



# EXPERTS' DEBRIEF

## TRANS-EUROPEAN REFLECTIONS ON THE EU'S RESPONSE TO RUSSIA'S WAR IN UKRAINE



- SPECIAL ISSUE -

# FOREWORD



**JIM CLOOS**  
TEPSA Secretary General

As Russia's war of aggression unfolded, we sent a number of questions to our network concerning the EU response. We asked questions about the energy markets, about SWIFT, military assistance and disinformation. The objective is to mobilize our network to get as many facts and figures as necessary and a scientific analysis of developments.

The findings concerning energy start from the agreed policy objective of lowering dependency on Russian exports. The Commission is working on the means to do that. There are two points to make when reading the contributions received: the first is that it is easier to reach the EU objective on oil than on gas, for structural reasons. The second is that there is a timing problem, particularly for gas. Reference is also made to the link with the climate change targets. In our last Experts' debrief we already highlighted the challenge of rising energy prices for our societies. At the time this was attributed more to general economic and market developments than the tensions around Ukraine. It is clear that Russia's unjustified military aggression against Ukraine since then will have an additional effect on prices. (Dujmović, Siddi, Surwillo & Slakaityte)

Concerning SWIFT, the experts recall that for the time same being the ban covers only seven of the Russian banks. A total ban would of course heighten the damage to Russia, but would also possibly have a wider effect on the world economy. It would also have a major effect on EU import of energy and wheat from Russia. (Kerényi, Akhvlediani)

The question of military assistance to Ukraine is another burning topic. In the absence of agreement on a no-fly zone, the focus is on providing ground-based air defense capacities and other means. The EU has taken the extraordinary step to provide hundreds of millions of euros to fund arms exports to Ukraine. We will closely follow the further developments in this field. (Raik, Gruszczak)

The final question was about Russian disinformation and the means to combat it. Important steps have already been taken, with the creation in 2015 of the East StratCom Task force. The EU has now suspended the activities of RT/Russia Today and of Sputnik. The experts mention a number of other measures to strengthen the EU toolbox further so as to enhance the EE's capacity to act in this area. (Sebe & Vaş, Sirbiladze)

## Topics

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# ENERGY SUPPLY

Could the EU afford to disconnect itself from Russian energy supplies in the short term? What would be the main impact and how could it be mitigated?

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**KRŠEVAN ANTUN DUJMOVIĆ**

Institute for Development and International Relations, Croatia

The plan of the European Commission to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels by 2030, announced on March 8 is an important step forward to untie the EU from dependency of Russian oil and gas. The EU has already started phasing out coal as the biggest pollutant, removing it out of the EU's green taxonomy. Oil can also be replaced from other sources worldwide (the Middle East, Latin America), while **phasing out Russian gas will take time**. However, **by winter 2022/2023 the EU should lower its dependence on Russian gas by 2/3**. This new initiative of the EC will **strengthen EU's energy dependency and undermine Russian aggressive actions** in the future as it will be depleted of financial resources to fund its military spending. The EU will gradually create its energy security independently from Russia, will **striping Russian gas of European market will have crippling effect on Russian economy**, as **Chinese market will not be able to replace the role of the EU for Russian energy exports**.

The EU's new energy policy initiative, which aims to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels and eventually to decouple it from Russia, is a necessary measure to achieve Europe's energy security and turn the EU into a global geopolitical player, with a united and strong voice in the global arena. However, the path to independence from Russian fossil fuels will not be rapid as **new energy supply routes could take years to be established**.

The situation in which EU finds itself in the face of Russian threats at this moment is more favorable in the oil than the gas sector. Russia exports 7 million barrels of crude oil on a daily basis to EU countries. Out of this quantity, it can be realistically expected that up to **4 million barrels of Russian oil could be replaced from the OPEC countries**. Members of OPEC supply 60% of the global oil demand, and while Russia is not a member of this organisation, it does have a certain influence on OPEC as the two collaborate in order to form prices on global oil markets. If the EU reaches an agreement with four members of OPEC which have capacity to increase their production – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait and Iran – **the oil delivered by tankers to Europe could replace 4 million barrels of oil currently coming from Russia**. Iran alone has this capacity.

