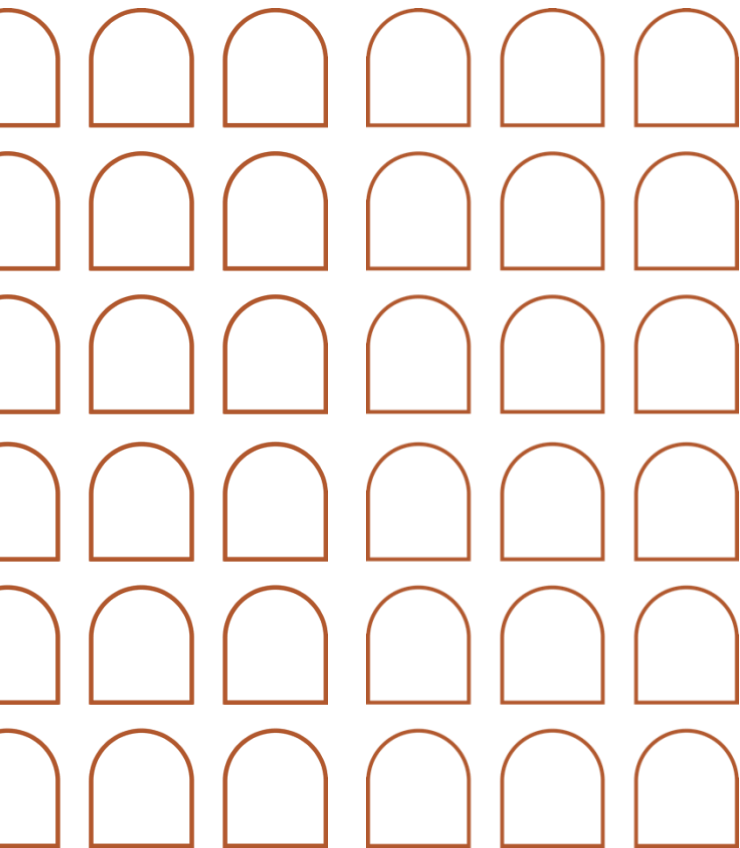


AN ENLARGED EUROPE AS A CIVILIZATION OF CONSENT

Can Europe be a laboratory for a new
planetary politics?



FOREWORD

The policy briefs in this collection are amongst the outcomes of a seminar organized by Berggruen Institute Europe in Granada, Spain, on the occasion of the European Political Community Summit (EPC) in October 2023. Where the discussions amongst the 47 governments in the EPC focused on immediate issues of international relations and geopolitics, the intention of the seminar was to address more fundamental issues of the political meaning and role of Europe in a planet in metamorphosis. Obviously, such questions cannot be approached only by people situated inside of the European Union, and so the seminar also gathered thinkers living in the Western Balkans, Ukraine, the Southern Mediterranean and China to begin to address these questions.

These policy briefs are focused on providing orientations for policy makers as they navigate Europe's changing place and role, and above all to open-up the space for political imagination and invention for the long-term where there is a risk of only being reactive and shortsighted. They reframe the potential role of Europe beyond outmoded conceptions of geopolitics in terms of *planetary* responsibility, limits and mediation, and reread concepts such as *civilization* and *consent* in the context of the European Union's fundamental polycentricity and complexity at a time of renewed discussion of enlargement. Fundamental notions of democracy, including citizenship, participation and the public good, are rethought beyond national frames and practices, to provide practical but transformative suggestions for how the European Political Community could be the crucible for a new planetary politics.

Developing a philosophy for Europe's re-foundational moment is an urgent task for the intellectual community in the coming years, and Berggruen Institute Europe, in partnership with the Florence School of Transnational Governance at the European University Institute and others, will continue to foster the planetary exchange of ideas necessary to generate it.

