The Acquired and the Required. Reflections on Geopolitical Europe

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AUTHORS
ZAKI LAÏDI

45, RUE D'ULM 75005 PARIS
LEGRANDCONTINENT.EU
GEG@ENS.FR

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ZAKI LAÏDI • ZAKI LAÏDI IS A PROFESSOR AT SCIENCES PO AND SPECIAL ADVISOR TO JOSEP BORRELL, HIGH REPRESENTATIVE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND SECURITY AND VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION.
HE IS THE AUTHOR OF NORMS OVER FORCE, PALGRAVE WHICH HAS JUST BEEN RELEASED IN A CHINESE TRANSLATION. HIS CONTRIBUTIONS TO GROUPE D'ÉTUDES GÉOPOLITIQUES ARE STRICTLY HIS OWN VIEWS.

The war in Ukraine marks a major political turning point in Europe's history since 1957. The war confronts Europe with the reality of a high intensity war between nations, the likes of which has not been seen on the continent since the end of the Second World War. The war also exposes Europe to a Russia that, in attacking Ukraine, has destroyed the European security framework that has been in place since 1991. Of course, this conflict does not put Russia into direct opposition with a European Union member state, but it does directly affect the Union given Ukraine's place in the European geopolitical balance. Moreover, a successful invasion of Ukraine would have directly threatened the Union's security by greatly increasing Moscow's political and military aggressiveness. Russia could have considered an invasion of Moldova after invading Ukraine, intensifying its work of destabilizing other nations.

For many years the Europeans attempted to create a common policy towards Russia. Admittedly, it has not succeeded in doing so, as the European perception of the Russian issue was highly heterogeneous. For some countries, the Russian threat was an existential one; other countries, without being completely naïve, thought or hoped that maintaining strong political dialogue or economic interdependence would soften Russia's revisionist and hegemonic designs; and finally, there were those countries for whom the Russian matter was a relatively secondary issue, either because they did not perceive it is a real threat to their security, or because they accepted Russia and maintained cordial relations which were sometimes supported by interpersonal relationships that were as strong as they were troubling.

The 24th of February 2022 shattered this fragmented perception in one fell swoop in favor of a now widely shared representation: that of a revisionist and hegemonic Russia challenging Europe's security. Moscow brutally invaded a sovereign nation after officially declaring that it had no such intention. Through the brutality of its actions, Russia managed to unite all the nations of the Union against it. Not only has its aggressiveness been laid bare, but its political word, as a permanent member of the Security Council, has been debased. After all is said and done, how can we believe in the veracity of Russian political commitments?

This European unanimity was therefore made possible through the brutality of the operation, through the spurious rationale that Russia used to justify it, as well as the pitiful performance of its army. Indeed, a war won within the space of a few days would have made the European response more difficult, not in terms of principles, but in operational ones. The fact that the legal and legitimate Ukrainian government remained in place, that the resistance of the Ukrainian people was evident, and that Russia's plans were thwarted from the first days of the invasion changed the situation. The world's second largest army proved to be a caricature of itself, while the Ukrainian army symbolized the resistance of a people.

This text is not meant to retrace the history of the conflict or describe its various stages. Rather, it seeks to understand how this war has changed the face of Europe, how it changed the Union from simply a normative power to a geopolitical one. To this end, it seems useful to us to identify two dimensions in the political dynamics of present-day Europe: the acquired and the required,before assessing the next steps and challenges.

The acquired is what the Union has managed to accomplish as a result of this conflict; the required is what remains to be accomplished on the road to power; and, finally, the undecided are all those matters that have yet to be decided, either because we lack the perspective to do so, or because the lessons of this war are far from being fully known.

The acquired

The acquired is the opposite of the innate, and in Europe, the innate is the refusal of power in the classical sense of the term. Indeed, the European project was first and foremost intended to prevent a new conflict between France and Germany. It aimed to pacify intra-European relations through exchange and economic cooperation. The framework was therefore Kantian: it was based on the principle of peace through exchange. Foreign policy was left to the side, either because no European state at that time wished to surrender its sovereignty in this sensitive area, especially after the spectacular failure of the EDC, or because those who were willing to do so only imagined this action exclusively within the framework of NATO. Let us not forget the preamble to the 1962 Franco-German treaty passed by the Bundestag which clearly made it subordinate to the Atlantic alliance which would guarantee Germany's security.

