



CEPS EXPLAINER

# CAN WE EVER BUILD A COMMON EUROPEAN HOME?

The perils and promise of an old idea



# SUMMARY

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In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the idea of a 'common European home' inspired many different political leaders. This idea has now crumbled amid Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine.

Historians will long debate what went wrong. For now, the West will have little choice but to inhabit a continental security context based on deterrence rather than romantic visions and shared identities. But Western governments should also not give up on the more flexible, accepting approach to European security and integration that animated the 1990s.

The EU granting candidate status to Ukraine last June was a landmark event. But the EU cannot have an effective strategy for Ukraine without also having a strategy for Russia. Even with the continent afflicted by war, the aspiration of a common European home must not be discarded.

This CEPS Explainer evaluates the principal lessons of the Ukraine War for European security and outlines a pathway to putting the continent back on the road towards a more inclusive order.



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This CEPS Explainer is published as part of CEPS' [Euro-Atlantic Triangle Project](#) project.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the idea of a 'common European home' inspired many different political leaders. One of them was Mikhail Gorbachev, who dreamt of a Europe extending from Lisbon to Vladivostok. Another was George H.W. Bush, who rhapsodised about a Europe whole and free. The EU expanded after the fall of the Soviet Union, growing to incorporate countries that had once fallen behind the Iron Curtain. While these US, Russian and European visions of continental order may not have been identical, each posited a Europe freed from zero-sum competition.

Historians will long debate what went wrong. One explanation arises from the career of Vladimir Putin. He was a youthful, unknown bureaucrat when he began his tenure as Russia's president. At first, he rushed to assist the United States after the 9/11 attacks and speculated about Russia's joining NATO.

Yet in 2008, after having pursued a brutal war in Chechnya, Putin invaded Georgia. He then proceeded to upend European norms of security by annexing Crimea in March 2014 and then intervening in eastern Ukraine not long after that. These moves anticipated Putin's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The alternative explanation for the loss of a common European home is that the assumptions behind EU and NATO expansion were too optimistic and too self-celebratory, with the latter promising membership to Georgia and Ukraine as early as 2008. Or perhaps they were too vague and too casually ambitious, especially when these assumptions were applied to eastern and central Europe. In 2022, much of the West found itself mentally unprepared for Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In formulating future plans for European security, Western countries cannot afford to repeat past mistakes. They should do whatever they can to learn from the past. Easy optimism should be put to rest, if it has not already. The security threat embodied in Putin's Russia must be faced directly, carefully and patiently. The West will have little choice but to inhabit a continental security context based on deterrence rather than romantic visions and shared identities. But Western governments should also not give up on the more flexible, accepting approach to European security and integration that animated the 1990s. It would be best to conceptualise this approach as a balancing act, deterring Putin's Russia on the one hand and fostering a capacious Europe on the other.

Supporting Ukraine's European future is the top priority. For the EU to be a 'geopolitical actor', another priority is to build a European security order that considers Russia's (changing) interests and identity. The EU's strategy for Ukraine must also be a strategy for Russia. Even with the continent afflicted by war, the aspiration or dream of a common European home must not be discarded.

## AN ENDURING CHALLENGE

Vladimir Putin is not an atypical Russian leader. A common rhythm in Russian and Soviet history is the drive to modernise (via Europe) for the sake of geopolitical ambition and national defence. Peter the Great had this in mind when he adopted Western technologies in the eighteenth century. Though not a ‘Westerniser’ like Peter, Stalin was another moderniser in this vein. He pushed industrialisation as fast and as hard as he could in the 1930s.

Throughout its history, Russia has needed technology transfers from the West to compete with it. This never equalled cultural integration with the West or the adoption of Western political values. Yet as its participation in the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe shows, reluctance to adopt Western values did not prevent Russia from becoming a European power. This Concert was not just an archaic pursuit of a ‘balance of power’ at the expense of small states – it embodied a commitment to pursue goals, norms and identities held in common by Europe’s liberal and conservative powers alike. Ideological conformity (apart from the shared rejection of violent revolution) was not a prerequisite for order.