Fabrizio Tassinari,
Executive Director of the Florence School of Transnational Governance

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Director of European Alternatives

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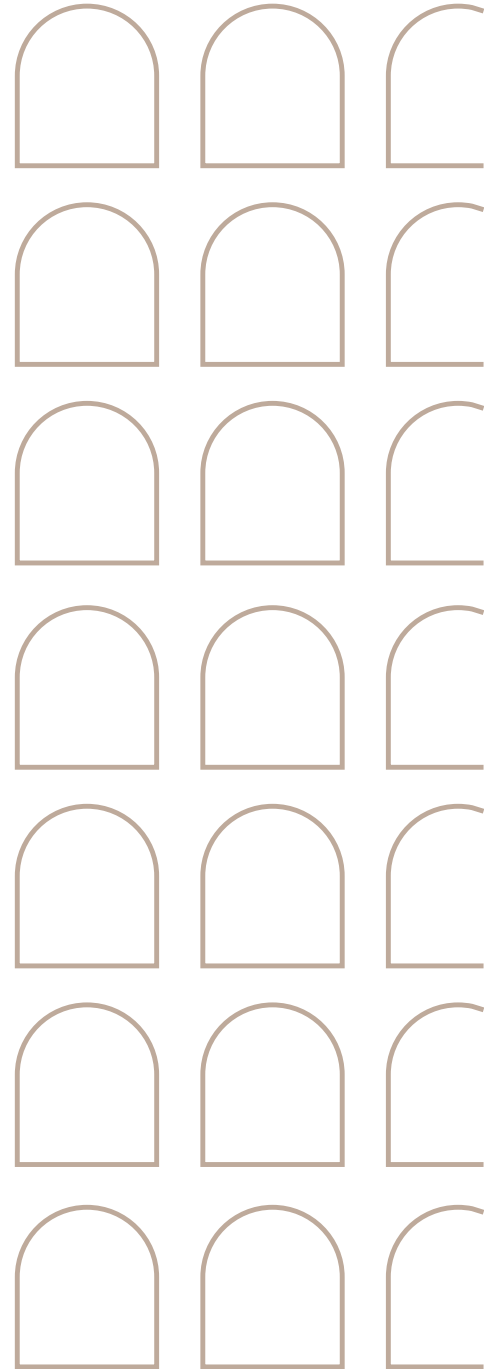
STG Policy Papers

POLICY BRIEF

BEYOND GEOPOLITICAL EUROPE

Authors:

Teona Giuashvili, Fabrizio Tassinari



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Seismic shifts, conflicts and instability have spurred a revival of the geopolitical discourse in international affairs. Russia's attack on Ukraine has exacerbated this development, raising the stakes for the EU to translate its rhetoric on 'geopolitical Europe' into action. The EU took some important steps and mobilised significant means to counter the aggression. However, it is questionable that the geopolitical paradigm, which focuses on power politics and spheres of influence, suits the EU's own identity, its cumbersome decision-making process and its lack of hard power. The EU has recognised that it needs to face new threats and challenges and that doing so requires a wider toolbox, including coercive instruments. But this does not mean endorsing a geopolitical mindset. A more strategic Europe would build on its experience and invest in its strengths, to create the conditions for dialogue and stability at the continental and global levels. Despite its current limitations, the recently established European Political Community can become a useful laboratory to test new forms of governance and a platform for the EU to affirm shared principles of co-existence in a competitive and contested world.

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This text is an outcome of the seminar 'An enlarged Europe as a civilization of consent. Can Europe be a laboratory for a new planetary politics?' organised by the Berggruen Institute Europe as a side event to the European Political Community Summit in Granada (3-5 October 2023).

Views expressed in this publication reflect the opinion of individual authors and not those of the European University Institute

1. THE RETURN OF GEOPOLITICS

From cabinet meetings to security councils, from boardrooms to teaching classes, geopolitics has made a forceful return to the language of foreign relations. In large part, this is a reaction to momentous seismic shifts – be they in Ukraine, Taiwan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Kosovo or in relation to the Israel-Hamas conflict – as much as a pondered reflection on the complexities of planetary politics. But discourse matters: it influences and often determines the way we think, frame and act, as citizens, as well as policy makers.