Has the war in Ukraine changed this relationship to power? It would seem so, insofar as the essential condition of power rests on two factors: the feeling of being confronted with an existential danger and the willingness to take risks to reduce it; and it is this dual approach that has motivated Europe since the beginning of the war. From the outset of the invasion, this sense of danger led Europe to pass a succession of ten sanctions packages in the space of a year. These sanctions were not only intended to target Russian elites, but also to weaken the war effort, which is totally unprecedented in European policy; this was a qualitative change that has received little comment, but was decisive. Up to that point, European sanctions had been aimed at ostracizing individuals or entities, not a regime. In this case, it was a matter of coercing the Russian regime to change its policy or make that policy more difficult. This is in stark contrast to Europe's extremely limited reactions after the occupation of Crimea in 2014, when it was not until a Malaysian Airlines aircraft was shot down by separatists in the Donbass that Europe timidly embarked on the path to sanctions.

By imposing harsh and swift sanctions on Russia, Europe has shifted towards hard power. In fact, and contrary to popular belief, hard power has never meant only the use of military force, but also the use of coercion – this is the only point that separates it from soft power. If military force is used in the context of a peacekeeping operation, it is not hard power. On the other hand, the adoption of significant sanctions intended to weaken or constrain the conduct of a nation fully qualifies as hard power. If we add to this the military financing of a nation at war and the freezing of Russian assets held abroad, it is not unreasonable to say that Europe has completed the first step in qualifying as a hard power, a step that has been long anticipated but which until now has never been realized, most likely due to a lack of unity within the ranks of the Union.

By coming to Ukraine's aid and imposing sanctions designed to curb Russia's war effort, Europe has succeeded in giving credibility to its ambitions of geopolitical power; but its most powerful political gesture in this war was not the approval of massive sanctions against Russia, nor the granting of European military aid to Ukraine, but the decision to end, in the space of one year, our energy dependence on Russia. Indeed, prior to the invasion of Ukraine, Europe imported 45% of its gas from Russia, a very high figure, which had even increased after the invasion of Crimea – this could logically lead Putin to believe that Europe would never take the risk of cutting itself off from Russian supplies. Furthermore, Russia supplied 200 million tons of oil and oil products, not to mention coal, which represented half of European imports. In the space of a year, this dependence has been virtually eliminated for gas, coal, oil and oil products.

Despite this, due to its financial means, Europe managed to compensate for the disruption by finding alternative sources of supply (sometimes at the expense of poorer countries). Europe also managed to reduce its gas consumption by 20% without slowing down its economy. Russia believed that Europe's dependence on it was so strong (75% of its gas and 55% of its oil went to Europe) that it would never take the risk of directly opposing Russia. Yet in taking this major risk, Europe deprived Russia of an essential source of revenue. As a result, it has cost Russia the energy battle; not only has Europe deprived Russia of resources, which have fallen by 40% in one year, but it has forced Russia to deal with an explosion in military spending.

The result is a kind of seesaw effect where Russia's revenues are collapsing while its expenditures are exploding. At the same time, Russia's problems are even more serious because the cost of extracting its hydrocarbons has become two times higher than the world average under the sanctions, thereby reducing its margin for financing the war. Of course, Russia has alternative outlets in China, India and Turkey. But this substitution is in no way counterproductive for Europe, whose objective is not to exclude Russia from the world market, but rather to curtail the gains from its exports in order to limit its resources for the war. Here again, Europe's political objectives have been met, especially since the introduction of a price ceiling has forced Russia to seek alternative means (shadow fleet) and to offer discounts on its prices.

The setting of a price ceiling once again demonstrates the reality and effectiveness of European hard power, since it is mainly companies based in Europe that have a virtual monopoly on maritime freight insurance. Today, Russia's market power has been weakened, and Europe has contributed significantly to this. Europe should, however, reflect on the two serious political mistakes it has made: excessive dependence on the Russian market and the belief that economic interdependence would make Russia more reasonable and therefore less aggressive. It seems difficult to imagine that Europe could go back on its energy liberation; particularly given that by breaking with its Russian dependence, Europe succeeds in achieving two concurrent political objectives: its Russia policy will no longer depend on its energy vulnerability, and its liberation from the Russian market will accelerate its energy transition. This is what Pierre Charbonnier has called “war ecology” in these columns.

