SPECIAL REPORT

no. 227

European Elections 2024: Policies, Partners, and Predicaments

Shairee Malhotra

Editor

M A Y   2 0 2 4

Contents

Editor's Note

In a mammoth election year with almost half of the world's population heading to the polls, the supranational European Union (EU) is also gearing for elections. While the Indian election holds the spot as the world's largest in terms of sheer scale, the European elections—with voting taking place transnationally across 27 nations to elect 720 Members of European Parliament (MEPs)— have no global parallel. The European Parliament is the main direct link between the EU's institutions and its citizens.

The Guardian refers to the upcoming European Parliament elections scheduled from 6-9 June as "the most important pan-European vote for decades."[1] Indeed, the Old Continent confronts a fundamentally changed world since its last election in 2019. Not only is this the first EU election after the conclusion of Brexit, but in February 2022, Russia's war on Ukraine brought the previously unthinkable spectre of war back to European soil, just as Europe was recovering from the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. Thus, Europe, in 2024, stands at a crossroads.

Against a belligerent backdrop and the prospect of American disengagement from the region, issues of security and defence are dominating pre-election debates. Issues of climate change and decarbonisation, which dominated the 2019 election landscape, have been relatively relegated.

On matters of foreign policy, while Europe's ties with nations such as India have strengthened, its two most consequential relationships are experiencing strain. Ties with China are at their lowest point, while its transatlantic alliance with the United States is falling under the shadows of trade tensions and the uncertainties of American domestic politics.

Mirroring national trends in EU member states, the European election is expected to take a sharp turn to the right, with far-right ideas getting further mainstreamed. This may impact decision-making and collaboration in a number of key European policy areas, including ongoing support for Ukraine, EU enlargement, and climate change and the green transition, with potentially negative consequences for a progressive EU policy agenda.

As the EU's estimated 400 million eligible voters get ready to vote, the outcome and resulting power balance within the European Parliament will play a crucial role in determining the Union's future trajectory. It would also indicate whether the world will witness greater European nationalism or deeper integration.

This report delves into the intricacies of the 2024 European elections and analyses the key policy issues at stake for the continent, as well as the elections' impact on Europe's ties with its key international partners—i.e., India, China, and the United States. Each chapter in this timely curated compilation provides a well-rounded expert perspective to discerning the myriad challenges and shifts underpinning current EU dynamics.

The report opens with *Doru Peter Frantescu's* chapter that lays the ground to provide an understanding of the functioning and mechanism of this unique electoral system. Doru highlights the key political groups contesting the elections and their ideological positions, and offers insights on the distribution of seats and data-driven election forecasts.

In the second chapter, *Tomi Huhtanen* underlines the core policy issues, and the key concerns of EU citizens revolving around economic anxieties and security challenges. Emphasising the contrast between citizens' current lack of trust in national governments and the comparatively higher level of trust in the EU, Tomi outlines an agenda for the future EU leadership.

The third chapter by *Susi Dennison* describes how the mainstreaming of extreme parties might impact the nitty-gritty of parliamentary deal-making. With centrist forces increasingly entering into compromises in order to get legislation in critical areas passed, Susi cautions against the EU's progressive agenda coming under strain, with consequences for the future of the European project.

In the fourth chapter, *Fanny Sauvignon, Luca Nipius, and Stefania Benaglia* describe the challenges surrounding the European Green Deal, and the need to balance decarbonisation and green transition goals with industrial competitiveness.

The authors urge closer strategic cooperation with the EU's global partners to ensure that green policies such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) create their intended impact rather than generating disputes.

In the subsequent chapter, *Mathieu Droin* tackles the critical issue of security and defence that has engulfed European debates in recent times. As Europeans become increasingly compelled to shoulder greater responsibility for their security, Mathieu highlights the elections' impact on the continent's security and defence.

Segueing from the fifth chapter, *Tara Varma* underscores the fundamental shifts in the transatlantic partnership, irrespective of the outcome of the November 2024 elections in the United States, which have resulted in a paradigm shift on the part of Europeans to take charge of their own security. Tara views the upcoming NATO summit in Washington DC, marking the 75th anniversary of the alliance's formation, as an opportunity for increased NATO-EU cooperation in this direction.

Amaia Sanchez-Cacicedo then makes a case for the EU and India to bridge the gap between their differing normative origins, while allowing their strategic partnership to deepen by focusing on issues of common interest and the desire to carve 'a middle path' vis-à-vis China and the US. Amaia posits that the outcomes of both the Indian and European parliamentary elections this year are unlikely to shift the fundamental direction of the relationship, which is advancing at a positive, albeit slow pace.

In the eighth chapter, *Alberto Turkstra* takes on the subject of the EU's ties with China, which are described as having reached a historic low and from which Europe aims to 'de-risk'. Outlining the European political parties' views of China based on their party manifestos, Alberto predicts that the post-election make-up of the European Parliament will maintain its hard line on China. He notes that competition and rivalry will likely define EU-China relations.

The report closes with *Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy's* chapter that analyses the wide range of threats confronting European democracy and polarising societies through disinformation, authoritarian interference, and hybrid warfare. Crucially, Zsuzsa provides key lessons for European society to better equip itself to defend its electoral processes, in the context of increasing convergence between Russian and Chinese disinformation efforts.

- Shairee Malhotra

Shairee Malhotra *is Associate Fellow, Europe, with ORF's Strategic Studies Programme.*

1

The European Parliament: A Pillar of Transnational Democracy

Doru Peter Frantescu

The European Parliament is the world's sole example of a transnationally elected body, making it a unique entity in the realm of international politics. The Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected by direct universal suffrage once every five years by the citizens of the EU's 27 member states, reflecting a direct line of democratic accountability from the electorate to the European legislative process.

The Election Canvas: When and How

The 2024 European elections, scheduled for 6-9 June, invite citizens of the EU, aged 18 and above (with exceptions permitting voting from 16),[a] to elect 720 MEPs. While national elections in other countries often follow a winner-takes-all format, the EU adheres to a proportional representation system that ensures a more equitable reflection of the electorate's diversity and gives smaller parties the opportunity to gain representation in Parliament.

The voting methods and mechanics of the proportional representation system used in European Parliament elections can vary across member states. For example, Italy, Poland, Belgium and Ireland divide their territories into multiple constituencies, each electing its own set

---

a   Austria, Belgium, Germany and Malta allow voting from 16; Greece from 17. See: *European Parliament*, https://www.europarl.europa. eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2023/749767/EPRS_ATA(2023)749767_EN.pdf

of MEPs. Meanwhile, the other countries treat the entire nation as a single electoral region, where all MEPs are elected at large. This variation can affect how closely the election results reflect regional preferences within each country.

In terms of voting systems, most EU countries utilise a closed party list system. In this system, voters cast their ballots for parties, not individual candidates, and parties have a pre-determined order of candidates in their lists. If a party wins enough votes to fill five seats and has listed candidates A, B, C, D, and E in that order, those five will take the seats.

For their part, other member states like Greece and Denmark use open or flexible list systems, under which voters can influence the order of candidates on the party list by voting for specific individuals. This allows popular candidates to rise higher on the list, potentially gaining a seat even if they were initially placed lower by their party.

Finally, electoral thresholds play a crucial role in determining how seats are distributed among parties. An electoral threshold is the minimum percentage of votes that a party must receive to be eligible for any representation in the legislature. Thresholds are implemented to prevent fragmentation in the Parliament by ensuring that only parties with significant support gain seats.

The application of electoral thresholds varies across EU member states, reflecting their individual electoral laws and preferences for balancing representativeness with effectiveness. For example:

Germany applies no electoral threshold for European Parliament elections, allowing even small parties to gain representation if they receive a sufficient number of votes relative to the total number of available seats.

France uses a threshold of 5 percent for the European Parliament elections. This is intended to filter out smaller parties and streamline the political process, ensuring that the parties represented in the Parliament have a substantial base of support.

Ireland does not employ a traditional electoral threshold like the 5 percent commonly found in many other European countries. Instead, the Single Transferable Vote (STV) method naturally filters out candidates with minimal support through the process of transferring votes from least popular candidates to those preferred by more voters.

Distribution of Seats

The distribution of seats in the European Parliament is designed to represent the populations of the member states of the EU, though not strictly according to their population size. The allocation follows a system of degressive proportionality, ensuring that while larger states have more seats than smaller ones, the latter are allocated more seats than would be strictly proportional to their population. This system aims to balance the need for demographic representation with the principle of ensuring each country's presence in the legislative process.

Germany, as the EU's largest member state, is allowed the maximum number of representatives, at 96 MEPs. On the other end of the scale, smaller states like Malta, Luxembourg, and Cyprus have six MEPs each, ensuring that they still have a voice relative to their size.

The Spectrum of Political Groups

In the European Parliament, national parties from the various member states do not sit as separate entities but typically join larger political groups. These groups are composed of parties sharing similar ideological positions, enabling more effective cooperation and stronger influence in legislative proceedings.

The formation of a political group in the European Parliament requires at least 23 MEPs drawn from at least one-quarter of the member states. This requirement ensures that the groups reflect a broad, transnational consensus rather than the narrow interests of a single nation or a small number of them. After elections, parties often engage in discussions to either form new groups or join existing ones based on ideological alignment and strategic goals.

The Parliament currently houses seven political groups,[1] each corresponding to specific ideological currents:

Group of the European People's Party (EPP): Centre-right, emphasising Christian-democratic, conservative values. Historically the largest political group in the Parliament, the EPP has led the European Commission since 2004. Key member parties include Germany's Christian Democratic Union (CDU), Spain's People's Party (PP), and Poland's Civic Platform (PO).

Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D): Centre-left, focusing on social democracy. This group has historically been one of the two largest in the Parliament. It includes major national parties like Germany's Social Democratic Party (SPD), Italy's Democratic Party (PD), and Spain's Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE).

Renew Europe: Liberal-centrist, advocating pro-European, liberal policies. This group has been pivotal in legislative discussions due to its central position in the political spectrum. Notable members are France's Ensemble (the party of French President Emmanuel Macron) and Germany's Free Democratic Party (FDP).

Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA): Green and regionalist parties, prioritising environmental and minority rights issues. Although small, the group is among the most united and vocal in the European Parliament. It includes parties such as the German Greens and French Europe Ecologie.

The Left in the European Parliament - GUE/NGL: Far-left, focusing on socialism and communism. The smallest group in the European Parliament, it includes parties such as Greece's Syriza, Germany's Die Linke, Spanish PODEMOS, and France's La France Insoumise.

European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR): Conservative, euro-realist, emphasising national sovereignty. Initially inspired by the British Conservatives, the group currently includes Poland's Law and Justice (PiS), Italy's Brothers of Italy, and Spanish Vox.

Identity and Democracy (ID): Right-wing to far-right, nationalist and eurosceptic. This group is isolated in the European Parliament, as most other groups refrain from engaging with them. Key parties include Italy's League, France's National Rally, and Germany's Alternative for Germany (AfD).

Non-Inscrits (NI): The non-attached members in the European Parliament are MEPs who do not belong to any of the recognised political groups. These members come from a variety of political backgrounds and reasons for their non-affiliation range from ideological differences to personal or strategic choices.

Forming the Commission: After the Elections

Subsequent to the MEPs' election, a crucial process unfolds—the selection of the President of the European Commission, akin to the EU's executive arm. Traditionally, the European Council, comprising national heads of state or government, nominates a candidate reflecting the parliamentary majority. This nominee must then secure the Parliament's approval.

Following this, the President, in coordination with Member States, proposes Commissioners, who are then subject to individual hearings before parliamentary committees, culminating in a collective Parliament vote of approval or rejection.

Election Forecasts: Insights from *EU Matrix*

Leveraging sophisticated data analytics, EU Matrix[b] predicts a fractious yet pivotal electoral landscape for 2024.[2] The 2024 European elections are scheduled to take place amid increasing fragmentation and polarisation within the European Parliament.

This fragmentation is primarily due to the diversification of political opinions across Europe, where traditional large parties such as the European People's Party (EPP) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) are facing challenges from smaller, ideologically distinct parties. This trend is partly driven by rising public interest in specific issues like environmental policy, migration, and economic nationalism, which are sometimes better represented by smaller or newer political groups.

The increasing polarisation is evident as the electorate becomes more divided on key issues, including the approach to European integration itself. Right-wing nationalist parties are gaining traction by capitalising on voter dissatisfaction with current economic, social, and political trends. These parties often stand in stark contrast to pro-European factions, creating a more contentious political landscape. This polarisation is likely to lead to more pronounced cleavages within the Parliament, affecting legislative outcomes.

For global observers, the European elections offer a window into the evolving landscape of European democracy—a unique system that, amid challenges, stands as a beacon of hope for collaborative governance and unity in diversity.

Doru P. Frantescu *is the CEO and founder of EUmatrix.eu. He has been nominated by Politico Europe as one of the 40 most influential personalities in EU affairs. He is co-author of the book, "How to Work with the EU Institutions", published by John Harper Publishing.*

---

b   EU Matrix is an EU-focused research platform that combines expert insight and digital technology to provide factual and objective information on how the EU political machinery works. The author is Founder and CEO.