The geopolitical discourse underscores a specific conception and dynamic of power, one that has been enacted upon by actors such as Russia or Iran in adversarial, binary, often opportunistic and sometimes brutal ways. From a narrower remit, that understood geopolitics as the determinant of power and influence over a salient geographical space, the concept has assumed ever wider connotations. It has come to encompass more prominently demographic if not ethnological considerations about where communities and nations belong in relation to their geography; it has resumed nineteenth-century elaborations of sovereignty and empire; and it has sometimes become the shorthand for the justification of spheres of influence in the phase of global instability currently rocking international politics. Not incidentally, some of the world powers often propounding the use of geopolitics also extoll it in connection to the virtues of a multipolar world.

Europe is not immune to the return of geopolitics; in fact, it could be referred to as one of the actors that has caught up with it more significantly in recent years. At the same time, Europe is also on the receiving end of it: geopolitics was brought to Europe

and Europe found itself in the position of having to respond. The new geopolitical framing and reality are proving more complex and less propitious for the realisation of the goal of a Europe that speaks and acts effectively in world affairs.

2. RUSSIA'S AGGRESSION AND EUROPE'S GEOPOLITICAL TURN

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has lent new momentum to the idea of 'geopolitical Europe' and placed it at the center of discussions among policy makers and expert circles. The shock provoked by Russia's war against Ukraine has triggered a rapid and coordinated response by EU institutions and member states, laying the ground for Europe's newfound geopolitical confidence. Inspired by political unity and determination in the face of Russia's invasion, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell was quick to welcome "[the belated birth of a geopolitical Europe](#)".

The EU's geopolitical rhetoric, however, predates Russia's war against Ukraine. Already in 2019, at the outset of her mandate, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen set out to lead a '[geopolitical Commission](#)'. Soon after, Borrell stressed the urgency for Europe to learn "[to speak the language of power](#)." These statements, among other policy documents, reflect heightened awareness of the necessity to change the EU's approach to mounting international challenges and of its ambition to confront them.

Russia's war against Ukraine has put to the test the EU's bold new narrative, and raised stakes for the EU to translate its rhetoric into concrete actions, bringing urgency and gravity to its pledges. The war compelled the EU to break some of its long-standing

and deep-seated taboos. For one, the Union granted Ukraine the status of a candidate for accession. This move was clearly inspired by geopolitical considerations, by way of opposing Russia's aggression and recognising security interdependence between Ukraine and the rest of Europe. For another, the EU and its member states have started to provide substantial military support to Ukraine, including heavy equipment and the launch of a military assistance mission to train Ukrainian soldiers. In short, the war has demonstrated that Europeans have managed to mobilise significant resources in response to Russia's aggression. Does that make of Europe a geopolitical actor in its own right? And is the geopolitical frame suitable to think of Europe's power and of the EU's role in the world?

Ubiquitous references to geopolitical Europe call for closer scrutiny of what 'geopolitics' is, of what the EU means by using the 'geopolitical' qualification, and of whether it is actually meaningful, and suitable, to apply this concept to the EU. At its core, geopolitics is the discipline that connects geography and power. It assesses how geography – territory, borders, natural resources, transport routes – affects international relations, and how state powers use geographic factors in their mutual competition, whether through peaceful means or through force. This original definition has been expanded in the public debate to become a synonym of power politics – a zero-sum approach to international relations where major powers compete over territory and communities, and concerns over survival prevail over all others.

This is, however, not the way in which Europe, which is here for simplicity used interchangeably with the EU, its political, economic elites and member states, appear to understand geopolitics. In this narrative,

geopolitics seems broadly referring to the need to give more space to strategic considerations in shaping what are at its core technocratic policies. The choice of wording '[geopolitical awakening](#)' in official discourses and documents is reminiscent of the need for Europe to adjust to a new context. In the words of Borrell: "[We Europeans must adjust our mental maps to deal with the world as it is, not as we hoped it would be](#)".