By accelerating the adoption of renewable energies and energy saving measures, Europe has aligned its geopolitical interests with its climate ambitions. Before February 24th, this was a challenge; after February 24th, it is a reality. And so, despite a very high degree of energy dependence on Russia, despite divergent views on the realities of Russia, despite a foreign policy shackled by unanimity, the European Union has entered the era of political power.

Beyond the measures taken, which we have just mentioned, Europe has made a considerable economic and military effort vis-à-vis Ukraine. Its aid, including assistance from the Union and member states, amounts to 67 billion euros, including 12 billion euros in military aid, which will increase to more than 18 billion euros by the end of the year. If we add the 22 billion euros intended to allow the export of Ukrainian agricultural products, the figure rises to 90 billion euros. In comparison, American aid, which is very significant, stands at 51 billion.

While it is true that U.S. military aid is greater than Europe’s, the difference is not glaring. European military support represents 40% of the American military effort – but in terms of per capita GNP in the U.S., the figures are comparable. Furthermore, when economic and military aid are added up, Europe is in the lead. In the end, European and U.S. aid is complementary, not competitive. American support is critical for everything to do with medium-range missiles and intelligence, not to mention the political support without which Europe’s commitment could not have been as great; but this should not cause us to once again neglect the quality of European military assets.

Moreover, the political management of Ukraine shows that it is European nations, or at least some of them, that have consistently taken the initiative to step up this assistance – for example, Poland and Slovakia, which have taken the lead in delivering fighter jets to Ukraine. Estonia has also put forward an ambitious plan to provide Ukraine with one million rounds of ammunition to the tune of 4 billion euros.

Of course, it could be argued that, with regard to this conflict, Europe was only able to act because of the prevailing consensus among its member states, and that the strength of this consensus with regard to Russia does not preclude extending it to other issues. The objection is admissible, provided that two nuances be introduced. The first is that even a member state such as Hungary, which from the beginning of the conflict has shown itself to be very reserved, even lacking in solidarity with Europe’s collective choices, has never used its veto power to oppose collective choices; such a nation even participates in financing the Peace Facility. The second is that an event of such magnitude necessarily leads to certain lessons. Of course, nothing is guaranteed. But this war has created a new political dynamic because it has changed the way Europe looks at itself, and perhaps the way the world looks at Europe. Power is a learning process; it is not without risks or setbacks – so far, they seem limited.

The required

In politics, nothing is simple, especially in the face of the systemic scale of the Ukrainian crisis. While there is little doubt that the war in Ukraine has allowed Europe to take the first steps towards what is referred to as a geopolitical Europe, this does not mean that anything is certain or that anything is settled. This will only be proven over the long term. In politics, linear progress is not the rule, especially when dealing with a federation of nations.

The first thing that is required is the ability to maintain the pace and intensity of the effort being made. But at what pace, and until when? No one knows, because everything depends on the conditions under which this conflict will end; and for the moment, it is far from over. If there is little doubt that Russia can no longer win this war, there is nothing to indicate that Ukraine has already won.

Furthermore, the parameters of both defeat and victory are not entirely clear. Naturally, the full and complete restoration of Ukraine's sovereignty over its territory remains the goal, but its concrete conditions have yet to be defined; particularly since, independent of restoring territorial sovereignty, the problem of war crimes, reparations, and security guarantees to be offered to Ukraine will have to be resolved. Moreover, despite its major political failure and impressive military setbacks, Russia continues to enjoy considerable nuisance power, supported by the infinite sacrifice of its men and the uninterrupted use of artillery fire. Russia cannot build or consolidate anything, but it can still destroy a lot. It is very likely that by this summer we will have a much more accurate assessment of the situation, because by then Ukraine will have launched a counter-offensive. There are numerous Russian vulnerabilities, especially in Crimea. After all, it is a peninsula, linked to southern Ukraine and Russia by a limited number of routes; cutting off these routes means suffocating Crimea, which would represent, before the Donbass, a strategic shift in terms of Putin's political and symbolic investment in Crimea.

From this viewpoint, there are four factors working in Ukraine's favor: the complete mobilization of the Ukrainian people to win the war, political and military support from the United States and Europe, continued strong public support, and Europe's ability to limit the effects of the energy shock. Gas and oil prices have returned to pre-war levels, as have grain prices: Russia's attempt to exploit the conflict to cause a spike in food prices and create a political backlash against the West in Southern countries has largely failed; prices remain high, but this is less a result of the war than of other factors, such as drought. Thanks to the EU Solidarity Lines and the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI) set up by Turkey and the United Nations, 51 million tons of Ukrainian and Russian grain have been successfully exported, which has helped to bring prices down.

