

## ‘Post-war’ Europe?

According to the late historian Tony Judt (2006), ‘post-war’ is the essence of today’s Europe. The European Union evolved from the devastations of World War II. Cooperation on the continent was meant to turn swords into ploughs and make future war impossible.

The memory of Europe’s violent past did not just contribute to peace and security on the European continent itself. History also inspired the EU to promote peace and security abroad. Typically, the EU’s relations with the rest of the world are not marked by (military) power-play but by peaceful means. This is often described with the term ‘normative power Europe’: the power of the ‘post-war’ EU consists not of weapons but of trade relationships, legal rules and enlargement promises.

However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 led to new discussions on both Europe's history and its approach to promoting peace.

As the largest conflict on the European continent since World War II, the invasion instantly stirred historical memory. Many EU citizens supported the Ukrainian cause, recognizing the values the country fought for – democracy, freedom, human rights – as the very principles that underpinned European integration since 1945. This triggered various responses, such as EU sanctions packages against Russia, billions of financial assistance allowing Ukraine to buy weapons, but also the opening of the road towards Ukrainian EU-membership.

Since, some states have hesitated to further escalate the war because of Europe’s past. Other states, in particular in Eastern Europe, refer to different historical memories claiming that the EU should shake off its ‘post-war’ anxieties and build a European army that can provide stronger security guarantees. But will the ‘post-war’ EU really be able to develop into a such ‘geopolitical power Europe’?



### Readings

- Bosse, Giselle (2024, May 21). *Has the EU Really Become More Geopolitical? Rethinking the Security-Values Nexus in EU Enlargement*. European Policy Hub. <https://europeandemocracyhub.epd.eu/has-the-eu-really-become-more-geopolitical/>
- EU response to to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/>
- Plokhy, S. (2023). *The Russo-Ukrainian War: The Return of History* (London: Allen Lane), 252-253 and 256-262.