According to this narrative, Europe would seek to [shape events rather than be merely driven by them](#), as demonstrated by emergencies from the euro crisis to the migration crisis, from Brexit to the Covid and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This call was accompanied by the recognition of the need for Europe to complement its capacity of attraction with instruments of coercion in order to maximise its influence. The return of large scale war in Europe required the EU and its members to take more responsibility for their own security. As a result, geopolitical Europe effectively amounts to a recognition of the surge of power competition, and of coercive power, in international affairs, and of the need for the EU to cope with that. Yet, most 'geopolitical' statements by EU leaders are accompanied by declarations of commitment to cooperation and multilateralism, which evoke a more value-driven agenda. The result appears confusing, when not misleading. Europe was dragged to the terrain of power politics and is compelled to stay in it, but it does not seem to be equipped or adamant to pursue it: a cognitive dissonance of sorts, whose pitfalls appear to be dire.

The shortcomings of this approach are multiple. Hans Kundnani argues that [the nature of Europe's geopolitical actorness is contested, its origins are problematic and its meanings confusing](#). In addition to the conceptual imperfections, the narrative of a

geopolitical Europe cannot dissimulate a number of [discrepancies between the EU's ambitions and its actions](#), its ends and means, as stressed by Richard Youngs. Transforming the EU into a geopolitical actor would require departing from its self-conception as a normative power. Since its beginnings, the European Union has not only distanced itself from power politics, but also asserted this feature as one of its main strengths – a normative power equipped with civilian and regulatory means to shape a rules-based international order. The geopolitical framing, with its adversarial and binary underpinnings, seem ill-suited to further this narrative.

On a political level, the affirmation of the newly proclaimed geopolitical role would require unity and determination on the part of the EU member states. Narrowing their differences and moving towards a common strategic culture and a converging worldview would be essential prerequisites of a geopolitical Europe. The EU should acquire the necessary instruments and pool together its resources, including defence capabilities, to an extent that EU member states have so far rejected. The recent conflict in Nagorno Karabakh and the outbreak of violence in Northern Kosovo have once again proved how far the EU is from playing a decisive role to prevent, manage or settle security crises in Europe itself. The new, acute phase of the Israel-Hamas conflict has also exposed divisions among EU member states and within EU institutions, while the influence of Europeans on the evolution of this conflict is limited.

3. BEYOND GEOPOLITICS: A DIFFERENT WAY FORWARD FOR STRATEGIC EUROPE

If Europe is to get out of the geopolitical corner it painted itself in, something radical needs to happen in its conception and

practice of power. Looking back at the EU's experience in Eastern Europe before Russia's aggression against Ukraine can offer important lessons for the future. In the run-up to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, short-term economic interests compounded energy dependencies with revisionist Russia. Self-imposed red lines on its own engagement with Eastern Europe did not prevent Russia's geopolitical ambitions either. The past two decades bear witness to the fact that transformative foreign policy through enlargement, while unique and valuable, has not been an adequate answer to the immediate security challenges confronting the continent. Democracy-building in Ukraine and other Eastern European countries remains imperative, but insufficient in the face of Russia's neo-imperial instincts. Today few would question that Europe should become more resilient, strategically-minded and equipped with the necessary capabilities and resources to ensure its security and to extend it to the continent.

This finding does not mean, however, that the EU should endorse a geopolitical mindset or engage in power politics. Nor does it compel the EU to neglect its normative *raison d'être* and to compromise its identity, quite the opposite. Regaining strategic thinking and acting accordingly can and should derive from the EU's own experience. The EU can draw lessons from its prior reliance on civilian instruments such as far-reaching association agreements with close partners and maximise the added value of its transformative approach by making it part of a wider strategic toolkit and bringing it in line with its broader agenda. Achieving that would also enhance the credibility and the legitimacy of the EU in shaping broader frameworks for dialogue and cooperation on shared challenges on the global stage. Peaceful and consent-based relations on the continent are an

absolute prerequisite for spreading a vision of peace and stability worldwide.