However, the situation is far less favorable for the EU when it comes to the gas sector and reaching independence from Russia. The EU currently imports around 155 billion of cubic meters of Russian gas (40% of total gas imports) with **the vast majority of 55 billion coming though the NS1 pipeline**. While certification and commissioning of NS2 should be halted for an indefinite period following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, **it is implausible that the consumption of gas from NS1 will decrease in the next 3-5 years**. New pipelines take years to build, and **Europe can meet its gas demand though LNG terminals in a limited portion**. Germany, as the biggest consumer of gas in Europe, should finalise its three LNG projects but this will take **at least two more years**. At the same time, the development of renewable energy, primarily from onshore and offshore wind farm in the Baltic Sea, and hydrogen, cannot replace fossil fuels even in the mid-term. This means that **the EU cannot significantly lower its dependence on Russian gas before 2030**.



**MARCO SIDDI**

Finnish Institute of International Affairs, Finland

The European Union would incur **serious economic losses** if Russian energy supplies were to be stopped, and some countries in Central and Eastern Europe might need to introduce emergency measures. If Russian gas supplies were halted, energy prices and the prices of many basic goods in the EU market would further increase. In the short run, in the spring/summer 2022, it would be possible for the EU to replenish its gas storage with non-Russian gas, but at a **considerable higher price** than in the past. The private sector is unlikely to take these costs and risk serious losses in the case market conditions change later in 2022 - for example, if Gazprom increases supplies later in 2022 and gas prices drop significantly.

**Europe has sufficient infrastructure to import gas from non-Russian sources;** there is huge spare capacity to import especially additional liquefied natural gas (LNG). The problem is that, particularly due to the tight market conditions of past and coming months, there is not much gas on the market for the EU to buy – definitely not enough to replace Russian gas supplies, which were 155 billion cubic metres in 2021 and even more in pre-Covid times. Most available LNG is tied by contract to buyers in Asia and the Americas. Global market conditions – high post-Covid demand and limited supply – mean that **there will not be much additional LNG for the EU.**

However, if gas flows from Russia to the EU continue under existing long-term contracts, which is the most likely scenario also for the short run, the EU will not face major shortages or emergency situations. At the same time, the Union can mitigate future risks if it continues to implement its **Green Deal**, boost renewable energy production, energy efficiency and savings, so that dependence on fossil fuel imports decreases more rapidly in coming years.



**IZABELA SURWILLO**

DIIS, Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark



**VERONIKA SLAKAITYTE**

DIIS, Danish Institute for International Studies, Denmark

**Severing energy ties with Russia will put a high economic strain on the European companies and individual consumers in the short term but can accelerate the EU's energy transition and boost its security of supply long-term. The economic impact of the high energy prices can be partially mitigated by a set of emergency and long-term measures outlined by the EU, such as the “Energy Prices Toolbox”.**

Russia's military invasion of Ukraine puts the issue of energy supply at the top of the EU's high-security agenda and led to a U-turn policy shift in its energy relations with Russia. If for many years there was a discrepancy between Central and Eastern Europe which largely perceived Moscow's use of fossil fuel exports as an instrument of political pressure, and some western countries, such as Germany, which insisted on the economic dimension of EU-Russia energy cooperation and projects such as Nord Stream 2, now the views across the EU are aligned. However, **abrupt diversification of the EU's energy supply poses a major challenge** for two main reasons. First, the EU is currently highly dependent on Russian gas (40%) and oil (30%), with the potential diversification of the gas supply proving particularly problematic due to insufficient gas infrastructure and limited availability of liquified gas. Second, the ambitious targets outlined in the European Green Deal, such as cutting the net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% from 1990 levels by 2030, rule out some potential short-term solutions that contradict the EU's climate agenda – e.g., burning coal.

In light of the current developments in Ukraine, the International Energy Agency (IEA) introduced a **10-Point Action** plan to swiftly minimize the EU's dependence on Russian gas by one-third by the end of this year, while staying in line with the climate protection targets. In a similar vein, the European Commission (EC) launched the **“REPowerEU”** plan aimed at complete elimination of the EU's dependence on the Russian fossil fuels by 2030, with a strong emphasis on natural gas. The proposed measures revolve around diversification of gas supplies, the introduction of minimum storage requirements, increased generation from low-emission energy sources (including nuclear), strengthened efficiency measures, and further investments in large-scale renewable projects.