Putin has often stated that Russia is a European country. Putin himself grew up in Saint Petersburg – Peter’s ‘window to the West’. He served as a KGB officer in East Germany and back in Russia he sent his daughters to German schools. Putin has enjoyed friendships with several prominent European politicians, in particular with Gerhard Schröder and Silvio Berlusconi; Viktor Orbán is a fellow traveller of sorts.

At the 2007 Munich Security Conference, Putin laid into the United States, accusing it of arrogance and militarism. A less-noticed aspect of this speech was its appeal to European leaders frustrated by the Iraq War and the US’s unilateralism. Even after annexing Crimea and invading eastern Ukraine, Putin entertained the hope that he could work with Europe, a hope not entirely unfounded given the level of energy relations, economic cooperation and diplomatic dialogue among Russia and select European countries between 2014 and 2022.

As with Peter and Stalin, Putin’s goal was not to subordinate Russia to Europe or to Europeanise Russia in a comprehensive way. To the contrary, Putin’s goal has been to profit through connection to Europe so that Russia could act autonomously in Europe and elsewhere.

Putin’s instrumental approach to Europe was only one layer of his foreign policy vision. Another was that Russia must behave and be perceived as a great power. This required massive investment in the Russian military, from nuclear weapons to equipment to training. One definition of a great power, as opposed to a regional power, is a country that can undertake expeditionary missions far beyond its borders.

In 2015, Putin demonstrated to the world that Russia could do this. Putin moved Russian military assets into Syria, changing the nature of the civil war in that country. This yielded considerable leverage for Russia not just in Syria but throughout the Middle East. Moscow has repeated these efforts on a smaller scale in Africa as well. Russia could affirm its great power status by writing its own rules. After his 2007 speech in Munich, Putin was especially sensitive to the international rules he associated with the US, which he regarded as a constraint. Defying the rules of a US-led international order was a point of pride for him, and especially so in Europe.

Very much the decision of a single man, Putin's invasion of Ukraine is not entirely idiosyncratic. Rather, it reinforces certain patterns of Russian history. The invasion came after extensive military modernisation enabled by access to Western markets and to Western technology. The war has been fought on territory that imperial Russia and the Soviet Union either controlled or sought to control, and the war exemplifies Russia's drive for great power status. This helps to explain the relative popularity of the war in Russia when it began. Russians may now resist mobilisation, and a significant number of Russians

### EUROPE'S RUSSIA CHALLENGE HAS A DEEP HISTORY BEHIND IT AND MOST LIKELY A LONG FUTURE AHEAD OF IT.

have left Russia because of the war, but there is no sizable anti-war movement within Russia. Putin is unlikely to be opposed on the war or to be deposed from power any time soon.

From this something important can be inferred – that the trends and tendencies that led to Russia's invasion will not vanish even if Russia loses the war and even if Putin dies or is forced from power. Europe's Russia challenge has a deep history behind it and most likely a long future ahead of it.

## THREE IMMEDIATE LESSONS

What can the EU learn from its track record of dealing with Russia? Three lessons come to mind.

The *first* is that a monolithic approach to European integration rooted in rosy narratives cannot be superimposed onto Russian foreign policy. The uniform expansion of Washington- and Brussels-centric norms and power structures is not a solution to the problem of order on the continent. This was a mistake of the 1990s and one from which it will take a long time to recover. Economic interdependence and integration between Russia and the EU may have made sense in the 1990s. But even in this period of fluidity and exchange, it was unrealistic to expect that Russia would abandon notions of influence and security that have informed at least the last three centuries of Russian history.

While Russia's entry into the G8 or the WTO represented worthwhile efforts at engagement, these were unlikely to eliminate Moscow's long-held ambition to write the

rules of European security or to put Russia's age-old fears of the West to rest. This should not be interpreted purely as a criticism of idealistic liberals or Atlanticists. Many who sought to accommodate Moscow were also naïve, failing to make the connection between Russia's economic integration into Europe and its eventual military modernisation.

The *second* lesson is not to have a 'halfway' policy for a country that is integral to European security and situated in the middle of a regional danger zone. Such a halfway approach was hard to avoid in the case of EU membership for Ukraine. Even though Ukraine has now been granted EU candidate status, actual membership remains years (if not decades) away. The promise of eventual membership may serve as a greater incentive for Kyiv to conduct domestic reforms. But the EU's experience with the Western Balkans shows how democratic immaturity and political instability in applicant states, when combined with a lack of absorptive capacity and unresolved questions over decision-making rules within the bloc, can produce gridlock.