From this standpoint, a strategic definition of Europe must cover a broader scope than that of the EU and encompass the entire continent, including the countries that are not members of the Union and NATO. In this context, the creation of the European Political Community (EPC) is an important addition to Europe's governance architecture to emancipate the continent from the imprint of a troubled and violent history and, as France's President Macron put it, "[build lasting peace in Europe.](#)" The EPC came into existence in September 2022 as part of Europe's political response to Russia's war against Ukraine. Its principal value has been symbolic; it has paraded a strong message of European unity in condemning the aggressor and supporting the victim. Its success has been measured by the attendance of up to 50 European leaders and the number of bilateral exchanges held on the margins. Flexibility, as well as the informal and non-hierarchical nature of the framework, have been presented as the main strengths of the EPC. All the European countries attending the summits participate on an equal footing, irrespective of their membership of the EU and NATO.

What the powerful images of several heads of states and governments gathering together cannot conceal, however, is their differences in terms of democratic credentials, security concerns and foreign policy priorities. Not all of them share the EU's worldview nor align with its positions, such as concerning the adoption of sanctions against Russia. This reality, however, points to the potential role that the EPC can play to enhance strategic convergence around common agendas by encouraging socialisation, reinforcing the practice of consultation and dialogue and helping shape a common European

strategic culture. Despite the recent failure of European crisis diplomacy in preventing renewed conflict over Nagorno Karabakh, the EPC provides a potentially useful and neutral venue for political crisis management given its wide membership.

On a broader level, European leaders should be more vocal in stressing that in the current international juncture of competition and confrontation, universal principles of consent, human dignity, mutual recognition in international relations do not necessarily require a geopolitical approach. Forums like the EPC can provide a platform to foster Europe's role in promoting these principles. Defiance in the face of military aggression and relevance in the face of institutional inertia represent the preconditions to play this role. Europe's capacity should include an ability to do things like mediating conflicts, protecting critical infrastructure, manage migration in a more humane manner, expand digital connectivity as a way to reimagine European citizenship. Europeans must do so mindful of the moral bias and double-standards that have ever so often tainted their posturing. They should be clearer, more transparent, and when necessary tougher and even nastier on what Europe cannot deliver. Whether Europe is geopolitical or not is beside the point, which is ultimately to plant and nurture the kernel of Europe's planetary aspirations.

The Florence School of Transnational Governance (STG) delivers teaching and high-level training in the methods, knowledge, skills and practice of governance beyond the State. Based within the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, the School brings the worlds of academia and policy-making together in an effort to navigate a context, both inside and outside Europe, where policy-making increasingly transcends national borders.

The School offers Executive Training Seminars for experienced professionals and a Policy Leaders Fellowship for early- and mid-career innovators. The School also hosts expert Policy Dialogues and distinguished lectures from transnational leaders (to include the STG's Leaders Beyond the State series which recorded the experiences of former European Institution presidents, and the Giorgio La Pira Lecture series which focuses on building bridges between Africa and Europe). In September 2020, the School launched its Master-of-Arts in Transnational Governance (MTnG), which will educate and train a new breed of policy leader able to navigate the unprecedented issues our world will face during the next decade and beyond.