Gas diversification points to the **introduction of alternative supply routes**, whereby **LNG infrastructure** stands crucial. The EU's yearly LNG import capacity accounts for 157 bcm of regasified natural gas, which at full capacity is sufficient to cover nearly 40% of the overall demand. The current LNG imports are only partially utilized, amounting to 80 bcm/year, leaving space for improvement. However, 70% of the LNG market operates with long-term (10+ year) agreements, and the major LNG suppliers – the US, Australia, and Qatar – are already operating at nearly full capacity. The stiffness of the LNG market combined with world-wide gas storage filling in response to developments in Ukraine does not leave much space for the EU to maneuver. In the near term, accessing cargoes destined for other destinations is the best shot the EU has; this, however, will come at an increasingly high price. Furthermore, if the LNG share in the EU is to be increased further, to meet the demand, new infrastructure capacity building is necessitated in both import as well as export destinations.

The combination of expensive LNG imports (prices of liquified gas and new LNG infrastructure) and the accelerated pace of low carbon energy transition is going to be costly for European businesses and individual consumers alike. **The impact of the high energy prices might be partially mitigated** by a number of measures proposed by the EC. The EC's "Energy Price Toolbox" adapted in October 2021 seeks to mitigate immediate energy price surges impact and boost resilience against shocks. On a national level, this measure covers income support to households, state aid for private businesses as well as tax reductions. In the longer term, measures focus on further investments in renewables and energy efficiency, which will improve states' overall energy security. Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in March 2022 the EC issued also **additional guidance for energy price regulation in exceptional circumstances**, such as direct support for companies affected by high energy prices and measures to minimize energy price volatility in the long run. Furthermore, the Commission will consult the Member States on the development of a Temporary Crisis Framework.

Oil is a more palpable resource than gas, enabling the transport of it via different means, including pipelines, road, rail, and sea. Therefore, maneuvering around the cut-off of Russian oil will prove to be less difficult in the short run, as **replacement barrels are available for immediate supply**. The release of **oil reserves** will play a crucial role before alternative energy sources can be utilized. In a long-term perspective, as the Secretary-General of OPEC noted, the permanent loss of the Russian oil volumes to the EU simply cannot be replaced at the current levels of consumption. Meeting the EU's demand with non-Russian oil depends on the global oil capacity which is insufficient; this will inevitably drive the prices up. The spikes can already be observed: at one point this week approaching \$139 a barrel, which indicates a jump of over 30% as compared to pre-war levels. **While measures are available short-term, the EU must engage in an accelerated oil phase-out and transition to renewables quicker than intended.**

## Further readings:

A 10-Point Plan to Reduce the European Union's Reliance on Russian Natural Gas

IEA, Report, March 2022.

<https://www.iea.org/reports/a-10-point-plan-to-reduce-the-european-unions-reliance-on-russian-natural-gas>

Renewable energy will lead to major shifts in geopolitical power

Berling, T. V., Schouten, P. & Surwillo, I., 4 Oct 2021, Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), 4 p. (DIIS Policy Brief; No. September, Vol. 2021).

New energy technology will make the Baltic Sea Region more crisis-resilient: Green energy technologies hold geopolitical promise

Berling, T. V. & Surwillo, I., 15 Dec 2021, Copenhagen, 4 p. (DIIS Policy Brief; No. December, Vol. 2021).

Small states' security strategies need an international energy dimension: What can be learned from the Danish Nord Stream and Baltic Pipe negotiations?

Berling, T. V., 27 May 2021, København: Danish Institute for International Studies, p. 1-4, 4 p. (DIIS Policy Brief; No. May, Vol. 2021).

REPowerEU: Joint European action for more affordable, secure, and sustainable energy

European Commission, Action Plan, 8 March 2022.