The greater issue concerns NATO membership, where the West continuously affirmed that the door was open without taking credible steps in that direction, leaving Kyiv with no security guarantee and no treaty alliance. These actions were enough to provoke Russia but not enough to deter it – the worst of all possible worlds. They may have fit the domestic political needs of the US and many European countries, but there should have been more tangible and [collective commitment](#) to Ukraine's security and less rhetoric devoted to NATO membership – more speaking softly and carrying a bigger stick.

Some may argue that the [2008 decision](#) to declare that Ukraine and Georgia 'will become' NATO members, without offering them a Membership Action Plan signalled to Putin that admission of these two countries was not actually on the table. Yet when combined with Western recognition of Kosovo, this amounted to a testing of Moscow's red lines. Partially in response to NATO and partially in reaction to developments in Georgia, Putin then tested the West's own red lines later the same year. Russia will always be loath to accept diminished sway over the security orientation of states on its border, though it may get backed unwillingly into less and less regional influence. Only with a militarily incapacitated Russia could such a scenario be expected to serve as a pillar of a stable European security order – and efforts to produce such an outcome would be fraught with risks.

Absent such a momentous development, transforming Russia from quasi-empire into an ordinary nation-state is a process likely to take decades, not years. Unlike Britain which *had* an empire, Russia *was* an empire. Despite important political changes in the country since 1991, the psychological, geographic and demographic remnants of empire persist in many fashions. Russia's strategic or tactical defeat in Ukraine is therefore more likely

to breed further resentment and revanchism rather than a fundamental transformation in how Moscow views its 'near abroad'.

Prior to Russia's invasion, efforts to square the principle of Kyiv's 'right to choose' with Moscow's declared security concerns, such as an official moratorium on NATO expansion that leaves the door open to Ukraine's eventual membership, were not undertaken. Arguments asserting that Ukrainian membership was not truly on the horizon and that Russia's concerns were completely illegitimate are unconvincing. If membership was two decades away, then NATO would have lost nothing by declaring, say, a 20-year moratorium on expansion while preserving the 'open door' policy in principle. If Kyiv's admission is expected to occur sooner, then Moscow was not wrong to be concerned that a state on its border, which for centuries had been unified with Russia, would join a military alliance led by a rival great power.

The recent [reaffirmation](#) of the 2008 decision at a NATO Foreign Ministers meeting, symbolically held in Bucharest, shows that transatlantic allies remain unwilling to reconsider how NATO might best contribute to upholding a stable European security order. None of this is to imply that the West caused the 2022 war, either by suggesting eventual NATO membership for Ukraine or by refusing to make Ukraine a treaty ally. Rather, it means that Western policies contributed to worsening relations with Moscow, without effectively bolstering Ukraine's security, and were thus not adequate for preventing war. It was Putin, of course, who ultimately pulled the trigger.

The *third* lesson, somewhat similar to the second, is the risk of zero-sum policy. In the leadup to the Euromaidan revolution, Moscow's Eurasian Customs Union put Kyiv in a position where it was forced to choose between East and West. This contrasted with the EU's approach to economic relations with Ukraine, as the Association Agreement and DCFTA would not prevent Kyiv from retaining free trade ties with other countries in the post-Soviet CIS grouping.

However, elements of zero-sum thinking were present in the EU's approach as well. The EU has repeatedly [emphasised](#) Ukraine's 'right to choose' whether to align itself with Western or Russian-led security institutions – an inherently binary framing of the situation. This right to choose is indeed embedded in the OSCE's [Charter of Paris](#), which inaugurated post-Cold War Europe's security order from Vancouver to Vladivostok. But the same document contains other seemingly contradictory principles, such as indivisible security on the European continent, namely that the 'security of every participating State is inseparably linked to that of all the others'. In other words, if Russia views Ukraine's attempts to join NATO as a threat to its security, then the right to choose finds itself in conflict with the principle of indivisible security. Caught between competing forces in 2013, it became practically difficult for Ukraine to exercise its right to choose.