However, we must admit that the whole structure remains shaky. This is why Europe undertook real political work, particularly in Africa, to explain that the sanctions against Russia did not apply to grain. The High Representative wrote to 52 African ministers to specify that cereals were not affected by the sanctions and that it was perfectly possible to purchase Russian or Ukrainian cereals.

This is a reality that the Russian narrative obviously sought to contradict, but this example also shows that, thanks to this war, Europe has discovered the need to behave as a transactional actor and not simply as a static political actor proclaiming abstract principles or dispensing development aid automatically without worrying about the behavior of its partners. European delegations now have clear arguments to deconstruct Russian propaganda.

This political work was extended to the United Nations where, through several resolutions, 140 nations condemned the invasion of Ukraine. However, we must not be foolish. Many nations do not feel the Ukrainian conflict in the same way as we do. They do not deny Russia's aggression, but they want to avoid this issue dominating the global agenda to the point of overshadowing other problems that are more pressing for them, such as financing the energy transition, debt, and development financing. Their conflict with Europe is not necessarily a conflict of values, but of priorities.

Who can blame them? Furthermore, Europe has no objection to the rest of the world continuing to trade with Russia, provided that third countries are not used as a logistical base for the re-export of European products to Russia – which is clearly the case. This is why the European Union has appointed a special representative to monitor this extremely sensitive issue.

The structure is therefore fragile, and Europe will never be totally immune to the risks of Ukrainian exhaustion if the conflict persists or drags on. The multipolar reality of the world forces us to simultaneously maintain our cohesion, to accept the prospect of a lasting commitment to Ukraine, to take into account the potential for public opinion to become fatigued, to prevent the creation of a coalition indirectly favorable to Russia, and to prevent China from providing more open support to Russia. All these uncertainties remain contingent on our ability to secure a military victory for Ukraine as quickly as possible.

Next challenges

Finally, there remains what I call the unsettled issues. These are all the political and strategic questions that this war has raised for which it is still very difficult to formulate hypothetical answers, and even less to make predictions.

The most fundamental question very obviously concerns Russia's place in the European security framework. Answering this question is difficult because it greatly depends on the conditions under which this conflict will end, which we cannot yet know. For now, it is hard to see how Russia could be integrated into a European security framework that it destroyed, even if they will still be our neighbors. This will be even more difficult if Russia does not renounce its imperialistic ambitions and accept that its borders are limited to those of the Russian Federation, which are its internationally recognized borders.

How much is Russia's word worth in this matter? This question is worth asking in light of its flagrant violation of the commitments it made to Ukraine under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. This is why it seems extremely difficult for Russia to be integrated in any way into a new security framework without a major political break. But while we know that it was Putin who started this war, Ukraine's problem is a Russian problem; Putin has only made the problem worse.

Furthermore, the war in Ukraine, which was at first a territorial war, has produced its own dynamics. Until the discovery of mass graves in Bucha, it was possible to imagine that a Russian withdrawal from Ukraine could be the solution – even a temporary one – to the problem. Since then, the scale of the war crimes, deportations of children, and destruction of civilian infrastructure has added to the toll, as though Russia wanted this conflict to be interminable, inextricable, and intractable. Stalemates are the hallmark of Russian policy, which is strong enough to destroy, but unable to build. Putin probably does not want a solution to this conflict. He is therefore looking to escalate it, to press for the direct involvement of NATO, which would force the West to compromise given the risks of wider conflict. The use of nuclear threats is part of this strategy of intimidation, which for the time being has not been very successful.

Given such a context, it is understandable that any discussion of the European framework is premature. The first condition for a pacification or normalization of relations with Russia is the withdrawal of its armed forces, the transfer of frozen Russian assets to Ukraine to facilitate its reconstruction, the establishment of a legal mechanism to determine responsibility for the war, and the granting of legal guarantees to prevent a repeat of the February 24th scenario. For the moment, the most tangible consequence of the war is and remains Ukraine's potential entry into the European Union. This is obviously only a possibility for now, given the enormous challenges that must be overcome. But it remains a real and credible prospect, and above all, one that has been accepted by the member states of the Union. The question of Ukraine's NATO membership will also come up at some point, since it is clear that the legal guarantees offered to it in 1994 have proved insufficient.