[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_22\\_1511](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_22_1511)

When energy became part of the Ukraine war everybody lost

Surwillo, I. & Slakaityte, V. 16 Mar 2022., Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) 4 p. (DIIS Policy Brief; No. March, Vol. 2022).

# SWIFT BAN

What are the limitations of the disconnection of several Russian banks from SWIFT, and how could these measures potentially be broadened while minimising technical consequences for Europe and the rest of the SWIFT network?

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**ÁDÁM KERÉNYI**

Institute of World Economics, Hungary

The disconnection of selected Russian banks from the SWIFT's financial messaging services had been discussed by several journals before the invasion started. It was in 2014 (at the time of Crimea's occupation), that the UK first called for this exact measure.

In 2022 according to the statistics, the Bank of Russia had over \$450 billion in non-gold FX reserves, and the private sector also had over \$500 billion of liquid investments, so these assets were close to \$1 trillion of liquid wealth. Although estimates show that Russian members represent only 1.5% of all SWIFT flows, I am afraid that the consequences might be beyond expectations. The disconnection of Russian banks from SWIFT could trigger a **new Lehman-like financial turmoil**.

There is a differentiation between a "**nuclear option**", a total exclusion of Russian entities from SWIFT or a "**softer version**", banning a list of 7 banks (Bank Otkritie, Novikombank, Promsvyazbank, Bank Rossiya, Sovcombank, VNESHECONOMBANK, VTB BANK).

A hard stop on Russia's involvement in SWIFT would make payments almost impossible. These 7 Russian banks might not be able to cope with sanctions, and the scale and coordination of current measures will hit them hard. Looking at the economic impact, it varies from a very limited value to a highly significant decrease of the Russian GDP. Since these 7 banks are deeply integrated into the European and global financial system, the sanctions are already being felt far beyond Russia's borders. **The potential economic repercussions could be complex and mutually painful for the trading partners of Russia.** The financial sanctions could be potentially broadened by extending disconnection from the SWIFT system to all Russian banks, including those that are heavily involved in energy-related transactions (Gazprombank).

Also, there is a widespread fear focusing on the potential uptick in money laundering and transfer of assets, as Russian financial experts will find alternative methods to keep money coming in and out of Russia. China, for example also has a small alternative to SWIFT called the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS).

However, other experts argue that there are also several reasons why the **ban's impact on Russian banks might not be as relevant as expected**: 1) SWIFT is a messaging system, and it has no role in payment execution; 2) it does not stop Russian banks from making or receiving international transfers from third parties; and 3) business-to-business payments are also currently unaffected.



## TINATIN AKHVLEDIANI

Center for European Policy Studies (CEPS), Belgium

The main limitation of the SWIFT related sanctions imposed by the EU is that **these sanctions are only targeted to selected banks** and do not cover all Russian banks. More precisely, the seven banks suspended from using SWIFT represent only 2% of the total number of banks operating in Russia and overall they source not more than one-fourth of assets owned by the Russian banking sector.

The main reason why the EU remains extra cautious with SWIFT is that some of its Member States still remain highly dependent on **Russian energy imports**. SWIFT, as the financial messaging system, sends payment orders to settle transactions worldwide, including cross-border transactions for purchasing Russian gas and oil. Hence, by suspending all Russian banks from using SWIFT, the EU risks complicating those transactions needed for receiving energy supplies from Russia. However, this is likely to be avoided by targeted sanctions imposed only on selected rather than on all banks in Russia.

**To make SWIFT sanctions more effective, the scope of the sanctions should be broadened.** The currently imposed sanctions only include VTB bank from the top three Russian banks, while Sberbank and Gazprombank are not yet suspended from using SWIFT. While still excluding transactions crucial for energy supplies, the EU could at least extend SWIFT sanctions on Alfa Bank, Rosselkhozbank and Moscow Credit Bank which source considerable amount of assets after Sberbank and Gazprombank.

Technically, even if all banks in Russia would be excluded from SWIFT, Western customers could still find ways to settle payments with Russia. For example, customers could continue using the banking system with transactions through accounts at banks in the West or third countries or using existing equivalents to SWIFT. The Russian central bank has already put out the announcement of a possibility to switch to its financial messaging system (SPFS), that Russia has been developing since facing the Western sanctions following its annexation of Crimea back in 2014. Another SWIFT analogue is China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS).