This is but one example of how political orders can feature an ambiguous normative equilibrium. Moreover, norms are inherently political: the question not only of *what* norms but also *whose* norms should prevail is impossible to avoid. Today's international order features great powers such as the US and China which have benefited from – but are also partly dissatisfied with – the status quo and seek to reshape global rules to reflect their own interests and identities. Even the scope of universally accepted norms such as sovereignty and national self-determination is often subject to contestation. Although Russia must cease running roughshod over the established norms of the European security system and desist from illegal acts of aggression, merely reiterating the principle that Ukraine has the 'right to choose' bypasses the problem of order on the European continent.

Nor did it help that the proposed [Association Agreement](#) between the EU and Ukraine contained clauses advocating for 'gradual convergence' in the realm of foreign and security policy, which further underlined the geopolitical aspects of the 2013-14 Ukrainian political crisis. Although the EU views the international agreements that it concludes purely as rules-based frameworks rooted in universally applicable UN principles, Russia (rightly or wrongly) had come to view the EU as the US's junior partner and therefore as a mere economic arm of NATO. These developments occurred against the backdrop of a tendency in both Moscow and Western capitals – evident since the 2004 Orange Revolution – to divide Ukrainian politics into 'pro-West' and 'pro-Russia' camps, an externally imposed framework which failed to reflect the diversity and complexity of Ukrainian society. When paired with Russia's crudely zero-sum perception of its 'near abroad' as a 'sphere of privileged interests', this helped to exacerbate regional conflicts and foster a more antagonistic dynamic between Russia and the West.

It was in this already-polarised context that, in combination with local grievances, the Kremlin's insistence that Ukraine give up on its Association Agreement with the EU helped to spark the Maidan revolution – a revolution with much idealism to its credit and much excitement about European integration, even if this enthusiasm was unevenly spread across the country. Amidst a violent crackdown, this revolution toppled a democratically elected leader, Viktor Yanukovich, who was not up to the task of choosing between Russia and Europe. With his fall, a Pandora's box opened across the region, with fault lines and flashpoints solidifying between Russia and the West.

Though the goals of the EU's Eastern Partnership were noble, they were unavoidably geopolitical – if not in intent, then certainly in effect.

## A EUROPEAN STRATEGY FOR UKRAINE

The EU's immediate task is to navigate the shoals of war and to begin thinking about a post-war Ukraine.

First comes the provision of military assistance to Ukraine, a massive and long-term venture. As Russia turns the war toward concentrated assaults on civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, Europe's responsibilities for humanitarian aid will increase. The war will test the EU's and the transatlantic alliance's capacity for unity. Since the coalition backing Ukraine is composed of democracies, its political tenor is constantly being adjusted, and nowhere are these adjustments more potentially destabilising than in the US, Ukraine's pivotal partner in the war. Should the war last for years, Europeans will have to be adept about sustaining their support for Ukraine, an effort which so far has been substantive and successful, even as they simultaneously look for potential avenues to contain the fighting.

Planning for post-war Ukraine is both necessary and very difficult. It is necessary because the EU has learned how much Ukraine matters. The Eastern Partnership did not offer a path into the EU, signalling to Putin that EU Member States were less willing than Russia to bear costs in the event of a struggle over Ukraine's geopolitical orientation. Nor did everything change after 2014. Between 2014 and 2015, France and Germany contributed to setting the terms for a diplomatic settlement through the Minsk agreements. Russia was to depart eastern Ukraine, free and fair elections were to be held, and after that EU (and US) sanctions on Russia would be lifted. None of this happened, signalling that Ukraine was not a top priority for Europe. War has been a cruel teacher. It has taught

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Europe the importance of Ukraine to Europe's overall security. Rather than at the periphery of two competing spheres of influence, eastern Europe must now be perceived as lying at the continent's heart.

The difficulty of planning ahead stems directly from the war. Russia has failed to achieve its political ends. It will not install a pro-Russian government in Kyiv, nor will it partition half the country. Russia's conventional military prowess is dramatically less than it had appeared on paper before the war, and Ukraine has demonstrated impressive political and military leadership. In tandem with Western military aid, Ukraine has more than held its own – Ukraine will keep its independence. But even if Russia continues to lose territory in Ukraine, Russia retains enormous powers of destruction within Ukraine. Nor can future offensive operations from Russia be ruled out after the winter. It remains difficult to anticipate whether there will be a Korea-style line of contact in perpetuity or if a negotiated settlement between Ukraine and Russia can be achieved. At present, the latter seems unlikely.