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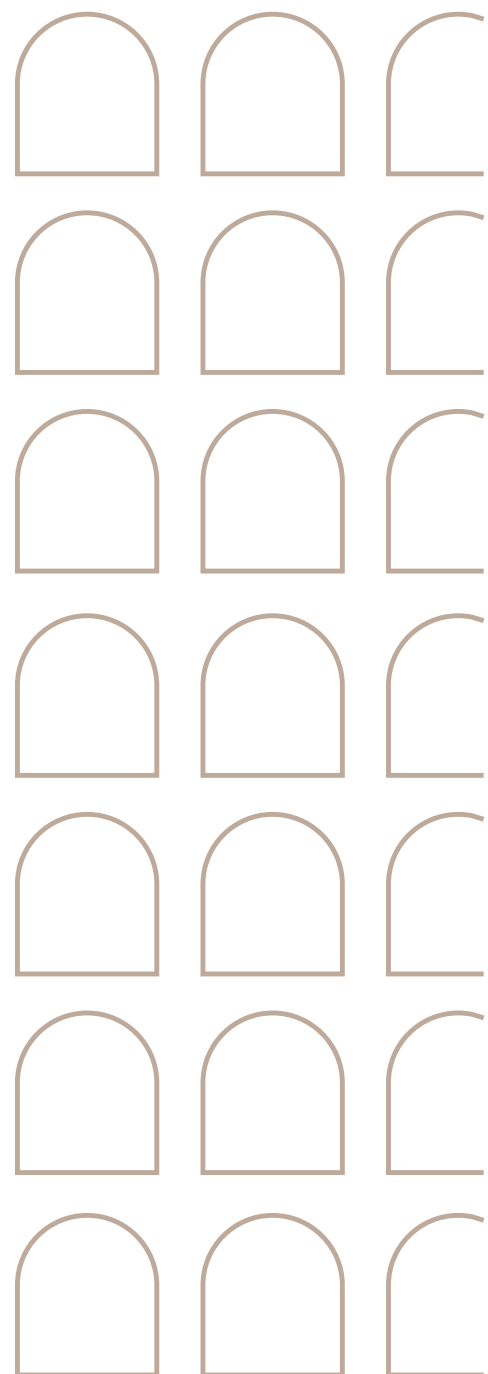
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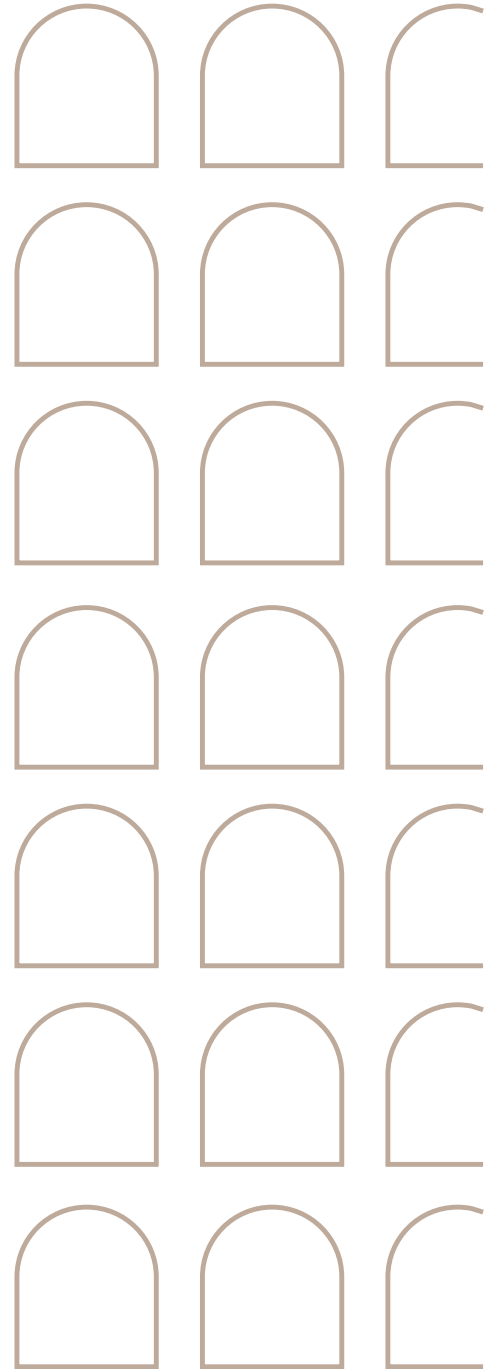
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STG Policy Papers