However, these SWIFT analogues cover only a fraction of what SWIFT connects: more than 11,000 institutions in more than 200 countries across the globe. Additionally, there are numerous alternatives to bank transfers that could be used, such as cryptocurrencies, securities, cash, IOUs and even precious metals. However, none of the alternatives are as convenient and secure as bank transfers settled through a globally well-connected network like SWIFT.

Therefore, extending SWIFT related sanctions towards more Russian Banks, particularly the largest ones, will yield strong negative effects for Russia. As we can learn from the past experiences of imposing sanctions against Iran, **SWIFT sanctions yield strong negative effects already in the short-term, which could be important to curb Putin's capacities to keep funding the war.**

# MILITARY SUPPORT TO UKRAINE

What is holding European countries back from doing more? What additional steps could and should be taken (individually and/or in the NATO framework) in order to defend Ukraine and the rest of Europe, notably in terms of defence against airstrikes and rockets?



**ARTUR GRUSZCZAK**

Jagiellonian University, Poland

The EU has fallen victim to a delusion cultivated for decades that its soft and normative powers can and will balance assertive policies of the global powers and that the ‘worst won’t come’. Even though the EU in its 2016 Global Strategy warned that ‘peace and stability in Europe are no longer a given’, a **worst-case scenario was not taken into consideration**. While highlighting Russia’s violation of international law and the destabilisation of Ukraine, the Global Strategy pointed to interdependence between the EU and Russia and the need to engage Russia in discussing disagreements.

European countries, same as most states in the world, are afraid of retaliation by Russia. Whether or not Putin’s aggressive stance is based on cold-blooded geostrategic calculation or the folly affecting long-time dictators, the EU member states and their associates **will not risk aggravating their relations with Russia**, especially in economic and financial terms. Currently, a no-fly zone is the crucial element of military support to Ukraine. Without protecting civilian population and the victims of war from the Russian military operations and ensuring an uninterrupted flow of military and non-military aid to the Ukrainian defence, prospects for survival of the independent Ukraine are bleak. This also means that the current supply routes from European countries to Ukraine may be blocked over time. Neither NATO nor the EU have been ready for taking such a groundbreaking decision thus far.

Last but not least, the Russian military invasion of Ukraine has been preceded by a Russian long-time, consequent operation of **undermining integration structures and cooperation mechanisms of European countries**. This included the penetration of political elites and opinion makers by the Russian intelligence services, the financing of political parties and NGOs by the Kremlin-affiliated entities and the buying of loyalty of former top politicians by offering them very lucrative jobs in Russia-controlled companies. As a result, a spider’s web weaved by the Putin regime in Europe has **demobilized many political forces against the Russian influence on European politics**. These tacit and dangerous liaisons connecting the Kremlin with decision makers in the economic, social and political spheres must be effectively dismantled.



**KRISTI RAIK**  
Estonian Foreign Policy Institute, Estonia

Obviously, Western military support is of critical importance for Ukraine's ability to push back Russia's invasion. Western countries have already mobilized **unprecedented volumes of military assistance**, including deliveries from the US worth USD 350 million in total, to be followed by major additional aid. The EU's decision to provide EUR 450 million from the European Peace Facility for military equipment to Ukraine was a historical step on the way towards making the EU a serious actor in European security. Many European countries have also been providing significant military aid (e.g. anti-tank Javelin missiles from my own country Estonia). Exact details concerning such deliveries are not available in public, in order not to jeopardize their arrival.

There are two concerns related to the provision of military aid, both of which underline the importance of collective action and solidarity in NATO and the EU. First, particularly countries in Central and Eastern Europe have been keen to help Ukraine, but at the same time they want to make sure that **their own defence capability is not undermined**. Second, the confusion over providing fighter jets from Poland to Ukraine has underscored the need to find formula that would involve allies collectively and **not put any single country in a vulnerable position with regard to Russia's possible reactions**.