Measured against Ukraine's dire situation February and March of 2022, the transatlantic push to help has been unprecedented and surprisingly effective. It may not be necessary at the moment to spell out the precise contours and institutional configurations of Ukraine's European future. It may be sufficient to see this future on a trajectory, and to emphasise that a crucial corner has been turned. Ukraine has fought for its place in Europe. Europe can no longer pretend that Ukraine is on its distant periphery.

This approach will undoubtedly reflect a greater commitment to Ukraine than witnessed in the early post-Cold War decades. But it will not solve the 'halfway house' issue that has helped to poison relations between Russia and the West. EU membership for Ukraine remains a distant prospect and Moscow will not allow Kyiv's membership in NATO. As such, the EU cannot have a Ukraine strategy without also having a Russia strategy, coordinated among transatlantic partners. Thus far, an early [leaked draft](#) of the EU's proposed future principles for relations with Russia focuses on more immediate tasks such as isolating Moscow, strengthening the EU's resilience, and shoring up the 'rules-based international order', without envisioning what a longer-term relationship with Moscow might look like. Ukraine will not be fully able to assume its rightful place in Europe until the war itself is history, and an end to the war also depends on developments in Russia as well.

### ...AND FOR RUSSIA

Europe's successful management of its Russia challenge will have to move in two seemingly contradictory directions. It will have to encompass the containment of Russian power, while remaining imaginative about what 'Europe' is and about what 'Europe' can be.

Vladimir Putin does not pose an apocalyptic threat to Europe. He is not on the verge of invading a NATO member. Nor does he have any special ability to transform Europe's democracies into autocracies. Circa 2022, Putin's Russia is a country slipping away from great power status, even if it retains various indicators of national power. Its military wastefulness in Ukraine and its self-imposed economic woes will limit its other global expeditionary adventures at least for some time. Putin has also deprived himself of the power to write the rules of European security – one of the principal indicators of great power status. Had he not invaded Ukraine, he could have combined persuasion with pressure, economic leverage and a search for amendable European politicians, and he might have made progress toward the anchoring of Russia as a power in Europe.

The fact that Russia is not all-powerful should encourage European leaders to calculate their interests rationally and to tread carefully with the 'democracies vs. autocracies' rhetoric. It is a less than accurate description of unfolding global dynamics, and it needlessly exacerbates tensions in the unfolding great power competition with China. Nonetheless, in the short term and possibly for a long time, the West's relationship with

Russia will need to be rooted in deterrence. This is in part because Putin has articulated non-negotiable goals for Ukraine. Dialogue and reassurance will be crucial components of successful deterrence, especially in the context of a mounting security dilemma and escalation ladder that no single party can reliably control.

Ultimately, Putin wants to Russify Ukraine. He wants to change its culture and to redesign the nature of its statehood. This is a revolutionary venture evocative of Europe's darkest times. Whether couched as a commitment to territorial integrity, human rights or self-determination, the EU cannot accede to Putin's fantasies. For months before the February 2022 war, Putin issued ultimatums and spoke lies about Russia's intentions. Putin may therefore take a cessation of hostilities as a chance for the Russian military to regroup and launch another invasion, absent a concerted effort to enhance Ukraine's military capabilities to a point where he would be forced to think twice. The illegal annexation of four Ukrainian regions further underscores the reality of deterrence as the only possible approach for the time being.

Stymied from reaching his most sinister goals, Putin could perhaps be pushed towards a ceasefire. Diplomacy aimed at tackling the root causes and long-term end states would surely require a Russian leader other than Putin to work. In the meantime, although Putin launched this war in part to ensure Ukraine's 'demilitarisation', prudent statecraft would necessitate a more cautious and less reckless approach on his part, were Ukraine to be armed to the teeth. Putin's rational decision to withdraw from Kherson demonstrates that he remains capable of acting in a calculated fashion. Yet arriving at this new equilibrium will first require a break in the action. Although this may only be possible after further Ukrainian gains, successful deterrence will necessitate successful diplomacy.