POLICY BRIEF

EUROPE AS A CONSENT CONSTRUCTION

Author:
Daniel Innerarity



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

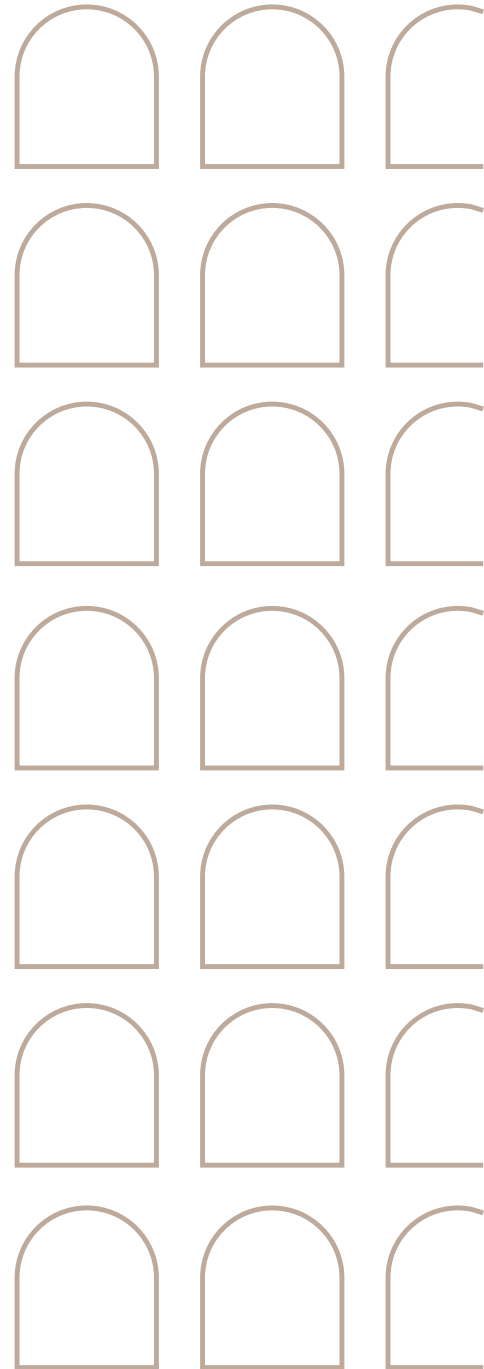
The European Union is the most polyarchical political institution in the world. This complex constitutional arrangement best explains both its the unique values and difficulties. In order to properly understand the European Union and its unique model of legitimacy, accountability and democracy, it is necessary to leave the viewpoint of the nation-state, and adopt a multiple and innovative viewpoint, which encompasses heterogenous interests, focusses on shared power, shared limitation and seeks to avoid hegemonies. With this understanding of Europe as a consent construction, it is possible to best propose policies which would advance democracy without undermining or undoing the transnational innovation in politics the EU represents.

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This text is an outcome of the seminar 'An enlarged Europe as a civilization of consent. Can Europe be a laboratory for a new planetary politics?' organised by the Berggruen Institute Europe as a side event to the European Political Community Summit in Granada (3-5 October 2023).

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1. INTRODUCTION

The more advanced a system and the more democratic its political culture, the more indeterminate its ultimate definition of power, supremacy, identification of responsibility, the centrality that makes everything intelligible, the originating source of authority, or whatever we want to call it. This has been the motive for multiple discussions that have articulated the dispute over supranational institutions' supremacy, constitutional pluralism or control of democraticity. The European Union (EU) is the *polity* in which this ambivalence is best revealed because it is the most polyarchical political institution in the world.

This idea of the EU as a polyarchy best summarizes, in my opinion, its values and its limitations as a model of complex government, where unity and diversity are, with corresponding difficulty, combined. If this were not the case, if the European project had been attempted as a plan for homogeneity and centralization, the Union would not have been able to achieve greater integration, incorporating in a common project societies that are as diverse as their interests or democratic trajectories, that act united without being one (Nicolaidis 2013, 351); but this absence of a hierarchical centre also explains many of its setbacks, the exasperating possibilities of veto and slowdowns, in short, the difficulties of any process of integration that simultaneously attempts to decide together and to respect the pluricentrality of the political space.