The will of European countries to assist Ukraine, also in military terms, is strong, but **coordination of aid in both the EU and NATO does not seem to be satisfactory thus far**. If Russia's offensive continues and pressure on NATO to step up its involvement grows – e.g. in the form of a no-fly zone – the need for collective readiness of NATO and the EU to manage the related risks will become ever more important.

# DISINFORMATION

Are there additional measures to be taken as regards Russian disinformation in Russia and abroad?



**MIHAI SEBE**  
European Institute of Romania, Romania



**ELIZA VAS**  
European Institute of Romania, Romania

The question of disinformation as such and particularly the state disinformation in Russia and abroad is of outmost relevance in the current security context. The short-term measures taken so far have tried to tackle this issue, either by implementing new policies/instruments or by resorting to some old school techniques. One example is the BBC resurrecting WWII-era shortwave broadcasts to counter Russia blockage of news related to the invasion of Ukraine.

We are observing the dissemination of distorted narratives regarding the EU and NATO aiming to provoke discord and misunderstandings amidst EU citizens. In time, these narratives can lead to increased **social fragmentation** regarding the ongoing crisis and can **harm citizens' trust in the way democracies work**.

Solutions to these narratives need to be identified also on the long run, and as a personal opinion, **the focus should be on education and transparency**. Support for media education both in formal and nonformal settings should be granted, with the purpose of **developing critical thinking skills among the citizens** as well as improving their **capacity to read evidence-based information**.

Existing key actions such as the European Democracy Action Plan should be further adapted to include more aspects for fighting disinformation and misinformation not only in the EU member states but also in partner third countries. Considering the global expansion of authoritarian rule in 2022, it is highly necessary to **invest in citizens' support for democracy** and to reflect this priority both at home and in the external policy of the EU.

Further attention and support should be offered to the **Eastern Partnership states** (including Ukraine) for fighting disinformation and supporting a free and independent media, in line with the recent intentions to create a broader toolbox to further enhance the EU's capacity to act. This toolbox will be structured across four cross-cutting dimensions, improving the EU's situational awareness. First, to build up the EU's and its partners' resilience by stepping up EU's **support to independent media and civil society in third countries** and boosting the strategic communication capacities of EU's Delegations.

We need to learn the lessons of the pandemic when our societies have been characterised by an infodemic, and to continue with the measures that proved to be efficient, while preserving the individual rights and freedoms. The measures should be in line with both the provisions on freedom of expression and information from the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the provisions on freedom of opinion and expression from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, while being robust enough to provide the desired outcome. Building up a resilient information environment is a marathon and not a sprint and we should always pay attention to the next context that can be vulnerable in the face of dissemination techniques (e.g., climate change and energy transition policies).



## IRAKLI SIRBILADZE

PMC Research Center, Georgia

Russian disinformation campaigns seek legitimacy both inside and outside the country. Internationally, Russia's disinformation campaigns that justify the abuse of international norms usually fail to attract audiences. Domestically, however, largely due to **state-controlled media** and a **repressive political system**, the Russian government- which pledges to protect 'historical Russia' allegedly threatened by the Western hegemony - has so far managed to secure the support of the **majority** of the public.

The **early signs** of the Russian-led disinformation campaigns appeared during the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, while, following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russia has embarked on waging full force political warfare against Ukraine and the West. The shooting down of the flight MH17, Russia's role in the Syrian conflict, interference in the US elections, use of a nerve agent on the UK soil as well as various malign actions against Western states exemplify Russia's instrumentalization of the disinformation campaigns to sow discord in the democratic West and its partners. In Russia's neighborhood, particularly in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, the Russian-led **disinformation campaigns aimed at threatening societal consensus** on these countries' Western integration through contesting liberal values and questioning their internal and external sovereignty. In relation to Ukraine, attempts to delegitimize the 2014 protests served as a discursive ground for Russia's objectives of 'demilitarization' and 'denazification' of Ukraine in 2022.

**Disinformation within Russia takes the form of suppressing dissenting voices and maintaining full control on the narrative regarding the West in general and the war against Ukraine in particular.** Hence the recent decisions on restricting the Western media outlets and social networks from operating within Russia as well as forcing independent local media outlets that deviate from the Kremlin-controlled narrative to stop reporting on the war against Ukraine. Power of the state media in Russia seems to so far bear fruit.