2

Key Policy Issues at Stake: An Agenda for the Future EU Leadership

Tomi Huhtanen

The European Union (EU) is a distinctive project and ambition, still relatively young but with growing global influence. The European Parliament will conduct elections across its 27 member states in June 2024 for an upcoming five-year mandate. These elections will occur in a significantly different environment than previous ones. In past decades, declining voter activity and interest posed a recurring challenge, but attitudes have shifted, and the EU's significance has expanded into areas it had not previously encompassed.

Motivated by the trauma of the Second World War, which devastated the continent, the European countries aimed to prevent similar catastrophes by fostering common dependencies, resources, and goals. As a result, a complex institutional system of the EU was created. The EU operates through an intricate system involving several key institutions, primarily the European Council, the European Commission, and the European Parliament.

The European Commission serves as the EU's executive branch, responsible for proposing legislation, implementing decisions, and upholding EU treaties. It is led by a president and includes commissioners from each member state, each overseeing specific policy areas. The European Council, consisting of the heads of state or government of EU member states, sets the overall political direction and priorities for the EU. It convenes regularly to deliberate on crucial issues affecting the Union.

The European Parliament, directly elected by EU citizens, represents citizens' interests in the EU decision-making process. It co-legislates with the Council of the EU, scrutinises the work of the Commission, and approves the EU budget. Members of the European Parliament (720 in total in 2024) are elected for five-year terms and participate in committees and plenary sessions to debate and vote on legislation. The European Parliament and the European Council can be likened to the lower and upper houses, respectively, symbolising the people and the member states. In a European context, this dynamic could be perceived as akin to a Council of States and a House of the People.

A Renewed Raison d'être for the EU

Even as the EU developed over the past few decades, its political drive weakened. The pursuit of peace in the continent became an insufficient motivation as new generations took this for granted. War was considered impossible in Europe.

While the EU had clearly contributed to the economic success of the continent, the 2008 financial crisis disrupted this picture. As a result, the common debate among EU experts was the search to find a new narrative and purpose for the Union. The urgency for that quest was underlined by the rise of populist movements, which often made the EU the scapegoat—a supposed supranational monster threatening the identity and sovereignty of EU member states.

Following the 2008 financial crisis, EU member states' interdependence due to the Euro became evident. Yet, two crises, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, reshaped perceptions and reinforced the EU's relevance, even for its largest members. The quest for a new narrative ceased, and addressing common European issues became the tacitly agreed EU purpose. However, as enthusiasm for the EU grew, internal contradictions surfaced. Questions arose regarding economic integration, mutual responsibility in times of crises, and the extent of EU decision-making power vis-à-vis member states, including the limits of power transfer from EU member states to EU institutions.

At the same time, populist movements became more robust in the EU, challenging both the centre-right and centre-left. The upcoming elections are likely to see EU critical forces gaining seats, rendering constructive alliances in the European Parliament more challenging.

What European Citizens Care About

In the run-up to the European elections, the predominant concerns among EU citizens revolve around economic uncertainties. Economic anxieties are pervasive, reflecting not only worries about personal finances, but also the tangible effects of a cost-of-living crisis and the burden of higher energy prices on household budgets. This strain is particularly acute for the lower middle class and lower class, as indicated by their vulnerability amid economic challenges.

A significant portion of the European middle classes perceive themselves as barely managing financially, with many reporting a decline in their standard of living in recent years.[1] This sentiment underscores a palpable fear of falling behind, particularly among the lower-middle class. Economic struggles not only pose immediate threats but also raise concerns about future policies. Despite these economic woes, there is a reluctance among citizens, especially the middle class, to contribute financially to improving public services and advancing the energy transition.

Beyond economic concerns, security issues—notably the war in Ukraine—loom large in citizens' minds. This geopolitical conflict and challenges, such as climate change and energy insecurity,

shape citizens' perceptions of the present and future. The war in Ukraine has heightened the distrust of Russia, with varying opinions across Western and Eastern Europe regarding the future of EU-Russia relations,[2] potentially leading to friction within the EU.

Despite these challenges, there remains a resilient hope among citizens that negative economic trends can be reversed. However, this is accompanied by a concerning lack of trust in national governments, contrasting with a relatively high level of trust in the EU as an institution.[3] This trust imbalance underscores the need for impactful EU policies to address citizens' concerns and regain trust, particularly those in the lower rungs of the social strata.

Polling shows an increasing demand for European policies to address the diverse needs of different social classes.[4] While the upper-middle class prioritises aspirations such as self-actualisation, the lower-middle class seeks economic stability and security. Neglecting the needs of the lower-middle class risks exacerbating social and economic discontent, undermining the EU's prospects.

The EU's role on the world stage is crucial for Europeans, particularly in the face of challenges such as the war in Ukraine. High levels of trust in the EU present an opportunity for it to play a significant role in shaping Europe's future. However, concerted efforts are needed to (re) connect with citizens, especially in South-Eastern Europe, and address their concerns amid increasing polarisation and distrust.

Overall, while economic and security concerns weigh heavily on EU citizens, there remains a collective desire for progress and positive change. The upcoming European elections present an opportunity to address these concerns, with the centre-right potentially playing a pivotal role in restoring trust and advancing an inclusive agenda for the future of Europe.

Predicting the Outcome of the European Elections

Polls indicate that the European People's Party (EPP), a coalition of centre-right parties, is likely to remain the largest group in the Parliament, with 183 seats, close to the number of 182 the party won in 2019.[5]

The likelihood of the Renew Europe group losing, Socialists & Democrats faring the same, and European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identify and Democracy (ID) groups gaining on the right side of the political spectrum, remains high. The ECR group in the European Parliament represents conservative and Eurosceptic parties, while the ID group consists of nationalist and far-right parties. In general, the political landscape is expected to shift marginally to the right, increasing the influence of the EPP as the middle force. Forces underlying the importance of nation-states will likely be stronger in the new European Parliament.

Figure 1: Current European Parliament Composition (Left) and Likely, 2024
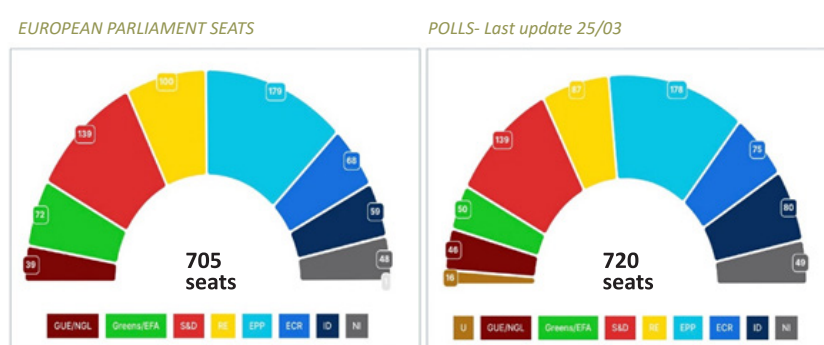
Election Results (right; as of 25 March 2024)

EPP: European People's Party; S&D: Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; RE: Renew Europe; G/EFA: The Greens/European Free Alliance; GUE/NGL: Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left; ID: Identity and Democracy; NI: Non-Inscrits ; U: Unaffiliated.[6]

Source: Euronews Polls Centre[7]

An EU Agenda for the Next Five Years

The EU will need to deal with multiple challenges over the next five years. The crucial issues at the top of the agenda will be debt, decarbonisation, energy security, defence, democracy, demographics, de-risking globalisation, and the European digital single market and infrastructure.[8]

Western societies, including those in Europe, have tended to accumulate debt. During low-interest rate periods, this was a lesser problem, but since interest rates have started to increase, the era of cheap money is over. Today, mounting global levels of private and public debt pose a significant threat to Europe.

Ensuring debt sustainability and economic growth while safeguarding the interests of future generations will require innovative policies and responsible fiscal management—and, consequently, some unpopular decisions.

The EU's ambitious plan for decarbonisation and sustainable transition, labelled the Green Deal, is proving more expensive and complex than previously predicted, with views that achieving this goal must not come at the expense of energy security and people's living standards gaining ground. Decarbonising, while maintaining a vibrant economy and ensuring a just transition, will be central to the EU's agenda.

The war in Ukraine has demonstrated that Europeans need to guarantee the defence of the continent, even in conventional terms. The security challenges Europe faces demand a focus on collective action, robust military capabilities, and strategic partnerships to strengthen the EU's defence posture. The EU will place more emphasis on defence-related issues, such as the defence industry, military mobility, and capabilities, with the possibility of choosing a new defence commissioner.

Resisting authoritarian threats, both internal and external, that seek to undermine representative democracy will be a central EU focus. These include the governments of certain member states, such as Hungary, on which the EU needs to reflect its response.

European societies are rapidly ageing, posing unique demographic challenges that are likely to become more severe in the coming years. Maintaining dynamism, ensuring fairness in burden-sharing, and supporting the elderly population will require innovative policies that promote inclusivity and resilience. Yet, easy solutions remain scarce, as increasing immigration and forcing people to stay longer in the workforce are not popular ideas.

Globalisation is changing, and the regionalisation of globalisation is on the rise. At the same time, the EU will aim to de-risk globalisation by, for instance, reducing its dependency on China. The new paradigm of globalisation is no longer solely about low-cost production. Security considerations are now increasingly shaping Europe's economic landscape. With domestic politics increasingly impacting the US's foreign policy, the EU and its member states are renewing and strengthening their relations with other global forces, such as India.

Another topic is digitalisation coupled with European concerns about privacy, freedom, and societal impact. Still, the EU aims to keep up with the pace of development in the US and China, while enforcing its single market.

Conclusion

Europe is facing more challenges than in previous years, even as the EU has become more important for Europeans than before. Consequently, internal deliberations concerning the trajectory of the EU have intensified, leading to heightened domestic political dynamics within the EU. This, in turn, is expected to influence the dynamics of the European elections.

While sudden developments in the Ukraine war may alter the EU's internal and external focus, it is clear that security, defence, economic transition, digitalisation, and the well-being of European citizens will remain at the core of EU policies.

As the US position in world affairs changes, Europe is reaching out to its diverse global partners in search of new synergies. In that context, in many of the EU's ambitions, such as defence, economy, and global cooperation, its blossoming relationship with partners like India becomes more important than ever.

Tomi Huhtanen *is the Executive Director of the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, the political foundation of the European People's Party (EPP).*

3

Europe's Rightward Shift and the Implications for EU Policymaking

Susi Dennison

In the 2019 European Parliament elections, the centre-right and centre-left lost seats not only as a result of a surge in support for the far-right, and the new centrist group Renew Europe, but also parties campaigning on a climate and environmental protection platform—the so-called 'Green Wave'. The elections witnessed a high turnout of over 50 percent of voters—the highest since the 1994 European Parliament elections. This was amid a political backdrop in which the European media were focused on the prospect of anti-European parties gaining control of around a third of the seats in the European Parliament for the first time, leaving policymakers unsettled about the implications for the future of 'the European project'.

In the run-up to the 2024 European Parliament elections, Europeans are living through a very different political moment. The 'shock factor' has gone, and the reality of the influence of extreme parties of the right and left has become normalised in European policymaking. The need for mainstream parties to build coalitions with those in the fringes has become increasingly accepted in the European Parliament in its most recent term. Successive crises—from the COVID-19 pandemic, to the outbreak of wars in Ukraine and Gaza, to the worsening climate crisis—have made European voters fearful, resulting in their priorities being increasingly centred around cost of living and security issues, above all else. This is fuelling a growth in the willingness to support 'nation first' policies[1] over more progressive agendas to invest in the European project, which is likely to bear fruit in the European Parliament elections in June. What does this mean, however, for the EU's approach to future policymaking?

Deal Making in the European Parliament

The European Parliament elections are widely expected to herald a consolidation of the rightward shift in the European Parliament and many EU member states,[2] of which the 2019 elections had already provided an indication. Current forecasts suggest that the parties in the political centre that approved Ursula von der Leyen as European Commission president in 2019 (i.e., EPP, Renew, S&D) will retain a majority after the elections in June, albeit a smaller one this time. They could jointly approve the new Commission, but are likely to need the support of the Brothers of Italy and/or the Greens voting in favour. The momentum behind von der Leyen's campaign to become European Commission President for a second time is looking solid, notwithstanding such controversies as the Piepergate and Pfizergate scandals.[3] Her selection as the European People's Party's (EPP) candidate could yield policy continuity from the next European Commission should she return to power.

However, in fields such as climate, rule of law, and immigration, this assumption could be misguided because of the broader political context. Greater political reliance on the far-right in order to pass legislation through the European Parliament will mean that those trying to push a progressive agenda under the next mandate will need to be prepared to make deals. The European Green Deal illustrates this point.

After the first five years of the Deal's implementation, pending action areas for the green transition such as transport, buildings, and efficiency are likely to be politically sensitive since these would imply costs and requirements on individuals in addition to the macro level. The signs of backlash against the green agenda,[4] most notably from farmers across the EU but also from business organisations and parts of the EPP, have taken their toll in terms of von der Leyen's willingness to push the Green Deal. This is evident in the Commission's recently released communication on reducing net emissions by 90 percent by 2040. Buried in the latter part of the 27-page document were calls on the agricultural sector.[5]

The EPP looks set to remain the largest political group after the elections, framing the debate in Brussels and in government in approximately 10 out of 27 member states—more than any other political group. The next Commission is thus likely to focus on the EPP's agenda of competitiveness, as framed in the proposal by some EPP MEPs for a strong executive vice-president tasked with an 'Industry Deal' involving deregulation and a more 'realistic' approach to the green transition. This could result in ambitions for post-2030 emissions reduction targets being scaled down and existing regulation resulting in a softening of requirements, depending on how competitiveness is interpreted and how internal dynamics in the EPP evolve.