A separate war-time challenge will be to keep the Europe that came into being after the collapse of the Soviet Union alive. When the Iron Curtain came down, between 1989 and 1991, a certain Europe was waiting to be born – the unwallied Europe that defies definition, for it is not set by geography, not set by ethnicity, not set by religion and not set by politics. Erstwhile 'Eastern Europeans' like Václav Havel, Adam Michnik and Angela Merkel devoted themselves to the idea of a new Europe. It was properly an idea, between culture and philosophy, and their idea was less circumscribed in reach than either the NATO alliance or the EU.

Russia may prove Putinist in perpetuity. Putin himself could rule for another ten or fifteen years, and he may do what autocrats sometimes manage to do – he may find someone who is not a family member to carry on after him. Putin has invested in Russia's security services and in its military. The rents amassed from Russia's status as a petro-state will take a hit from the war, but they will continue coming in, and they could for decades be the foundation for Russia's militarist posture toward Europe. For all of the Kremlin's manifest incompetence in waging war, the soundest Russian strategy is to outlast the transatlantic alliance in the struggle over Ukraine. The appearance of a never-ending

Putinist Russia could provoke the West into building a twenty-first century *cordon sanitaire* to wall off Russia.

Even if Russia's autocratic militarism persists, constructing a wall around it would be unwise. It would diminish Europe by allowing geopolitics to triumph over other aspects of the European project, and it would be strategically confusing. The job at hand is to limit Russia's powers of coercion in Ukraine (and some other parts of its 'near abroad'). This job has little in common with efforts to prevent Russian citizens from entering Europe, nor with aspirations to affirm European-ness in the Manichaean terminology of good and evil, light and darkness, an eternal West and an eternal East. For Europe, a civilisational struggle against Russia would amount to a distraction while Russia is waging war against Ukraine.

Although opposition forces and dissatisfied individuals in Russia are incapable of affecting their country's political institutions today, they have much to contribute to enhancing Europe's openness and innovation. A vast Russian diaspora, composed of the country's younger and more dynamic elements, could refashion Russia in unpredictable ways.

**THE EU CANNOT OPPOSE PUTIN'S RUSSIA EFFECTIVELY IF IT OPENS ITSELF UP TO ACCUSATIONS OF HYPOCRISY AND IF IT UNDERMINES THE PRINCIPLES THAT IT CLAIMS TO HOLD DEAR. IF WALLS MUST GO UP, LET IT BE THE OTHER SIDE THAT PUTS THEM UP.**

The EU cannot oppose Putin's Russia effectively if it opens itself up to accusations of hypocrisy and if it undermines the principles that it claims to hold dear. If walls must go up, let it be the other side that puts them up. This will leave the wall builders with the burdensome responsibility of keeping them up. But over time, nature abhors a wall. Interstate competition and deterrence are often a necessity, but they must not be embraced wholeheartedly and

unconditionally. Russia (and the world) must know that it is a better planet – not Western primacy – that we seek to build and preserve.

With Putin running roughshod over the European security system's established norms, it is tempting to suggest that Russia is 'leaving Europe'. The Kremlin's own pronouncements about Russia's 'Eurasian' future over recent years lend credence to such a thesis. But the invasion of Ukraine demonstrates that the European element of Russia's identity – the boundaries of its cultural orbit and its broader place on the continent – is still being actively litigated. A sprawling state, historically and demographically complex, Russia will never be purely European or Eurasian.

Russia's post-Cold War inability to find (in its own estimation) an adequate place in Europe is owed as much to anxieties over status and identity as to narrowly defined security concerns. The invasion of Ukraine is evidence of these questions remaining unresolved – and they may prove even more difficult to address in a domestic climate featuring greater political repression and less economic opportunity. As such, deterrence

alone cannot guarantee a stable continental order over the long term. While the precise form of the European security order in several decades' time cannot be known, much as in centuries past, political and cultural diversity must not be an obstacle to constructing an inclusive order.

## CHARTING A WAY TOWARDS A COMMON EUROPEAN HOME

Though the advent of a common European home may lie far away, certain steps can be taken over the short-to-medium term to begin erecting its foundations.