Of course, this prospect is likely to once again fuel Russia's quest for revenge, but the war of 2022 shows that the real root of the problem was never NATO, but rather the process of Ukraine's political, economic and cultural distancing from Russia. As long as Moscow thought it could control Ukraine, its independence was tolerated; the day the Kremlin realized that this distancing was probably irreversible, it chose the path of destabilization; and when destabilization proved fruitless, it chose invasion. It is worth remembering that the Maidan Revolution was not born out of the prospect of NATO membership, but out of a proposed free trade treaty between Ukraine and the European Union – in other words, the root of the problem lies in Russia's historical inability to break away from the colonial pattern that has shaped its history for several centuries.

We believed that this process had begun with the collapse of the USSR, but Putin has reminded us that this is not so, and that Russia continues to think of itself as a colonial empire. This is the core of the problem and it is therefore up to Russia to address it. Historically, the demise of empires is not easy to manage. Europeans are well aware of this. This was the case for Spain with Cuba, or for France with Algeria. While we wait for this possible outcome, it is up to Europe to contain Russia, including outside the continent where it is methodically fighting our positions. This situation could last for years, possibly decades; even the prospect of a high-intensity conflict between Russia and Europe cannot be ruled out. The Russian question is therefore still before us.

Is Ukraine changing our approach to Europe's strategic responsibility? The term "strategic responsibility" is more appropriate than "strategic autonomy", which has political connotations. What is certain is that Ukraine has undeniably raised awareness about the level of danger and has demonstrated the need to make a sustained military effort in the medium and long term. In the coming years, defense spending will increase substantially for large countries such as France, Germany and Poland – the latter will see its military spending rise to 4% of its GDP.

Of course, without American support, the European military response to Ukraine would not have been sufficient; but it would be inaccurate to think that the European response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine was instigated by the United States alone. There was indeed a kind of joint US-European response, made possible by the very strong overlap of views and common interests in this war.

Besides the very likely increase in military spending, we can already see a number of initiatives, including those just taken by the four Nordic countries to create common integrated air defense. Of course, these are only the first steps, which will only be meaningful if they are supported and multiplied. These steps do not substantially modify the European Union's relationship with NATO, since the territorial defense of Europe is a matter for the Alliance more than ever before; the war in Ukraine has clearly shown that Europeans are not ready militarily to meet the challenge of high-intensity warfare alone.

At the same time, this war has once again shown Europe that it must make a particular effort to make American support more credible. There is no denying that the United States is and will be encouraged more than ever to intensify the European defense effort. Naturally, this complementary approach works when both sides of the Atlantic have the same perception of the problems and solutions.

Is this strong convergence during the Ukraine war permanent? Probably not – because nothing is permanent in politics. It is clear that the transatlantic link has been revitalized by the war in Ukraine, but the strength of this link requires Europe to increase its strategic responsibility in terms of defense and security. This assumes that Europe returns to a high level of military spending, targeting quantitative and qualitative efforts, meaning the mutualization of efforts and autonomy of action in all fields outside of Europe's territorial defense. There is a long way to go in this area. For although the war has unified European positions concerning the Russian danger, it has in no way eliminated the very strong national sensitivities and disparities with regard to their own approaches to security. But the experience in Ukraine shows that strategic choices in Europe are never made coolly or in the abstract, but in the heat of the moment and in a concrete manner. In other words, it will always be crises that make Europe and nothing else.

Europe must take inspiration from the Japanese model and play the NATO card without giving up its own efforts. That is the main challenge of its strategic responsibility, as set out in the Strategic Compass. From this perspective, the mutualization of European efforts will be essential, including through the development of a European military industrial structure. There are now several initiatives along these lines, but there are still many obstacles to overcome. Beyond Russia and Ukraine, other theaters will put Europe to the test in terms of the practice of power. The first concerns China; the second, the Global South – even if this last expression still warrants development.