In a scenario where the EPP turns towards the far-right, the result could be lower ambitions on progressive files where the far-right is sceptical, in return for cross-party support on some of the EU's central challenges in the next institutional period where it is easier to secure such support. Ongoing support for Ukraine, maintaining consensus around EU enlargement, and an EU collective budget of sufficient size are some such areas.

The European Parliament has historically been a horse-trading environment, in which deals are made according to issue rather than based on formal coalitions. However, in the last European Parliament, some trends were detected in terms of the nature of the majorities that carried forward agreements on certain issues.[6]

A centre–right coalition tended to dominate on agriculture, industry, fisheries, and international trade. Post-2024 elections, in the European Parliament that will be created—expected to be dominated by the EPP as the largest political group, and the far-right ECR and ID groups likely to increase their seat shares—this majority could hold comfortably.

On the other hand, the centrist coalition of EPP, S&D (Socialists and Democrats) and the liberal parties, which has tended to win votes on budgetary matters and foreign affairs—crucial for von der Leyen's ambition of a more geopolitical Europe—will be harder to achieve, with reduced numbers of seats expected for both S&D and Renew parties. In such a scenario, it would be necessary to court support from elsewhere, including far-right groups, to pass legislation or agreements through compromises on the part of the centrist parties. In the areas of civil liberties, gender equality, international development, justice and home affairs, reaching a majority would require even more work.

Before the current European Parliament, there was a so-called "cordon sanitaire"—a consensus not to work with parties of the extreme right. However, it is now commonplace within the European Parliament to cooperate across this cordon, not only at a pan-EU level but also between centrist and far-right parties within national groups. This was demonstrated in the adoption in April 2024 of the Migration and Asylum Pact.[7] With centrist parties habitually compromising to achieve majorities, this growing trend of cooperation with the far-right poses a huge risk for a progressive agenda given centrist politicians' limited room for manoeuvre. This risks diluting some of the central pillars to achieve the strong, secure, and competitive Europe set out in the leaked Council strategic agenda.[8]

A Cautious Council

However, in terms of EU functioning, it is not only the results of the European Parliament elections, and the European Commission that the Parliament appoints, that matter. The pre-poll debates will very much frame the picture too. The domestic national discussions ahead of the elections will shape the mandates that national governments feel they have been given for how they engage on EU files in the context of the Council of the EU—the body comprising member state governments that sets the strategic direction of the EU. If there is a challenging anti-EU debate in these member states, progressive governments will feel restricted in the positions they can adopt. On the other hand, Eurosceptic governments may feel emboldened, in an environment that strengthens their forces after the elections.

Forecasts predict that in as many as 18 EU member states, far-right parties are likely to grow in prominence.[9] In at least nine of these, including France, Italy, Hungary, Belgium, the Netherlands and Austria, the far-right have a significant chance to come first. In the other nine, they are likely to will come second or third. This group includes the likes of Sweden, Finland, Estonia, Germany, Spain and Portugal. It is therefore likely that in all these settings, the national governments will feel that they have little choice but to take note of the messaging of far-right groups. This cannot but resonate in the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, as well.

The External vs. the Internal

Multiple threats are engulfing the EU's geostrategic environment, and in the United States, Donald Trump could get re-elected in November 2024. These developments could tear at the very fabric of the transatlantic relationship once again. Nonetheless, the European Parliament elections should not stand out as the gravest issue that Europe's leaders must confront. Yet the nature of the threat posed by the politics within the EU for the future of the European project, in particular its ability to develop as a geopolitical actor, should not be underestimated either.

Progressive leaders cannot make the mistake of focusing outward too much and ignoring what is domestically important. Otherwise, when they look back in late June, the EU may have moved further down a path towards a union driven by national, rather than European, sovereignty than they bargained for.

Susi Dennison *is Director of the European Power programme and a Senior Policy Fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.*

4

The EU Green Deal and Trade: Finding A Balance Between Fairness and Competitiveness

Fanny Sauvignon, Luca Nipius, and Stefania Benaglia

T he EU Green Deal, launched in 2019, started out as an ambitious decarbonisation deal. Not too long after, the COVID-19 pandemic reinforced the deal's sustainability commitments as it laid bare the vulnerabilities of the EU's supply chains. The Green Deal was challenged by the war in Ukraine and adapted in 2022 through the REPowerEU plan,[1] to reduce the EU's dependence on Russian natural gas and increase energy security.

Meanwhile, an expanding Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)[2] has resulted in diplomatic conundrums with the EU's trade partners, who have a different approach to decarbonisation. Yet, CBAM is central to the EU's industrial green transition efforts and is designed to achieve a level playing field for internal and external producers alike. Leveraging the EU's capacity to regulate complex global challenges, CBAM paves the way for regulating green transition. With its expanding array of measures, whose success is dependent on international trade and development cooperation, the Green Deal is grappling with an EU global agenda that is fixated on competitiveness and security—this will be a pivotal issue in the upcoming European Parliament and the next European Commission.

An Expanding CBAM

The EU's CBAM is amongst its most high-profile Green Deal policies. When the carbon pricing mechanism entered an initial transitional phase in October 2023, CBAM was already an important issue for international partners, even before it became a proposal. Today, there continues to be little understanding of the mechanism.

In principle, CBAM aims to level the global playing field for producers operating both within and outside the EU, including those wanting to sell their products in the EU's internal market. Several energy-intensive sectors such as iron and steel, aluminium, cement, fertilisers, electricity, and hydrogen are subject to this regime. If these products are imported into the EU, they will be subject to a carbon tax at the EU border for their embedded carbon emissions. The existing EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) places a financial burden on EU producers based on their carbon emissions. CBAM complements and mirrors the EU ETS. As CBAM is harmonised with the EU ETS price, it places the same financial responsibilities on non-EU producers who export to the EU, in an attempt to promote green transition.

A considerable proportion of the products covered come from outside the EU. For example, out of the 147.7 Mt of steel consumed in the EU in 2022, 28.9 Mt of finished steel products were imported, amounting to almost 20 percent of the total consumed steel.[3] Without CBAM, the imported steel would have a price advantage, as there is no carbon price attached to it. This could cause an increase in imports, leading to the leakage of carbon emissions out of the EU.

Gradually, an increasing number of sectors will fall under the CBAM, eventually covering more than 50 percent of emissions from ETS-covered sectors.[a] The mechanism is in its transitional phase until 2026, during which period there are only reporting obligations. CBAM allows EU industries to decarbonise their products without being outcompeted by imported products with the aim of preventing carbon leakage as well as improving the competitiveness of industries that fall under the EU ETS.

Impact on the EU's Global Partners

Yet, the mechanism may have a considerable impact on non-EU economies. For example, about 26 percent of India's exports of products covered under CBAM, amounting to 7.6 billion euros, go to the EU, according to a report by GTRI.[4] The extent of a carbon tax that will be imposed by the EU depends on the extent and ability of Indian producers to lower the footprint of their products,[5] which aligns with the intended impact of CBAM. This also allows the EU to incentivise global producers to invest in low-carbon alternatives without directly imposing a carbon price on non-EU countries.

---

a   The EU ETS currently covers electricity and heat generation, energy-intensive industry sectors, certain installations for the incineration of municipal waste, and parts of the aviation and maritime sectors.

Some of the EU's international trade partners argue that CBAM is a protectionist measure that may violate World Trade Organization (WTO) regulations, particularly on the principle of non-discrimination. This is because it could treat imported products differently based on their carbon content, thus putting certain trading partners at a disadvantage;[6] for example, steel produced in India has a much higher carbon footprint than those of its competitors.[7] Another criticism is that CBAM could exclude developing countries, as their producers may lack the resources and opportunities to transition to low-carbon technologies and products.[8] Without adequate support, the CBAM regime risks further widening global inequalities and preventing low-income countries from participating in climate change mitigation efforts.

Nevertheless, CBAM's gradual and multilayered approach was designed in accordance with WTO regulations. Its implementation, coupled with complementary EU climate diplomacy efforts, will tell whether CBAM is able to avoid trade conflicts with partners. This will include global investments to achieve just energy and climate transition, and adaptation to the differentiated needs and responsibilities of partner countries.

Between Decarbonisation and Competitiveness

While some EU Green Deal measures, such as CBAM, attract attention outside of the EU single market, the meaning and effects of the Green Deal are also debated within the Union. A recurring criticism is that the Green Deal may threaten the competitiveness of some EU industries, risking to burden them with regulations without providing adequate support for the required transitions.[9] This argument, extended by liberal political forces such as Renew Europe and segments of the European private sector, has already impacted EU policies. Recent initiatives under the Green Deal umbrella represent attempts by President Ursula von der Leyen's Commission to reconcile decarbonisation objectives with industrial competitiveness imperatives. The Green Deal Industrial Plan (GDIP), announced in February 2023, seeks to establish "both a global and a European level playing field" for the clean transition.[10] The plan relies on four pillars: a predictable and simplified regulatory environment, faster access to funding, enhancing skills, and open trade for resilient supply chains.[11] The first and fourth pillars mobilise global attention by extending their reach beyond EU borders and the single market.

A closer look at key GDIP policies, including the Net-Zero Industry Act[12] (NZIA) and the Critical Raw Materials Act[13] (CRMA), highlights the double playing-field vision. The NZIA, largely interpreted as a mild response to the United States's (US) Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), focuses on attracting investments into the EU, scaling up manufacturing, and improving overall market conditions for EU clean tech. The NZIA, while more comprehensive than the IRA, lacks a dedicated budget and financing framework.[14] While the US, China, India, and Japan, among others, invest heavily in the clean tech race, the EU is still in the process of unlocking the necessary funds.

In parallel, the European CRMA aims for a "sustainable supply of raw materials"[15] feeding into the green and digital transitions. While it includes local measures to strengthen domestic supply chains, the policy is inevitably geared towards international engagement and trade, since the value chains—from extraction to export—of raw materials that the EU depends on are often held by non-EU partners. Diversifying and strengthening international partnerships is at the heart of the CRMA and implemented within the framework of the EU's Global Gateway,[16] the bloc's connectivity strategy.

The CRMA, therefore, ties together not only the EU's Green Deal and trade policy but also its foreign policy.

Resilience, Supply Chains, and Geopolitics

Competitiveness is often associated with another EU buzzword: resilience. Having gained popularity in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and related supply chain disruptions, the concept now permeates all aspects of EU policy and international cooperation, from trade to digital, and from the Green Deal to corporate governance.

Beyond sustainability, 'resilient' has emerged as a synonym for 'secure', encompassing non-traditional security interests of the EU across sectors. This ties into the competitiveness argument: to ensure socio-economic recovery and resilience, the green and digital transitions require EU reforms and investments. Above all, securing EU green and trade interests is reliant on the EU's geopolitical standing.

In order to achieve a global level playing field, free trade agreements and related negotiations can be complemented by trade and technology councils, which are for now limited to EU-US and EU-India. There is, however, no one-size-fits-all tool to broaden and harmonise cooperation, as shown by the multiple partnerships linking Japan and the EU, like the EU-Japan EPA,[17]

the EU-Japan SPA,[18] and the EU-Japan Digital Partnership.[19] The objective is to reduce perceived threats to the EU's competitiveness and resilience from the IRA's or other market players' supposed lack of compliance to WTO rules. Some threats grow into disputes, such as the EU's complaint about Indonesia's restrictions on raw materials[20] affecting the stainless-steel value chain.

In the EU, tackling supply chain disruptions and threats to resilience is now more readily associated with foreign policy, in combination with long-term, flagship EU policies like the Green Deal. This was evident in the EU's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine; to reduce dependency on Russian natural gas and diversify energy deals, the ongoing REPowerEU[21] plan was launched under the Green Deal umbrella.

Resilience and security are now closer than ever in EU policy. Despite the ongoing debates around the Green Deal and its direction, it is poised to be central to the EU's future global strategies.

Conclusion

Imperfect though CBAM and the Green Deal are, they can help enable the EU's green transition. Ahead of the European elections, the Green Deal is treading a fine line between its multilateral commitment to fairness and decarbonisation and the need to support EU industries in competitive value chains. At the same time, the compounded global crises and geo-economic trends of previous years have underlined the need for a resilient EU, safeguarding critical supply chains and diversifying international partnerships.

Achieving these objectives requires extending beyond strategic communication towards partners to achieve closer cooperation and ensure that the EU's decarbonisation and trade policies have the intended effects and do not generate disputes. The deployment of the CBAM regime represents a diplomatic challenge to ensure that it is the global green growth engine that it sets out to be.