*First*, the revised EU principles for relations with Russia currently under discussion should explicitly spell out the long-term aspiration for an inclusive European security system based on the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. Should Moscow start to pull back from its infringements on the sovereignty of Ukraine, a phased lifting of sanctions is conceivable. This position might matter little while Putin is in office – too often he has subordinated the veneer of diplomacy to the machinations of war. Yet it might be an incentive to post-Putin Russian leaders to change course.

Such proposals ensure that building a common European home will not be based on unilateralism or intransigent behaviour by any party. Moreover, the topic of deepening the EU's relations with states in Russia's 'near abroad' should be removed as these do not shape the EU's strategy for relations with Russia, strictly defined. Especially after granting candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, relations with Kyiv are a matter of EU enlargement policy, whereas the EU's Russia strategy concerns the question of a common European home. Over time, this will [signal](#) to Moscow that the EU's normative orbit will remain an integral part of Europe's future security order and that the EU values relations with Russia for their own sake.

*Second*, as highlighted by [recent reporting](#), there is a possibility of a ceasefire at some point in 2023. While it may merely be a prelude to renewed conflict or a prolonged standoff, it could also offer space and momentum for further agreements which can reduce the risk of further escalation. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's stature has increased markedly during the war and she has greater leeway to put forward ideas that may run counter to the initial instincts of many Member States. In the event of a ceasefire and while continuing to strengthen Ukraine's military, she should use the political capital she has built up to propose a series of 'arms control' measures aimed at regulating the positioning of forces and missiles on Ukrainian and Russian territory and aimed ultimately at the withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine. A multilateral peacekeeping force could also provide a buffer space between the Russian and Ukrainian armies.

These proposals would be coordinated with HRVP Josep Borrell, with the aim of fostering an image of an EU that is invested in acting geopolitically on matters of continental

security to positive sum effect. And while these issues technically lie outside the Commission's area of competence, there is nothing which should prevent von der Leyen from raising ideas and kickstarting a discussion.

*Third*, the EU's Special Envoy for Non-Proliferation and Disarmament and SECDEFPOL.4 within the European External Action Service should be tasked with developing proposals on strategic stability and arms control on a continent-wide basis, which Member States would be responsible for negotiating and implementing in the future. These proposals would eventually serve as a basis for a bilateral cooperation agenda with Russia after Putin has left the Kremlin (on the assumption that his successor is less aggressive than he is) and would reinforce the notion that the continent's security order will not be decided in Washington and Moscow alone. Such cooperation could reinforce the principle that the security concerns of *all* European states, including Ukraine and Russia, should be taken seriously.

*Finally*, once an appropriate amount of time has elapsed following the end of hostilities, the Commission and HRVP should issue a joint communication outlining the EU's support for the vision of a common European home as a matter of principle, even if the precise contours of the future European security order remain to be determined. Much as Ukraine's candidate status was accorded (partly) as a matter of principle even though actual accession may lie many years away, a similar statement should underpin the EU's commitment to building durable relations with Russia rooted in mutual respect, provided Russia eventually withdraws from Ukraine, reckons with crimes committed and assists with its reconstruction.

The ideal of a common European home has taken a beating in 2022. No political leader has become more invested in its demise than Vladimir Putin. For those still invested in its promise, it bears repeating that the ideal of a common European home has often flourished in dark times. Amid peace and prosperity, it is effortless to celebrate what brings Europeans together. Yet it is amid the furies of war that the ideal of a common European home is fully revealed, even if, as Gorbachev believed, such a home would have to be a house with many rooms.

The origins of the EU do not lie in the late 1940s. They lie in the 1930s and in the Second World War, when far-sighted Europeans like Robert Schuman, Konrad Adenauer and many others could see beyond the animosities and the rigidities of war. They had the gift of a humane vision – and the gift of patience, for they were not naïve about the malice of a Hitler or a Mussolini. Though they could not predict the future, they could ready themselves for it, in part by staring the war in the face and in part by understanding that all wars, eventually, come to an end.

When they do, political arrangements that had once been unthinkable can be contemplated and, if the stars align, put into practice.

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