployment in the region will pose an additional challenge for the E.U., as well as for the U.S. and the U.K. Focusing on countering hegemonic ambitions might be a good European mindset for structuring future policies in the eastern vicinity.

¹² The Heritage Foundation, "NATO Secretary General on Modern Needs of the Alliance 75 Years After Its Founding," YouTube, January 31, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bM4hwUyHeaI>.

¹³ United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, "Assessing the Department of State's Strategy for Security in the Black Sea Region," October 25, 2023, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/assessing-the-department-of-states-strategy-for-security-in-the-black-sea-region>.

The geopolitical conundrum facing the E.U.'s Eastern Neighbourhood policy is multifaceted. Russia's civilisational warfare and imperial ambitions have destabilised the region and threatened European security. However, the E.U.'s past approach has been insufficient, overly cautious, and lacked strategic vision.

Fundamentally, the E.U. must adapt to new security realities, including an aggressive and hostile Russia. This requires rethinking the Eastern Partnership to support Ukraine militarily while focusing on infrastructure connectivity and economic projects linking Europe to the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Extra-regional democratic partners like the U.S. and NATO are key to implementing a comprehensive regional security framework.

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