Fanny Sauvignon *is Researcher in the Foreign Policy Unit at the Centre for European Studies (CEPS), Brussels.*
Luca Nipius *is a Research Assistant in the Energy, Resources and Climate Change unit at CEPS.*
Stefania Benaglia *is Head of the Foreign Policy Unit at CEPS.*

5

The Impact of the EU Elections on the Region's Security and Defence

Mathieu Droin

Never before since the institutionalisation of the European elections in 1979 has the security environment of Europe been as challenging and unpredictable. The war in Ukraine continues, and despite the expected stimulus from the US$61-billion aid package[1] voted by the United States Congress in April, the outcome of the conflict remains undecided. The war has also demonstrated Europe's dependency on the United States (US) for security and defence.[2] Despite European military support to Ukraine, the overall performance of the Ukrainian Armed Forces depends on the level of US support. If European states who are members of the European Union (EU) or North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have been spared Russia's direct aggression, it is arguably owing to the deterrent effect of the US security guarantee.

However, the US security umbrella is waning, irrespective of the next US president. The question for Europe is whether American disengagement from Europe will be sudden and potentially conflictual in the case of a second Trump administration, or gradual and concerted in the case of a second Biden term. In either case, Europe will be shouldering a larger share of its own security and defence.

Europe's New Reality

According to the European Parliament Eurobarometer released in April, defence and security is the top issue in nine countries, which marks a sea change from the previous elections in 2019.[3] This makes "security and defence" the third highest priority for Europeans, behind "poverty and social exclusion", and "public health", but on par with "economy and jobs", followed closely by "climate change" and the "future of Europe". The issue of security and defence ranks first among priorities that citizens believe would reinforce the EU's global position.

Therefore, security and defence is likely to weigh on the outcome of the elections as well as on the expected rise in voter turnout, which is usually low for European Parliament (EP) elections. This, in turn, demonstrates an evolution in Europeans' perception of the EU as a key player in their security and defence.

For the past three decades, the EU has found itself in a grey zone between NATO, which remains the cornerstone of European collective defence, and the 27 national armies. Since its inception, the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) has focused on crisis management outside EU borders, in the EU's neighbourhood (Western Balkans, Caucasus, Mediterranean), and further afield in Africa or the Northern Indian Ocean.[4] Additionally, since the EU is a political and economic project, defence has always been perceived as being outside its remit. This is mostly correct; Article 42(2) of the EU treaty prevents Brussels from using the common budget for "operations having military or defence implications", although a taskforce has been set up to loosen the strict interpretation of this provision.[5]

The changing perceptions of the EU can be attributed to its security and defence transformation in the previous years, which can be divided into two critical phases.

The first phase, which corresponds with the second half of the 2010s, was triggered by Donald Trump's transactional approach to the transatlantic bond.[6] These years were also marked by a steep deterioration in Europe's security environment following Russia's first invasion of Crimea and Eastern Ukraine in 2014, a series of terrorist attacks across Europe, and the acknowledgement of increasing great power strategic competition.[7] Additionally, while Brexit amputated the EU of its second military power, it also opened the door to a bolder agenda in security and defence that London had long objected.

Consequently, the EU adopted its first Global Strategy in 2016[8] and its first Strategic Compass in 2022,[9] which proposed a roadmap for security and defence for the upcoming decade. At a more practical level, the EU launched a series of initiatives to incentivise Europeans to invest in and jointly develop critical capabilities. These initiatives include the European Defence Fund, which allocated 8 billion euros to scale up the funding of collaborative research and development till the prototype stage for defence products and technologies, as well as the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), a framework that supports joint defence projects when submitted by at least three EU member states.[10]

The second phase was sparked by the war in Ukraine, with two main lines of effort. The first was the need to provide military support to Ukraine, which was previously uncharted territory for the EU; nevertheless, the Union displayed its adaptability, notably recalibrating an off-budget instrument called the European Peace Facility (EPF), which was initially dedicated to capacity-building, including the provision of lethal weapons, for EU partners, mainly in Africa. The EPF quickly became a tool to coordinate military support for Ukraine, allowing member states to be reimbursed for the military equipment delivered to Ukraine, worth 12 billion euros as of February 2022.[11] Additionally, the EU launched in November 2022 the EU Military Assistance Mission Ukraine mission to train up to 30,000 Ukrainians and the Act in Support of Ammunition Production initiative, launched in 2023, to produce, procure, and deliver one million artillery shells to Ukraine.[12]

The second line of effort consisted of strengthening the European defence industrial and technological base to make it "ready for war", in accordance with the first EU Defence Industrial Strategy (EDIS), released in March 2024.[13] The strategy sets ambitious targets to strengthen the EU's defence industrial base and to "buy European". However, achieving these targets will be challenging, not just because Europeans are confronting three decades of underinvestment in their defence and their dependence on US military hardware has increased since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, but also because the EU has limited powers in this area. The effort is led at a "supranational" level by the European Commission, whereas member states are eager to retain their national prerogatives when it comes to their defence industries. The best the EU can do is to incentivise, but it does not have the ability to enact binding decisions in this domain.

Can the Elections Empower the Union's Security and Defence?

At first glance, the elections appear to have marginal impact on EU security and defence policy. The first reason is institutional. The CSDP is an intergovernmental policy that is steered by heads of states and governments when they meet in the European Council or by ministers of foreign affairs in the Foreign Affairs Council. On a daily basis, it is the result of constant dialogue and negotiations between the Commission, the European External Action Service (EEAS, the EU's "Foreign Ministry"), and member states. The EP, on the other hand, is more of a consultative or monitoring entity.

However, the secondary role of the EP is not insignificant. When it decides to do so, the EP can leverage its position to weigh in on security and defence issues, as recently illustrated by the Parliament's refusal to approve the Council budget until new Patriot air-defence systems are handed over to Ukraine.[14] Additionally, the Parliament approves the composition of the Commission and elects its President. If, as predicted, sovereign or nationalist forces become stronger in the Parliament, they could exert closer scrutiny on the Commission's actions in key sovereign domains such as defence.

In 2019, it took six months for the Commission to take office, but this is something that Europe cannot afford this year. This potential new role of counterweighing and, if necessary, trying to obstruct security and defence policies, is yet to be fully implemented but cannot be discarded on the basis of the political orientation of the next EP. Crucially, the Parliament partakes in the adoption of the common budget, including the seven-year Multi-annual Financial Framework (MFF)[a] and yearly budgets. During the last MFF negotiations, proposed envelopes related to defence were slashed in favour of more traditional areas such as agriculture.[15]

The main political traction and ambition will originate from the next Commission's composition and its President. The most serious contender, Ursula von der Leyen, has positioned defence at the centre of her campaign.[16] The next Commission is likely to play a more prominent role in defence matters, such as through instating a Defence Commissioner and making a quantum leap in defence spending, including through the issuance of defence Eurobonds, although many capitals remain skeptical of both ideas.[17]

Irrespective of their political programmes, EU decision-makers might be compelled to take bold steps out of necessity and urgency. First, since the US supplemental is likely to be the last aid package coming from across the Atlantic, the EU has a pivotal role to ensure that Europeans commit the necessary support to Ukraine. Second, in the event of Trump's re-election, NATO might become dysfunctional again. This would imply a greater role for the EU to foster cohesion and collective efforts at the European level, especially in the not-so-unlikely scenario of a Trump-Putin deal on Ukraine, over the heads of Europeans.[18]

---

a   The current MFF will be in place till 2027.

The EU does not have the ambition nor the ability to challenge NATO as the cornerstone of European security, but it can become a stronger security provider, as demonstrated by operations with executive mandates such as the European Union Naval Force Aspides in the Red Sea.[19] The EU's mutual defence clause (Article 42.7) cannot match NATO's Article 5 since it does not include the US; however, it combines the military might of 27 countries, 23 of which are also NATO members.

Ultimately, while the European elections might not aid a stronger European defence, the European, regional, and international security environment will exert pressure on the EU to transform itself. In this context, the challenge for the EU will be to reconcile its bureaucratic agenda with the will of the European people.

Mathieu Droin *is a visiting fellow in the Europe, Russia, and Eurasia Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). He has previously served as deputy head of the strategic affairs unit at the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MFA).*

6

The Transatlantic Partnership: Poised for More Change

Tara Varma

In the past decade, the transatlantic partnership between the United States and Europe, including but not limited to the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and covering trade, multilateral cooperation, defence and security, and more, has undergone shifts. The changes have underlined the need for Europeans to think more seriously about taking charge of their own security. While this may seem an obvious and logical need, it has taken[1] the shock of the Donald Trump administration in the United States (2016-2020), the COVID-19 pandemic, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, for Europe to realise it.

Europe's relationship with the US is special due to its dependence on the US security guarantee. After the Second World War, Europe was able to reconstruct, develop and flourish economically, secure in the knowledge that it could always count on Washington to protect it against rivals, particularly the Soviet Union. However, the fundamental changes the international system is experiencing, as well as domestic developments in the US, are inevitably changing the transatlantic partnership.

The Trump Shock

European countries are watching the ongoing US electoral campaign closely, as its outcome will help define the future of the transatlantic partnership. If Joe Biden is re-elected president, and the Democrats take the House of Representatives, Europe will have a sense of relief. There may still be changes in the US-Europe partnership; Europe may have to do more for itself, with the US's primary focus being competition management with China.[2] However, the change will not be abrupt or antagonistic.

If Trump wins again, however, the opposite may happen. European nations have not forgotten Trump's contempt[3] for international institutions and multilateralism during his earlier term. They have realised that not all political forces in the US share their ideal of international cooperation, and that excessive dependence on one country that might choose not to defend this ideal, is a risk. While he was president, Trump did not shy away from denouncing the very alliances and partnerships that formed the cornerstone of US foreign policy, claiming they were unfavourable to the US.[4] He withdrew the US from several multilateral agreements, such as the Paris Agreement and the Iran nuclear deal.[5] He has vowed to restore this policy again if voted back to power.

War in Europe

The situation in Europe has also dramatically changed after Vladimir Putin decided to invade Ukraine in February 2022. While the Biden administration had been warning European nations[6] for months about such an invasion, it still caught them by surprise. Under Biden, support for Europe and Ukraine has been consistent, notwithstanding the deadlock in the House of Representatives and the weaponisation of the issue for domestic political purposes.[7] The EU-US-NATO triangle remains united, but there is concern not only as the US comes closer to the November elections, but also with the possible outcome of the June 2024 European Parliament polls.

Indeed, if the far-right and the far-left in Europe—both currently doing well in pre-poll surveys[8]—make the breakthroughs in the election they are expected to, Europe's foreign policy[9] could take a vastly different course in the future, notably one where unwavering support to Ukraine might not continue. Current European institutions—the European Commission, European Council, along with the European Parliament—have been steadfast in their support to Ukraine, effectively accelerating the accession negotiations into the EU for both Ukraine and Moldova.[10]

European nations consider their fates intertwined with that of Ukraine and thus need Ukraine to prevail in the war. Yet, a predicament arises: for years, they disinvested their defence industries as the EU aimed at permanent peace in the continent. By binding formerly enemy countries and their economies together, it was felt that they would refrain from going to war with one another. This strategy did succeed, but wars and conflicts elsewhere did not disappear, and some even took place very close to European borders.

For the countries of Europe, Putin's invasion of Ukraine has been the final reckoning—after the Covid-19 pandemic and the Trump years—and they have little choice but to defend themselves better. It is a huge change—European perceptions have effectively undergone a paradigm shift and EU members are now ready to talk about security and defence.

Europe has indeed stepped up.[11] Eighteen of the 32 members of NATO[a] now spend 2 percent of their GDP on defence, which they committed to at the 2014 NATO summit.[12] The following points break down European Union aid to Ukraine as of March 2024:

- 47.9 billion euros (approx. US$51.16 billion) provided to support Ukraine's overall economic, social, and financial resilience

- 33.1 billion euros (approx. US$35.35 billion) provided as military assistance

The European Peace Facility (EPF) is an off-budget EU financing instrument, set up in March 2021, which enables the EU to deliver lethal weapons to countries which are not members of either EU or NATO. (Ukraine is in neither grouping, and the EPF is being used for the first time since it was set up.) It allows financing of operational actions with military or defence implications under the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Of the 33.1 billion euros, 11.1 billion euros (US$11.85 billion) has been delivered to Ukraine under the EPF.

- Almost 17 billion euros (US$18.15 billion) to help member states cater to the needs of Ukrainians fleeing their country to the EU.[13]

Europe is charting a new path, but overcoming years of disinvestment and neglect in strategic thinking and implementation will take time. With a NATO summit scheduled in Washington DC in July 2024—marking the 75th anniversary of the alliance—they must prepare now by putting forward ambitious propositions.

The Opportunity in the Forthcoming NATO Summit

Europe is writing a new chapter of its history: it is investing more in defence. To be sure, this will take time to come to fruition—funding has to be secured, factories built, workers trained, and new supply chains of critical materials set up.

This provides scope for increased EU-NATO cooperation, in the spirit of a revived transatlantic partnership. The two institutions can truly complement each other: NATO has a procurement agency and can coordinate efforts, while the EU has an array of financial instruments and an industrial toolbox that can incentivise defence industries across Europe.[14] Building long-term capacity is essential for the future of European security. Ukraine—and other European nations, too—

---

a   NATO has 32 members, including the US and Canada.

have been buying weapons systems off the shelf to satisfy immediate needs. To deter adversaries permanently, however, they must build capacities for themselves.