China is not Russia, because for the time being, Beijing is not a threat to our security. Moreover, it is important to realize that China is a systemic player whose power is incomparably greater than Russia's, and this has to be factored in. Today, China's GNP represents 80% of the American GNP. The technological-military-political parity with the United States already evident in many areas will be almost completely achieved in a little over a decade. Even in the semiconductor sector, which is the heart of the global competition, the Chinese are only seven years behind in the most advanced segments of the market. Of course, accidents are always possible. But China's trajectory is indeed that of a superpower in all segments: technology, economy and of course politics. We are therefore confronted with what international relations theorists call the hegemonic transition for a power, in this case China, seeking to replace the United States as the world's leading power. However, this transition will not be simple. On the one hand, this is because the United States is determined to slow it down. Secondly is because the centrality of the Sino-American competition is being increasingly reovered by a multipolarity in which other actors are seeking to assert themselves not with aspirations to become world powers, but rather to impose themselves in regional situations. In fact, in all parts of the world, from Latin America a growing number of states are simply trying to play their own game. In this way, the current international system could be qualified as a bi-multipolar system, in which bipolar dynamics are combined with multipolar dynamics. This combination is, by definition, unstable because it is difficult to define the rules of the game and its boundaries.

From a European point of view, China is an actor that we have profound differences with. But we must stick to the "partner, competitor, and rival" triptych, balancing these three factors according to the situation and the political dynamics. Cooperation is effective in the areas of biodiversity or even the indebtedness of poor countries. It should be greater in the area of climate change. On the other hand, our positions on issues such as universal human rights, which China, Russia and many others want to dismantle or subordinate to the right to development, remain very far apart. We must keep our own channels of communication, information and discussion with Beijing open on all subjects – whether it be the opening of markets, human rights, the indebtedness of certain countries, climate change or biodiversity, not to mention strategic and diplomatic issues such as the Ukraine or the Middle East. China, which was said to not be prepared to mediate, succeeded in directly encouraging the restoration of diplomatic relations between Tehran and Riyadh, which is no small feat.

We are not interested in either the establishment of a Moscow/Beijing axis or in the subordination of Russia to China, though admittedly this is already well underway. We must judge Beijing's behavior by its actions, while remaining faithful to the "one China" policy – which, after all, has proven its worth in maintaining peace. But we will not accept any change to the status quo through force. Taiwan is a fundamental element of our security, given the importance of the Taiwan Strait in the transit of global trade and the hyper-concentration of semiconductor technology in Taiwan. It is therefore important that all European navies – not just the French one – maintain their freedom of navigation missions in the Taiwan Strait – the well-known FONOPs (Freedom of

Navigation Operations), instead of bypassing the island. The last French naval mission took place in April 2023, during President Macron's visit to Beijing.

The other major point of contention with China concerns the increasingly unbalanced economic relationship, which is less a result of Europe's weak competitiveness than of the market barriers put in place by the Chinese authorities under the Made in China and Buy in China programs. The deficit with China has reached nearly 400 billion and continues to grow. The momentum of investment in China is slowing down as the Chinese market has become increasingly difficult to access, except in those niche sectors where the Chinese do not aspire to have national champions, such as luxury goods.

In such a context, we need to reduce our vulnerabilities vis-a-vis China while maintaining significant economic ties. That is what we call now de-risking, but not de-coupling. However, such approach needs to be conducted very carefully. As the High Representative argued, if "we direct our flows towards Asian countries other than China, we almost automatically see an increase in the trade relations of these countries with China. And this is not by coincidence. These countries are importing more of the products they need from China to export more to Europe or the United States. So our dependence becomes indirect. But in some cases, it can become even more dangerous because these countries are much more vulnerable to pressure from China than we are (...) In my view, the major risk from a geopolitical point of view is that de-risking will strengthen China's hold over the entire Asian economy".

We owe it to ourselves to stand firm on principles and maintain our own margin of appreciation in the face of problems that have arisen or may arise – and not be misled by attempts to divide us.

The second axis concerns our engagement with the countries of the Global South. This is a topic that falls outside the scope of this paper, but the war in Ukraine has underscored a new reality: many nations are taking advantage of the emerging multipolarity of the world system to resist any form of alignment. There is a fear of a potential US-China conflict, or of a conflict between the West and Russia.

Of course, certain nations are determined to benefit from these contradictions in order to increase their own room for maneuver; others fear being cornered. It falls on us, as Europeans, to act within these contexts to either appease these fears or offer alternatives. Europe accepts the emergence of a multipolar world – besides, even if it did not want to, this would not change anything. What is important is not so much that points of view other than our own are expressed, but that we are able to respond to the needs and fears of those who seek us out or whose friendship we seek, all the while combating the narratives and behaviors of those who seek to supplant or belittle us. The practice of power is a combat sport that is not limited to one single contest. It is a journey that we have just begun. There is no guarantee that Europe will finish it; but since Ukraine, all indications point to our having avoided elimination – advancing to the next round.