**The EU has in the past years led efforts to counter Russia's disinformation campaigns.** In 2015 it has established the East StratCom Task Force and aimed at strengthening resilience in the EU and beyond. More recently, the EU has suspended the broadcasting activities of Sputnik and RT/Russia Today- a political arsenal in the hands of the Russian Federation to justify its war against Ukraine. To further counter disinformation in Russia and abroad, the EU shall:

- **offer support to independent media outlets and civil society voices** remaining in or leaving Russia, and increase its use of **public diplomacy and strategic communications** to promote the EU as a democracy-and-welfare-oriented peaceful actor in Russia and beyond;
- purposefully invest in strengthening state and societal resilience through **promoting good governance**, when it comes to the EU's eastern partners. Along with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova face further threats as Russia will likely try to create pretext for the intervention and further attenuation of their sovereignty by spreading disinformation related to, among others, Russophobia, the development of biological weapons and protracted conflicts.

# CONCLUDING REMARKS



**MARIAM KHOTENASHVILI**  
Executive Director, TEPSA

There is a wide-spread agreement across the EU that it must react strongly to Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine. Sanctions are seen as key in this respect. With our questions we have tried to elicit information about the implications, including if the EU could go further with its sanctions, including towards a ban on (some) Russian energy supplies to the EU. Experts tried to lay out the consequences on Russia and the EU. There are links between the measures, notably SWIFT and energy supplies. Together, the contributions to this brief have shown a number of possible ways how collective action by EU Member States could further weaken Russia's ability to conquer Ukraine, while also taking into account the implications for the EU.

**Energy supplies:** Oil from Russia can be replaced more easily than gas. At the same time, EU countries pay much larger amounts to Russia for oil (\$110 billion for crude oil in 2021, \$69 billion for oil products) than for gas (\$54 billion in 2021). Further diversification of oil supplies by the EU could make a substantial dent in Russia's hard currency income.

In this respect, it is noteworthy that according to a recent survey, 55% of German respondents are in favour of ending oil and gas imports from Russia, even if this were to cause supply shortages. On 12 March, the German government announced an intention to stop the import of Russian oil and coal by end-2022.

Energy savings, efficiency investments and faster investment in renewables are obviously fundamental. Implementation of the European Green Deal is now even more urgent.

**SWIFT:** The seven Russian banks disconnected from SWIFT so far account for only about a quarter of Russian banking sector assets. Given that Russia has not made any de-escalation efforts nor meaningful humanitarian steps, disconnection of additional Russian banks from SWIFT should be seriously considered. However, it is clear that possibilities for further de-SWIFT-ing are linked to the reduction of Europe's energy dependence on Russia.

**Military support:** Imposition of a no-fly zone over Ukraine does not have sufficient support within NATO. NATO countries are also reluctant to supply fighter jets to Ukraine, with the Pentagon suggesting that strengthening Ukraine's ground-based air defence capacities can actually be more effective. If this is the case, then EU countries should look promptly into their ground-based air defence arsenals. All air defence equipment that the Ukrainian army could use without sophisticated training should be provided. Individual NATO members should not fear depleting their stocks, because NATO leaders have resolutely confirmed that all NATO members are collectively protected. Air defence capabilities are now needed in Ukraine, especially to prevent further bombing of civilian buildings.

**Russian disinformation in Russia and abroad:** Experts' conclusions on the extent of Russia-sponsored disinformation across Europe are alarming. Irakli Sirbiladze notes how Russian government's narrative protecting 'historical' Russia, 'threatened' by Western 'hegemony', spreads through Russia-controlled media. He also notes how Russia's repressive political system has so far managed to secure the support of the majority of the Russian public. Mihai Sebe and Eliza Vaş highlight how Russia's disinformation efforts in the EU are aiming at provoking discord and misunderstandings among EU citizens. The contributions make clear that the EEAS East StratCom Task Force does not represent a sufficient counter measure to Russia's sophisticated machinery of spreading disinformation, including through financing of far-right political parties in Europe.