It is also in Washington's interest that Europe takes more responsibility for its security—not as a substitute for US security guarantees, but to ensure its own credibility and viability at a time when support to Ukraine, and indeed the very presence of the US in Europe, has become a contentious issue domestically. Europe's contribution to its own security should be on par with that of the US. The NATO summit in July is an opportunity for bold decisions towards that end.

In this year of two crucial elections, Europe needs to take greater charge of its own security, whether Biden is re-elected, or not. If Biden is re-elected, European countries will have developed more willingness and capacity and will be better and more equal partners to the US. If Trump wins, Europeans will find themselves in a dramatic position, but will at least have started preparing for it. A new chapter in the transatlantic partnership is currently being written.

Tara Varma *is a visiting fellow at the Centre of the United States and Europe at the Brookings Institution. She was awarded the honour of Knight of the National Order of Merit of France in November 2023.*

7

EU-India Relations: The Way Forward After the 2024 Elections

Amaia Sanchez-Cacicedo

This year, both India and Europe are conducting parliamentary elections, the outcomes of which are not expected to significantly alter the fundamental direction of their relations. The strategic relationship between India and the European Union (EU) has many benefits, rooted in their core interests and the broader geopolitical context. At the same time, certain differences exist due to their diverging worldviews and the disparities in key aspects of their identities. This partnership, however, is likely to endure and grow in its aspirations over time.

Predicted Election Outcomes and Promises

The results of the Indian national and European parliamentary elections are expected by mid-June 2024. Both are predicted to lean towards the right.

In India, according to a pre-poll survey by the news organisation NDTV, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is on course to secure a majority in the Lok Sabha for a third consecutive term.[1] This victory would further solidify the right-wing Hindutva and populist elements in mainstream Indian politics. On the European front, it is projected that the traditional centre-left and centre-right parties will lose ground to marginal populist right-wing parties. However, the Group of the European People's Party (EPP) is still expected to retain the largest number of seats.[2]

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's incumbent government is pledging continuity in its election promises. The focus is on anti-corruption measures, as well as development and prosperity goals. These aim to transform India into a developed economy by 2047, and the world's third largest.[3] The EU's frontrunner for the European Commission leadership is the incumbent Ursula von der Leyen, but recent crises have cast a degree of doubt on her prospects. She is campaigning on a platform of prosperity, security, and the defence of liberal democracy against those who seek to undermine it, both within and outside Europe.

Regarding foreign policy, the immediate goal for both India and the EU is to ensure security in a turbulent, conflict-ridden environment. Europe's largest threat is Russia, due to the ongoing war in Ukraine. For India, beyond its arch-rival Pakistan, China has become the primary concern, especially along its shared 3,488-km border.[4] In many ways, the EU's perception of Russia mirrors India's view of China.

The Broader Geopolitical Context

In the broader geopolitical context, the question is whether India will continue to need the EU as much as the EU needs India. Some may argue that the imbalance will grow, especially against the backdrop of the upcoming elections in the United States (US) and the potential re-election of Donald Trump. However, both India and the EU are looking at the global chessboard.

Their relationship is currently marked by substantial trade and investment flows. The EU, led by the Netherlands and Germany, is India's largest trading partner and one of its biggest sources of foreign direct investment (FDI).[5] Meanwhile, according to data from 2022,[6] New Delhi stands as the EU's tenth trading partner. Both actors are expected to pursue a geo-economic and security rapprochement as a 'middle way' between China and the US. They are likely to deepen their engagement in critical and emerging technologies, connectivity, supply chain resilience, and defence cooperation.

India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has emphasised that India is a "non-Western" country, and not "anti-West". He stressed that it can have equally strong ties with the US and Russia, depending on its national interests.[7] This form of 'non-alignment' is not new to India, though 'strategic autonomy' and 'multi-alignment' are today's preferred terms. What has changed is the rapid improvement in India's relations

with the West, including the EU and its member states. This is taking place despite India's push for multilateral reform and its acquiescence to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The growing EU–India rapprochement is a mutually beneficial relationship based on common areas of interest, given the current geo-political environment.

A Pragmatic Focus on Issue Areas

The strategic importance of the EU–India relationship is growing, evidenced by recent events that have positively influenced its momentum. One such event was the launch of the EU–India Connectivity Partnership in May 2021. This initiative aims to enhance connectivity in the digital, transport, and energy sectors for a combined market of 1.8 billion people, including the fostering of stronger people-to-people ties.[8] Following EU Commission President von der Leyen's visit to New Delhi in April 2022, the EU–India Trade and Technology Council (TTC) was established. The EU has a TTC with only one other country—i.e., the US—highlighting the significance of the EU–India partnership. By November 2023, this partnership had already resulted in the signing of an EU–India Memorandum of Understanding on Semiconductors.[9]

Furthermore, the shared presence of the EU and India in minilateral forums is becoming increasingly common, indicating a convergence of geo-strategic interests. A prime example is the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP), which the EU joined shortly after its inception in 2022 and India joined a year later.[10] Other initiatives include the International Solar Alliance, the G20, and the India–Middle-East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Both actors share concerns over problems like cyberattacks, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and the disruption of critical supply chains.[11]

When evaluating whether the partnership is gaining momentum, it is essential to examine critical issue areas of strategic interest to both partners.[12] Key shared strategic interests for India and Europe currently include connectivity and securing supply chains, critical and emerging technologies, security and defence cooperation, climate change, and energy. This collaborative approach is part of their combined pursuit for a 'middle path' amidst US and China's dominance, and diversification across various middle powers in a multipolar setting.

At a broad level, there are differences between the EU and India, especially on issues like climate change. India emphasises the need for climate financing, while the EU is focused on global decarbonisation. This is evident in the tensions surrounding the EU's Carbon-Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). However, on a practical level, the EU and India are making strides in their cooperation on green technologies as part of the TTC. They are aligning their interests in areas like climate modelling and biotechnology, for instance, recycling waste to hydrogen, electric mobility, and managing plastic litter. There is also progress in making New Delhi's successful 'India Stack' interoperable with the EU's budding Identity Wallet. This is taking place despite regulatory and normative disparities in the EU–India technological realms. These crucial steps, though small, are helping to reshape the larger landscape of EU–India relations.

Red Lines: Normative Dis-Alignment

Perhaps the primary obstacle in EU–India relations is a lack of understanding of where they are coming from, normatively-speaking. India, as an emerging power, and the EU, as an established traditional power, have differing views of the world order.

European countries played a significant role in the construction of the post-1945 international order, while India was a newly independent nation-state at that time. Today, India is actively pushing for changes to this framework, seeking what it perceives as its rightful place in international politics, whether in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) or the various International Financial Institutions (IFIs). This ambition is evident in the BJP election manifesto, which includes India's aspiration for a permanent seat in the UNSC.[13] For the EU, the existing multilateral order is fundamental to its foundations: this makes it more conservative when it comes to demands for reform.

Against this complex historical backdrop, it is imperative for the EU and India to recognise their foundational normative beliefs and work to bridge existing gaps. While the EU often prioritises liberal democracy and human rights, New Delhi tends to focus on economic openness and ensuring territorial integrity.[14] There is common ground in their shared belief in multilateralism as a basis for cooperation. This shared belief allows Brussels and New Delhi to cautiously piece together the puzzle moving forward.

Conclusion

The EU and India today find themselves in a unique position, both geopolitically and internally, to gradually and progressively deepen their strategic relationship. To achieve this, both parties must be pragmatic, focus on areas of common interest beyond economics, and be willing to tackle normative disalignments. The aspiration to find a 'middle way' between China and the US—whether bilaterally or minilaterally—provides a compelling motivation to continue strengthening EU–India ties in the coming years.

Amaia Sanchez-Cacicedo *is Associate Analyst for South Asia at the European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS).*

8

EU-China Relations After the Elections: Some Light at the End of the Tunnel?

Alberto Turkstra

The current political cycle of the European Commission (2019-2024) has been a turbulent one. In addition to the COVID-19 pandemic and the return of war to European soil, the von der Leyen Commission has had to grapple with the steady deterioration of relations with the People's Republic of China, which are at a historical low.

The change in the EU's stance vis-à-vis China precedes the present legislative cycle. In March 2019, the European Commission published a Strategic Outlook[1] defining China as a partner for cooperation and negotiation, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival with its own set of values. This seemingly contradictory "partner-competitor-rival triad" narrative is not meant to be a comprehensive and consistent long-term strategy but rather a broad and flexible framework that encompasses the views of all 27 EU Member States, from those eager to tap into the economic opportunities that China continues to offer, such as Germany, whose industrial and supply chains are deeply intertwined with China's, to those like the Baltic States, which advocate a much tougher line on China.

The lack of meaningful deliverables in the current legislature (with the exception of the China-EU Agreement on Cooperation and Protection of Geographical Indications, which entered into force in 2021[2]) has led to sombre EU-China relations, best illustrated by EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell referring to the 2022 virtual EU-China Summit as a "dialogue of the deaf".[3] Competitor and rival components have gained prominence as a result of the growing centralisation of power in China and its increasing assertiveness abroad. Examples

include the deepening 'no-limits' Russia-China partnership coinciding with the Russia-Ukraine war; the confrontational 'wolf warrior diplomacy' adopted by Chinese diplomats at the height of the pandemic; and the freezing of the Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) in 2021 amid tit-for-tat sanctions.[a]

An irritant in the EU-China relationship is the barriers to market access for European companies in China (and vice-versa). A recent report published by the European Chamber of Commerce in China[4] posits that many EU companies have been forced to re-evaluate their assumptions about the Chinese market, which has become less predictable and reliable over the recent years. Overall confidence in China's growth prospects has deteriorated,[5] with the era of double-digit growth of the Chinese economy well and truly over. China's push for self-reliance and reduced dependence on external trade through policies such as the dual circulation strategy[6] have also restricted market access for foreign enterprises. From the perspective of Chinese companies operating in Europe, the perceived politicisation of economic and trade issues,[7] the October 2023 announcement that the European Commission would initiate an anti-subsidy investigation into imports of electric vehicles from

China, launched on account of the accusation that Chinese state subsidies are creating an uneven playing field in the European market. More recently, the investigation into Chinese suppliers of wind turbines under the new Foreign Subsidies Regulation has further dampened the confidence of Chinese enterprises.

Yet, China and the EU remain closely interconnected through trade and investment, which was accelerated after China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. Currently, approximately 2.3 billion euros are exchanged between China and Europe daily.[8] Therefore, a strategy of decoupling, which has found greater resonance on the other side of the Atlantic, is neither feasible nor realistic for the EU. As the security implications of economic, trade and investment ties with China have moved front and centre to the policy debate, the EU has settled for a de-risking policy framework to guide its relations with the world's second largest economy.

To protect key industries, enhance the resilience of its economy, and tackle the ballooning trade deficit with China—which stood at 291 billion euros in 2023[9]—the EU and its Member

---

a   In 2021, the EU imposed sanctions under the new EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime – the so-called Magnitsky Act – on various high-ranking officials of the Chinese Communist Party due to alleged human rights violations, and China reacted with counter-sanctions against vocal Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) including Reinhard Bütikofer, the Chair of the EP's Delegation for relations with China; the Council of the European Union's Political and Security Committee and various Members of Parliament (MPs) from individual Member States.

States have worked towards devising defensive mechanisms, policy toolboxes, and instruments aimed at reducing risks and vulnerabilities vis-à-vis China. These include an FDI screening mechanism, an anti-coercion instrument, industrial policy initiatives such as the European Chips Act, the 5G 'toolbox' to restrict the access of non-European telecommunication manufacturers to the European market, and the Global Gateway Initiative, widely perceived as an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Although not all of these are explicitly directed against China, it is hard not to think that they have all been devised with China in mind.

In the lead-up to the European Parliament elections in June, EU-China relations have entered a phase of damage control and stabilisation. High-level visits have resumed, with the first in-person EU-China Summit since the pandemic being held in December 2023 in Beijing,[10] though it did not yield a joint statement. Visits by heads of state, including Belgian Prime Minister Alexander de Croo and more recently by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, have followed. Ahead of the aforementioned Summit, in an attempt to lure tourists and business travellers back to China following years of pursuing a severe zero-COVID policy, China endorsed visa-free entries for major EU economies.[11] However, it is unlikely that these *ad-hoc* conciliatory moves signal any significant deviation in the overall direction of Chinese foreign policy towards greater self-reliance.[12]

Beijing's charm offensive should also be understood in the context of the upcoming November elections in the US. In the likelihood of Donald Trump's return to the White House, EU leaders will need to shield themselves from his temperamental and transactional approach. For China, weakening the transatlantic bond has always been a strategic objective, in sync with its regular messaging to European interlocutors to "form an independent China policy".[13] As the current hegemon, the United States is driven by its desire to sustain its technological and economic primacy and motivated through its competition with China, which is threatening its global position. Europe, on the other hand, is more focused on reducing dependencies and risks.[14]

The China Factor in European Party Manifestos

Given the legislative competencies of the European Parliament, the composition and balance of power of the next Parliament and Commission will shape the direction of the EU's China policy. If Commission President Ursula von der Leyen stays for a second mandate—and she is the clear front runner—EU-China relations are unlikely to improve, since Beijing perceives her as being too close to Washington.

The manifestos of the political parties that make up the European Parliament's seven political groups[b] offer some useful insights as to the direction of the EU's China policy in the next politico-institutional cycle (2024-2029), from the belligerent tone of parties on the right of the spectrum to the more conciliatory note adopted by the socialists. At the time of writing, all political parties taking part in the elections have published their election programmes, except for the far-right Identity and Democracy (ID) Party.

The manifesto of the European People's Party (EPP), which enjoys a comfortable lead in the polls and is expected to be the biggest party after the elections, mentions China 10 times.[15] The EPP embraces the competitive aspect of EU-China relations, referring to the necessity of "challenging our economic competitors, such as China, while defending strategically important European sectors against unfair practices." It also notes the necessity of strengthening the regulatory framework in order to shield the EU's innovative companies "from takeovers by third countries, notably China" and to strengthen trade relations with like-minded partners "to remain competitive vis-à-vis dominant competitors such as China".

The Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party which, together with the European Democratic Party, forms the Renew Group in the European Parliament, refers to China 12 different times throughout the text. ALDE adopts an even more hawkish line on China than the EPP, calling for the implementation of "Magnitsky-style targeted sanctions on Chinese officials and other members of the Chinese Communist Party who violate human rights in Xinjiang, Tibet and Hong Kong."[16] The ALDE manifesto further calls on the EU to support the development of candidate countries in the Western Balkans (in addition to Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine) in order to counter disruptive efforts by "China, Russia and others". Finally, the party's manifesto proposes to keep the CAI frozen while the EU continues to build a network of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with like-minded powers.

The Socialists and Democrats (S&D) manifesto makes less explicit references to China, mentioning it only once and highlighting the space for cooperation in a way that no other political group does: "We will rebalance our relations with China, promoting our values and protecting our interests, and further cooperating to address pressing global issues."[17]

---

b   Group of the European People's Party (EPP); Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D); Renew Europe Group; Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA); Identity and Democracy (ID); European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and The Left.

The European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party, in its last-minute, four-page manifesto, takes a middle ground towards China, arguing for a balance between "engagement and the imperative to address human rights violations".[18]

The Greens call for a human rights-based EU foreign policy, including towards China, in which de-risking supply chains and increasing the EU's self-sufficiency are pillars.[19] The manifesto also makes the case that the EU "should find a middle ground between US surveillance capitalism and China-style state control." The Left's manifesto makes no mention of China, although it does call for "cooperation between sovereign states based on equality and the renunciation of hegemony."[20]

With these manifestos in place, and with the polls auguring a shift to the right, the next European Parliament is likely to maintain a hard line on China. With a widening value gap and fundamental divergences, competition and, to a lesser extent, rivalry are likely to remain the defining features of EU-China relations, even if channels of communication and cooperation with China remain open, especially in multilateral formats where joint action between the EU and China is essential to tackle global challenges such as climate change.

To end on an optimistic note, the resumption of high-level visits and diplomatic efforts may ease friction and restore some of the trust that has been lost in the previous years. This may perhaps reverse deteriorating perceptions of China in the eyes of the European public.

Alberto Turkstra *is project manager at* Diplomatic World, *a Brussels-based international quarterly magazine interlinking the worlds of politics, diplomacy, business, finance, art and culture, and representing an exclusive interface between decision-makers in economic, political and diplomatic circles. The views expressed in this piece are entirely his own.*

9

Protecting European Elections from Hybrid Threats: Is the EU Prepared?

Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy

In 2024, nearly half the world's population will be heading to the polls. If elections are a litmus test of civic space and of effective governance, as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk recently argued, Taiwan has passed the test.[1] Despite external interference through information manipulation and cyber-attacks, Taiwan successfully held its elections on 13 January. The uncontested outcome is a testament to the maturity of its democracy. On the eve of the elections, president-elect Lai Ching-te said: "Between democracy and autocracy, Taiwan stands on the side of democracy."[2] Yet, Taiwan's experience has also shown that during elections, even the most well-equipped societies are vulnerable to hybrid warfare, including information manipulation and interference.

Europe is still to pass the test. From 6 to 9 June, the continent-wide elections will elect 720 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). This will occur amidst the growing strength of far-right, anti-Brussels, and anti-establishment parties across Europe. These parties often exploit technology to undermine citizens' faith in democracy. The existing social tensions in Europe have created an ideal environment for Russian interference, aimed at further polarising societies. Moscow has long cultivated relations with various elements of Europe's right wing. Recently, China has also expanded its influence in the European information space, with Russian and Chinese disinformation efforts starting to align. This situation has underscored the urgent need for collective action in Europe.[3]

The World Economic Forum's (WEF) 2024 Global Risks Report listed Artificial Intelligence (AI), misinformation, disinformation, and cyber insecurity among the top ten global risks over the next two years.[4] It warned that both foreign and domestic actors will use misinformation and disinformation to deepen societal and political divisions. Considering the susceptibility to foreign information manipulation during previous European Parliament (EP) elections, the question arises: Is Europe now better equipped to protect its electoral process and fulfil its ambition to champion democracy worldwide?

New Security Challenges

Europe's elections will be taking place during a time of democratic backsliding in different parts of the world. For over a decade, nationalist and populist movements have capitalised on anti-globalisation sentiments, advocating trade protectionism, demanding curbs on immigration, and calling for less international cooperation. For Europe's global enterprises, a shift to the right globally could entail further trade barriers. As for its democracy, these elections will serve as a crucial test amidst dramatic changes to its security environment, which now includes an increase in hybrid threats in its vicinity, with disinformation at the forefront. Moscow's physical invasions—Georgia in 2008, Crimea in 2014, and Ukraine in 2022—have all been accompanied by wars waged online. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has prioritised tackling disinformation, with particular focus on artificial intelligence (AI).[5]

The 2024 World Economic Forum Risk Report identifies generative AI as a threat. This technology provides state and non-state actors the power and means to access knowledge and devise new tools of disruption. As seen in Taiwan's elections, generative technology is a potent tool for shaping the information landscape. It challenges traditional debunking methodologies, rendering them less effective against manipulative tactics.[6]

In response to these rapid advancements, and perhaps indicative of the EU's improved situational awareness, the EP approved the AI Act on 13 March 2024. This Act is the world's first binding law on AI, aiming to ensure safety and adherence to fundamental rights.[7] The AI Office, to operate under the Commission, has already begun recruiting AI specialists.[8]

Tools and Measures

The adoption of the AI Act is a direct response to citizens' proposals from the Conference on the Future of Europe. This conference was an effort to bridge the gap between the EU and its citizens through deliberative democracy. Von der Leyen, who proposed the conference as Commission president candidate in her 2019 Political Guidelines, pledged to allow all Europeans to voice their expectations from the EU, in keeping with a bottom-up approach.[9] Among the proposals, European citizens urged the EU to ensure a safe and trustworthy society, which includes countering disinformation and ensuring responsible use of AI.[10] The collected proposals are to be implemented through legislative proposals and possibly treaty changes.

The EU has focused on tackling hybrid threats through the AI Act and several other legislative and non-legislative measures implemented since 2019. These include the EU Hybrid Toolbox, a Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Toolbox (FIMI), a Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox, the Digital Services Act (DSA), and the Network and Information Systems Directive. These tools and the legislations, which focus on cybersecurity and foreign interference, are designed to facilitate quick decision-making in the EU.

The lack of coordination poses a significant challenge to the bloc's effectiveness. On paper, these developments may suggest that the EU has made progress in bolstering the bloc's fight against disinformation since the 2019 elections. The real question, however, is that even when implemented efficiently, these measures may still not be enough to ensure progress in practice.

Ground Realities

The threat of interference in the 2024 elections is evident. Two months before the upcoming June elections, investigations by Czech and Belgian authorities revealed that a Russian propaganda network paid European lawmakers to spread Russian messages using the Voice of Europe news organisation.[11] At the same time, a Polish citizen was charged with allegedly paying bribes to European parliamentarians to establish a Russian "zone of influence in Europe."[12]

The capability of state and non-state actors to weaponise information and interfere in democratic electoral processes has intensified. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 first revealed to Europeans the deep roots of Russian propaganda across member states. Some governments opposed sanctions on Russia, and a number of politicians hesitated to condemn the invasion. In response, in June 2015, the EP emphasised that the EU should strengthen its response to the challenge of weaponised information.[13]

In the same year, the European Council agreed to establish a task force to counter the Kremlin's deliberate disinformation efforts regarding Moscow's objectives in Ukraine and other parts of Europe. The European External Action Service (EEAS) created several task forces and launched *EUvsDisinfo*. The initiative aims to better forecast, tackle, and respond to Russian disinformation campaigns by raising public awareness and helping citizens resist manipulation of digital information.[14]

In 2018, the EU's Hybrid Fusion Cell warned that "disinformation by the Russian Federation poses the greatest threat to the EU."[15] In an unprecedented move, in 2020, the EU named China, in addition to Russia, as a source of online disinformation related to the novel coronavirus. This disinformation aimed at undermining Western democracies and foment internal divisions.[16] This move marked a significant shift in the EU's approach to China, reinforcing its 2019 designation of China as a 'systemic rival,' a label it has since maintained.

Key Lessons

The past decade has exposed the intensity and complexity of threats facing Europe, demonstrating the challenges in formulating an effective response. Beyond 2024, there are critical insights to consider.

First, the effectiveness of EU-level measures has been constrained by weak implementation of legislation and differences across member states. These states vary in their legal and institutional frameworks, and not all are at ease with EU institutions encroaching on what they see as their sovereign national security concerns.[17] As a result, collective measures may not be effective nor sufficient in safeguarding the electoral process.

Second, Europe has widened its ambit beyond Russia to also include China as a potential source of foreign interference. However, threat perceptions of China continue to differ, while there is more unity on Russia. Europeans have experienced China's attempts to discredit democracy and spread disinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, China's assertive geopolitical stance, particularly its reaction to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, has tarnished its image as a trustworthy partner. Nevertheless, a unified approach to China is yet to take concrete shape, with policies of some EU member states continuing to be influenced by economic interests.

Third, the intensification of the Russia-China strategic alignment since February 2022 has significantly increased the complexity of information manipulation. The EEAS's role in countering Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) has established Russia, as "the most obvious example" of a foreign actor with "intentional, strategic and coordinated attempts to manipulate facts, to confuse, and to sow division, fear and hatred." It noted that both China and Russia engage in such behaviour to "achieve their own political and economic goals by undermining the credibility of democratic institutions, and encouraging division and polarisation within European societies and beyond."[18] The challenge now is to connect the dots, transition from in-depth analysis to effective action, and counter both Chinese and Russian hybrid threats.

Fourth, to respond to hybrid threats, top-down, institutional measures must be complemented by investments in bottom-up approaches. This involves cultivating well-informed and responsible digital citizens capable of countering disinformation themselves. A 'whole-of-society' approach is necessary. Taiwan offers key lessons in this regard, for example by establishing cooperation across media platforms and encouraging flexible public-private partnerships, improving citizens' media literacy, and building efficient clarification mechanisms.[19] In 2023, the European Parliament launched a website to improve communication and provide authoritative information on the EP elections in all official EU languages.[20] More such investments in media literacy and digital literacy will empower citizens and strengthen their understanding of elections.

The EU has taken the lead in advancing the conceptualisation and implementation of methods to analyse FIMI. However, election interference is part of a wider strategy of hybrid warfare. To counter the evolving nature of these threats, Europe needs to work closely with like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific and share information. Europe recognises that instability in the Indo-Pacific has global implications. Projecting democratic unity against authoritarian interference is key, and to achieve this, democratic coordination will help build broader situational awareness across Europe and the Indo-Pacific. Only through shared awareness can Europe withstand the corrosive effects of hybrid threats.

Dr. Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy *is affiliate scholar at the Department of Political Science of Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Based in Taiwan, Zsuzsa is adjunct assistant professor at the National Dong Hwa University in Hualien.*

Endnotes

Editor's Note

1   "The Guardian view on the 2024 European elections: a continent at the crossroads," *The Guardian*, March 5, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/mar/05/the-guardian-view-on-the-2024-european-elections-a-continent-at-the-crossroads

1. The European Parliament: A Pillar of Transnational Democracy

1   "Political Groups," EU Matrix, https://eumatrix.eu/en/epg

2   "Updates," EU Matrix, https://eumatrix.eu/en/blog/2024-elections-update-new-majorities-MEPs-Commissioners

2. Key Policy Issues at Stake: An Agenda for the Future EU Leadership

1   Martijn Lampert, Panos Papadongonas, and Federico Ottavio Reho, "Middle-Class Concerns and European Challenges: A Data-Driven Study from a Centre–Right Perspective," Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, September 15, 2023, https://www.martenscentre.eu/publication/middle-class-concerns-and-european-challenges-a-data-driven-study-from-a-centre-right-perspective/

2   Lampert, Papadongonas, and Reho, "Middle-Class Concerns and European Challenges: A Data-Driven Study from a Centre–Right Perspective"

3   Lampert, Papadongonas, and Reho, "Middle-Class Concerns and European Challenges: A Data-Driven Study from a Centre–Right Perspective"

4   Lampert, Papadongonas, and Reho, "Middle-Class Concerns and European Challenges: A Data-Driven Study from a Centre–Right Perspective"

5   "European Parliament Election 2024," Europe Elects, April 29, 2024, https://europeelects.eu/ep2024/

6   "Browse Chamber: MEPs," MEPs, European Parliament, April 11, 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/meps/en/search/chamber

7   "Euronews Polls Centre," Euronews, https://polls.euronews.com/?view=graph&menu=polls&loaded-analyses=3&loaded-polls=3&loaded-news=4

8   Peter Hefele et al., "The 7Ds for Sustainability: 175 Proposals for the Next Legislature," Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, October 25, 2023, https://www.martenscentre.eu/publication/the-7ds-for-sustainability-175-proposals-for-the-next-legislature/

3. Europe's Rightward Shift and the Implications for EU Policymaking

1   Jon Henley, "How Europe's Far Right is Marching Steadily into the Mainstream," *The Guardian*, June 30, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jun/30/far-right-on-the-march-europe-growing-taste-for-control-and-order

2   Kevin Cunningham et al., "A Sharp Right Turn: A Forecast for the 2024 European Parliament Elections," European Council on Foreign Relations, January 23, 2024, https://ecfr.eu/publication/a-sharp-right-turn-a-forecast-for-the-2024-european-parliament-elections/

3   Julia Kaiser, "From Pfizer to Pieper: With VDL on the Defensive, who Stands to Gain?" The Parliament, April 19, 2024, https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/article/from-pfizer-to-pieper-with-vdl-on-the-defensive-who-stands-to-gain

4   "'Greenlash': Why it's Getting Harder to Pass Environmental Reforms in the EU," *Euronews Green*, August 13, 2023, https://www.euronews.com/green/2023/08/13/greenlash-why-its-getting-harder-to-pass-environmental-reforms-in-the-eu

5   European Commission, "Securing our Future; Europe's 2040 Climate Target and Path to Climate Neutrality by 2050 Building a Sustainable, Just and Prosperous Society," February 6, 2024, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52024DC0063.

6   Cunningham et al., "A Sharp Right Turn"

7   European Parliament, "MEPs Approve the New Migration and Asylum Pact," April 10, 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240408IPR20290/meps-approve-the-new-migration-and-asylum-pact

8   Zia Weise, "Bullets not Bees: EU Ditches Green Focus Ahead of June Election," *Politico*, April 11, 2024, https://www.politico.eu/article/leaked-eu-priority-list-reveals-absence-climate-change-focus/

9   Cunningham et al., "A Sharp Right Turn"

4. The EU Green Deal and Trade: Finding A Balance Between Fairness and Competitiveness

1   European Commission, "REPowerEU: Affordable, secure and sustainable energy for Europe," https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/repowereu-affordable-secure-and-sustainable-energy-europe_en

2   European Commission, "Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism," https://taxation-customs.ec.europa.eu/carbon-border-adjustment-mechanism_en

3   EUROFER, *European Steel in Figures 2023, EUROFER statistical handbook*, Brussels, Belgium, 2023, https://www.eurofer.eu/publications/brochures-booklets-and-factsheets/european-steel-in-figures-2023.

4   GTRI, *The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism: EU's Climate Trojan Horse to Obstruct Imports*, March 2023, https://gtri.co.in/gtriFlagshipReportsd.asp?ID=3

5   Mohammad Danish, "Does India share WTO's concern on EU's CBAM?", *Trade Promotion Council of India (TPC)*, September 18, 2023, https://www.tpci.in/indiabusinesstrade/blogs/is-wtos-concern-a-concern-for-india-with-eus-cbam/

6   Danish, "Does India share WTO's concern on EU's CBAM?"

7   Halina Yermolenko, "CBAM will affect 15-40% of Indian steel exports to Europe," *GMK Center*, June 23, 2023, https://gmk.center/en/news/cbam-will-affect-15-40-of-indian-steel-exports-to-europe/#:~:text=India%20exports%203%2D5%20million,agency%20ICRA%2C%20informs%20Business%20Standard.

8   Hugo Harvey, "Without reform, the EU's CBAM risks leaving developing countries behind," *Land & Climate Review*, March 13, 2024, https://www.landclimate.org/without-reform-the-eus-cbam-risks-leaving-developing-countries-behind/#:~:text=CBAM's%20potential%20shortcomings&text=Beyond%20legality%2C%20an%2-0often%20overlooked,developing%20countries%2C%20particularly%20in%20Africa.

9   Martin Porter, "The future of the European Green Deal: 'Competitive Sustainability'," *Euractiv*, February 6, 2024, https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/opinion/the-future-of-the-european-green-deal-competitive-sustainability/

10   European Commission, "The Green Deal Industrial Plan: Putting Europe's net-zero industry in the lead," https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/green-deal-industrial-plan_en.

11   European Commission, "Communication: A Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age," https://commission.europa.eu/document/41514677-9598-4d89-a572-abe21cb037f4_en.

12   European Commission, Proposal for a regulation – Net Zero Industry Act, https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/publications/net-zero-industry-act_en.

13   European Commission, European Critical Raw Materials Act, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/green-deal-industrial-plan/european-critical-raw-materials-act_en.

14   Milan Elkerbout, "An industrious initiative, yet the Net-Zero Industry Act won't end concerns about cleantech cash," *Centre for European Studies*, May 24, 2023, https://www.ceps.eu/an-industrious-initiative-yet-the-net-zero-industry-act-wont-end-concerns-about-cleantech-cash/.

15   European Commission, European Critical Raw Materials Act.

16   European Commission, Global Gateway, https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_fr.

17   European Commission, "EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement," https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/japan/eu-japan-agreement_en#:~:text=The%20EU%20and%20Japan's%20Economic,hard%20for%20them%20to%20compete.

18   EU-Japan SPA, "EU-JAPAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT (SPA)," https://www.eujapanspa.jp/

19   European Commission, "Digital Partnerships," https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/partnerships

20   World Trade Organisation, DS592: Indonesia — Measures Relating to Raw Materials, https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dispu_e/cases_e/ds592_e.htm.

21   European Commission, "REPowerEU: Affordable, secure and sustainable energy for Europe"

5. The Impact of the EU Elections on the Region's Security and Defence

1   James Waterhouse, "Ukraine Aid Package Could Help Kyiv Slow Russia's Advance," *BBC*, April 21, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-68868399

2   Max Bergmann and Sophia Besch, "Why European Defense Still Depends on America," *Foreign Affairs*, March 7, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/why-european-defense-still-depends-america#:~:text=It%20then%20falls%20to%20the%20United%20States%20to,U.S.%20troops%20for%20the%20airlift%20of%2-0European%20evacuees

3   "European Parliament Spring 2024 Survey," European Union, April 2024, https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3272

4   Leonie Allard, Cinzia Bianco, Mathieu Droin, "With Operation Aspides, Europe is Charting its Own Course in and Around the Red Sea," Atlantic Council, March 7, 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/with-operation-aspides-europe-is-charting-its-own-course/

5   Henry Foy, "EU Looks to Bypass Treaty Ban on Buying Arms to Support Ukraine," *Financial Times*, March 21, 2024.

6   Anna Dimitrova, "The State of the Transatlantic Relationship in the Trump Era," Fondation Robert Schuman, February 2, 2020, https://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/european-issues/0545-the-state-of-the-transatlantic-relationship-in-the-trump-era

7   Anthony H. Cordesman, "The U.S., NATO, and the Defense of Europe: Underlying Trends," CSIS, June 27, 2018, https://www.csis.org/analysis/us-nato-and-defense-europe-underlying-trends

8   "A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy," European Union External Action Service, December 15, 2019, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/global-strategy-european-unions-foreign-and-security-policy_en

9   "A Strategic Compass for Security and Defense," General Secretariat of the EU Council, March 21, 2022, https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7371-2022-INIT/en/pdf

10 Edouard Simon and Alessandro Marrone, "Linking PESCO and EDF," IRIS, April 2021, https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/66-Report-PESCO-EDF-April-2021.pdf

11 European Union External Action Service (EEAS), "A Security and Defence Approach Fit for the Future – European Peace Facility," February 2023, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/european-peace-facility-epf_en#:~:text=Overall%20assistance%20for%20Ukraine%20by%20the%20EU%20and,%E2%82%AC82%20billion%2C%20including%20%E2%82%AC28%20billion%20in%20military%20support

12 "EUMAM Ukraine," EU Military Assistance Mission for Ukraine, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eumam-ukraine_en?s=410260

13 Max Bergmann et al., "The European Union Charts its Own Path for European Rearmament," Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 8, 2024, https://www.csis.org/analysis/european-union-charts-its-own-path-european-rearmament

14 Eddy Wax and Jacopo Barigazzi, "EU Parliament Delays Approval of Council Budget to Press for Military Aid to Ukraine," *Politico*, April 11, 2024, https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-parliament-delays-approval-council-budget-press-military-aid-ukraine/

15 Aurelie Pugnet, "European Parliament Supports 2024 Defence Budgets," *Euractiv*, September 2023, https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence-and-security/news/european-parliament-supports-increase-in-2024-defence-budgets/

16 Barbara Moens, Zia Weise, and Hans von der Burchard, "Von der Leyen's 2nd-term Pitch: More Military Might, Less Climate Talk," *Politico*, February 19, 2024, https://www.politico.eu/article/ursula-von-der-leyen-military-

defense-slimate-second-term/#:~:text=Poll%20of%20 Polls-,Von%20der%20Leyen's%202nd%2Dterm%20 pitch%3A%20More%20military%20might%2C,in%20 support%20for%20another%20run.&text=Behold%20 Ursula%20von%20der%20Leyen's%20 transformation%20from%20green%20dove%20to%20 military%20hawk

17 Jack Schickler, "Von der Leyen's Defence Union Dream Won't Come Easy – or Cheap," *Euronews*, January 1, 2024, https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/04/01/ von-der-leyens-defence-union-dream-wont-come-easy- or-cheap

18 Mathieu Droin and Dalibor Rohac, "Trump's Proposed Ukraine 'Deal' Threatens European Security," *The Dispatch*, April 19, 2024, https://thedispatch.com/article/ trumps-proposed-ukraine-deal-threatens-european- security/

19 Selin Uysal, "The EU's New Red Sea Naval Mission: Implications and Challenges," Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 2024.

6. The Transatlantic Partnership: Poised for More Change

1 Tara Varma, "European Strategic Autonomy: The Path to a Geopolitical Europe," *The Washington Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (2024): 65–83, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10 .1080/0163660X.2024.2327820.

2 Kurt M. Campbell and Jake Sullivan, "Competition Without Catastrophe," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1, 2019, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/competition-with- china-catastrophe-sullivan-campbell.

3 Joseph S. Nye, Jr, "If Trump Returns," *Project Syndicate*, May 31, 2023, https://www.project-syndicate.org/ commentary/trump-2024-election-us-foreign-policy-by- joseph-s-nye-2023-05.

4 Thomas Wright, "Trump's 19th Century Foreign Policy," *Politico*, January 20, 2016, https://www.politico. com/magazine/story/2016/01/donald-trump-foreign- policy-213546/.

5 Tara Varma, "Trump's Second Act," The Berlin Pulse, Körber Stiftung, November 28, 2023, https://koerber- stiftung.de/en/projects/the-berlin-pulse/2023-24/.

6 "Biden Declassified Russia Intel Due to Allied "Skepticism," US Spy Chief Says," *CNN*, June 6, 2022, https://edition.cnn.com/europe/live-news/russia-ukraine- war-news-06-06-22/h_276b57a82950ba4bae43403ae8b3 b11a

7 "Johnson Moving Forward with Ukraine Aid Bill Despite Pressure from Hardliners," *CNN*, April 18, 2024, https:// edition.cnn.com/2024/04/17/politics/mike-johnson- ukraine-aid/index.html.

8 Europe Elects, https://europeelects.eu.

9 Rosa Balfour and Stefan Lehne, "Charting the Radical Right's Influence on EU Foreign Policy," Carnegie Europe, April 18, 2024, https://carnegieeurope. eu/2024/04/18/charting-radical-right-s-influence-on-eu- foreign-policy-pub-92139.

10 European Commission, "Ukraine's Path Towards EU Accession," EU Solidarity with Ukraine, April 18, 2024, https://eu-solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/ukraines-path- towards-eu-accession_en.

11 Tara Varma, "Europe and NATO are Stepping Up on Ukraine," The Brookings Institution, February 2, 2024, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/europe-and-nato-are- stepping-up-on-ukraine/

12 NATO, "Defense Expenditures and NATO's 2% guideline," April 25, 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/ natohq/topics_49198.htm#:~:text=In%202014%2C%20 NATO%20Heads%20of,instability%20in%20the%20 Middle%20East

13 European Commission, "EU Assistance to Ukraine," EU solidarity with Ukraine, April 18, 2024, https://eu- solidarity-ukraine.ec.europa.eu/eu-assistance-ukraine_ en.

14 Varma, "Europe and NATO are Stepping Up on Ukraine"

7. EU-India Relations: The Way Forward After the 2024 Elections

1   "Will NDA Achieve '400 Paar'? What Poll of Opinion Poll Says," *NDTV*, April 17, 2024, https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/lok-sabha-election-poll-of-opinion-polls-nda-to-outdo-itself-but-will-it-go-400-paar-poll-of-opinion-polls-shows-5461665.

2   "What the Poll Says," *Politico*, April 19, 2024, https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/european-parliament-election/.

3   "BJP Manifesto", Bharatiya Janata Party, 2024, https://www.bjp.org/bjp-manifesto-2024.

4   "Management of Indo-China Border," Ministry of Home Affairs India, May 5, 2017, https://www.mha.gov.in/sites/default/files/INDO%20CHINA_05052017.pdf.

5   Trade in volume between the EU and India has grown in 2021-22 (29.43%) and 2022-23 (13.45%) to reach USD 132 billion in 2022-23, surpassing the U.S. (USD 128 billion) and making the EU India's largest trading partner. See: "Foreign Trade (Europe)", Ministry of Commerce and Industry India, https://commerce.gov.in/about-us/divisions/foreign-trade-territorial-division/foreign-trade-europe/

6   "European Union, Trade in Goods with India", European Commission - DG Trade, European Union, https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/isdb_results/factsheets/country/details_india_en.pdf.

7   "India is Non-Western, not Anti-West: EAM Jaishankar," *The Economic Times*, January 3, 2024, https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/india/india-is-non-western-not-anti-west-eam-jaishankar/articleshow/106524570.cms?from=mdr.

8   "EU-India Connectivity Partnership," Council of the European Union, May 2021, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/49522/eu-india_connectivity-factsheet_2021-05-final.pdf.

9   European Commission, European Union, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_4380, 2023

10   "Minerals Security Partnership," US Department of State, https://www.state.gov/minerals-security-partnership/.

11   Kanti Bajpai, "Dissonant EU-India Worldviews: Is Cooperation Possible?," in *EU-India Relations: Gaining Strategic Traction?*, ed. Amaia Sanchez-Cacicedo (Chaillot Paper 181, Paris : EUISS, 2024), https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/eu-india-relations.

12   Sanchez-Cacicedo, *EU-India Relations: Gaining Strategic Traction?*

13   "BJP Manifesto", Bharatiya Janata Party, 2024

14   Rohan Mukherjee. "Norms in Flux: EU-India Relations on the Global Stage," in Sanchez-Cacicedo, *EU-India Relations: Gaining Strategic Traction?*

8. EU-China Relations After the Elections: Some Light at the End of the Tunnel?

1   European Commission, "EU-China – A Strategic Outlook," 2019, https://commission.europa.eu/publications/eu-china-strategic-outlook-commission-and-hrvp-contribution-european-council-21-22-march-2019_en

2   European Commission, "EU-China Geographical Indications Agreement Factsheet," 2021, https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-china-agreement-protecting-geographical-indications-enters-force-2021-03-01_en

3   Josep Borrell, "EU-China Summit" (speech, EP plenary, Strasbourg, 6 April 2022), https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-china-summit-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-ep-plenary_en

4   European Chamber of Commerce in China, "European Business in China Position Paper 2023/2024," 2023, https://www.europeanchamber.com.cn/en/publications-position-paper

5   European Chamber of Commerce in China, "European Business in China Position Paper 2023/2024"

6   Alicia García-Herrero, "What is Behind China's Dual Circulation Strategy," *China Leadership Monitor*, Issue 69 (Fall 2021).

7   China Chamber of Commerce to the EU, *CCCEU Report on the Development of Chinese Enterprises in the EU 2023/2024: Building Trust, Boosting Prosperity,* 2023, http://en.ccceu.eu/flagshipreports.html

8   Valdis Dombrovskis, "The Need for a Coherent Strategy for EU-China Relations" (speech, European Parliament Plenary Debate, Brussels, April 18, 2023), https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_23_2345

9   Eurostat, "EU Trade in Goods with China: Less Deficit in 2023," https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/w/ddn-20240304-2

10   Council of the European Union, "EU-China Summit, 7 December 2023," 2023, https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2023/12/07/

11   Pierre Emmanuel Ngendakumana, "China to Allow Visa-Free Entry to Citizens from 5 EU Countries," *Politico,* November 24, 2023, https://www.politico.eu/article/china-relaxes-visa-requirements-citizens-france-germany-italy-netherlands-spain/

12   H.E. Wang Yi, "Self-Confidence and Self-Reliance, Openness and Inclusiveness, Fairness and Justice, and Win-Win Cooperation" (Address at the Symposium on the International Situation and China's Foreign Relations, Beijing, January 9, 2024), https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/202401/t20240110_11221162.html

13   Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202204/t20220401_10663276.html

14   Ben Bland, "Europe Needs an Endgame for its China Policy," *Politico,* March 19, 2024, https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-needs-an-endgame-for-its-china-policy/

15   European People's Party, "EPP 2024 Manifesto: Our Europe, a Safe and Good Home for the People," 2024, https://www.epp.eu/files/uploads/2024/03/Manifesto_2024.pdf

16   Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), "Your Europe, Your Freedom: Delivering Change for You," 2024, https://www.aldeparty.eu/the_manifesto

17   Party of European Socialists, "PES Manifesto for the 2024 European Elections: The Europe We Want: Social, Democratic, Sustainable," 2024, https://pes.eu/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/2024_PES_Manifesto_EN.pdf

18   European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Party, "2024 Party Manifesto," 2024, https://ecrparty.eu/2024/04/24/ecr-party-adopts-manifesto-for-european-elections-decides-not-to-put-forward-a-lead-candidate/

19   European Greens, "Courage to Change: European Greens Manifesto 2024," 2024, https://www.datocms-assets.com/87481/1713876249-manifesto_2024.pdf

20   European Left, "European Elections Manifesto 2024," 2024, https://www.european-left.org/2024-eu-election-manifesto/

9. Protecting European Elections from Hybrid Threats: Is the EU Prepared?

1   United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, "2024 elections are testing democracy's health", March 1, 2024, https://www.ohchr.org/en/stories/2024/03/2024-elections-are-testing-democracys-health

2   William Yang, "Lai Ching-te Wins Taiwan Presidential Election", *Voice of America*, January 13, 2024, https://www.voanews.com/a/ruling-party-candidate-wins-taiwan-s-presidential-election/7438570.html

3   European External Action Service, "2022 Report on EEAS Activities to Counter FIMI", https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/EEAS-AnnualReport-WEB_v3.4.pdf

4   World Economic Forum, "The Global Risks Report 2024. 19th Edition", January 10, 2024, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_Global_Risks_Report_2024.pdf

5   European Commission, "Special Address by President von der Leyen at the World Economic Forum", January 16, 2024, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_24_221

6   Taiwan AI Labs, "Infodemic. 2024 Taiwan Presidential Election Information Manipulation AI Observation Report", January 2024, https://ailabs.tw/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2024-Taiwan-Presidential-Election-Information-Manipulation-AI-Observation-Report-2.pdf

7   European Parliament, "Artificial Intelligence Act, P9_TA(2024)0138", https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2024-0138_EN.pdf

8   Eliza Gkritsi, "Europe's landmark AI Act passes Parliament vote", *Euractiv*, March 13, 2024, https://www.euractiv.com/section/artificial-intelligence/news/europes-landmark-ai-act-passes-parliament-vote/

9   European Parliament, "A Union that strives for more. My agenda for Europe. By candidate for President of the European Commission", 2019, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/resources/library/media/20190716RES57231/20190716RES57231.pdf

10 European Parliament, "Artificial Intelligence Act: MEPs adopt landmark law", March 13, 2024, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20240308IPR19015/artificial-intelligence-act-meps-adopt-landmark-law

11 Mared Gwyn Jones, "European Parliament 'looking into' claims members were paid to spread Russian propaganda", *Euronews*, March 29, 2024, https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/03/29/european-parliament-looking-into-claims-members-were-paid-to-spread-russian-propaganda

12 Lisa O'Carroll, "Belgium investigates alleged Russian payments to MEPs", *The Guardian*, April 12, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/12/belgium-investigates-alleged-russian-payments-to-meps#:~:text=%E2%80%9CThe%20%5BCzech%5D%20investigation%20shows,serves%20Russia%20on%20the%20battlefield.

13 European Parliament, "The strategic military situation in the Black Sea following the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia", June 11, 2015, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2015-0232_EN.html

14 For more, see: https://euvsdisinfo.eu

15 European Commission, "Action Plan against Disinformation (JOIN(2018)36 final)", December 5, 2018, https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/library/action-plan-against-disinformation

16 Mark Scott, Laura Kayali and Laurens Cerulus, "European Commission accuses China of peddling disinformation", *Politico*, June 10, 2020, https://www.politico.eu/article/european-commission-disinformation-china-coronavirus/

17 Kennet Lasoen, "Realising the EU Hybrid Toolbox: opportunities and pitfalls", *Clingendael*, December 2022, https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Policy_brief_EU_Hybrid_Toolbox.pdf

18 European External Action Service, "2nd EEAS Report on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference Threats", January 2024, https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2024/EEAS-2nd-Report%20on%20FIMI%20Threats-January-2024_0.pdf

19 Willian Hung, "Media Literacy Education: Taiwan's Key to Combating Disinformation", *Global Taiwan Institute*, March 6, 2024, https://globaltaiwan.org/2024/03/media-literacy-education-taiwans-key-to-combating-disinformation/

20 European Parliament, "European elections, 6-9 June 2024", https://elections.europa.eu/en/why-vote/
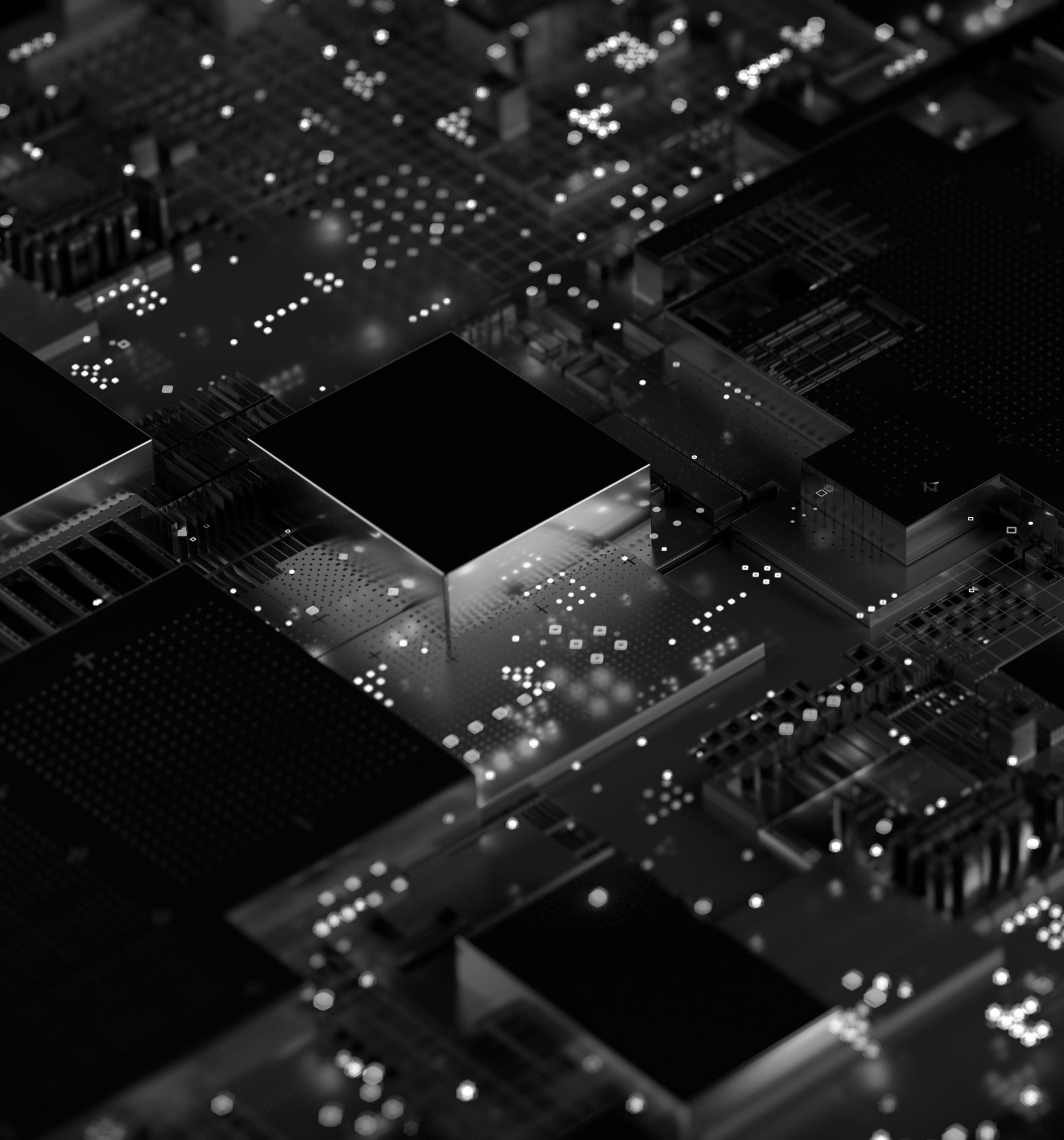
Ideas . Forums . Leadership . Impact

20, Rouse Avenue Institutional Area,
New Delhi - 110 002, INDIA
Ph. : +91-11-35332000**. Fax :** +91-11-35332005
E-mail: contactus@orfonline.org
Website: www.orfonline.org