2. A POLITICAL ENTITY WITHOUT A CENTRE

From the point of view of its political ontology, the EU is a political entity without a centre, a "political community with different levels of aggregation" (Schmitter,

1996). European institutions are strongly interconnected but lack a clear hierarchical order. The system combines supranational and intergovernmental principles in a multilevel and pluralist structure, more consensual and cooperative than antagonistic and hierarchical. There is not an "Archimedean point" from which all legal and political authority is deployed (Schütze 2012, 211). The EU presents a defiant change of paradigm in the face of legal monism and the hierarchical logic that stems from the state-centric tradition. European practices of governance are "heterarchical"; authority is not centralized or decentralized but shared (Neyer 2003, 689). That is the reason for the profusion of expressions like "governance without government" (Rosenau, Czempiel, Zürn), "law beyond the state" (Volcanseck, Neyer), or "constitutionalization of international politics" (Stone) to attempt to identify a model of governance that relativizes the monopoly of the representation of own's own interests in the context of complex multilevel structures within transnational networks that overlap without forming hierarchical structures that are similar to state structures.

This reality is at the heart of the complaints about such apparently diverse matters as the EU's lack of intelligibility and transparency, difficult accountability or weak leadership. In general, politics in shared systems, with separation of powers, has little transparency, poor decision-making capacity and uncertain answerability. A plurality of decision-making centres tends to lead to disperse public attention. We must also consider "the problem of many hands" (Thompson 2004, 11-32) and the disadvantages that this tends to entail when it comes to responsibility.

3. DEMOCRATIC SUCCESSES OF AN AMBIGUOUS CONSTRUCTION

Behind the deficits mentioned in the previous section, there are without a doubt shortcomings that should be corrected but also attributes that, from a certain point of view, could even be considered democratic successes. It is true that the lack of transparency of any form of government that responds to political interdependence that the Germans call *'Politikverflechtung'* increases the impossibility of holding any single person or party responsible for a positive or negative performance (Höreth 1998, 17). However, perhaps we are judging this question from the matrix of the nation state when we should, instead, take advantage of this circumstance to consider a more complex and less personal idea of responsibility, ways of making shared power intelligible and accountable. Let us also consider the positive side of complexity, which is a state of affairs that is more republican than democratic, to the extent that it impedes domination since it makes it difficult, for example, to form permanent hegemonic coalitions, and, especially, it is a system that is "anti-unilateralist" (Fabbrini 2007, 197). "The dispersion of governance across multiple jurisdictions is both more efficient than, and normatively superior to, central state monopoly" among other things because "it can better reflect the heterogeneity of preferences among citizens" (Marks / Hooghe 2004, 16).

The lack of centrality and the multiplicity of levels in the EU match the diffuse leadership, scant polarization and not very well-understood greater collegiality. There are those who interpret this as a political deficit, but it can also be seen as an advanced stage in the evolution of politics, when the personalization of sovereign power has been left behind. "The problem is not so much that it is impossible to provide a clear picture of European types of

policy-making, it is rather that it is impossible to trace those processes to a set of identifiable authors and thus to deal with the intelligibility problem whose democratic figure is the accountability problem" (Leca). Leadership is lacking not so much (or not only) because of the personality of European leaders, but because the current set of institutions, rules and conventions do not allow for such a role. In this sense, Europe is a good example of this "empty place" that, according to Claude Lefort, defines the locus of power in democratic societies, a space still too monarchically occupied today, even if it is only because of the nostalgia for hierarchies, personalized leadership, foundational moments, retained or recuperated sovereignties and aspirations to assure *Kompetenz-Kompetenz*, in other words, the ability of a tribunal to rule on the question of whether it has jurisdiction. In the EU, there is no central power that must be conquered in a competition between political parties, and policies are not determined by a majoritarian government, but by negotiations between the Council, Parliament and the Commission. In this context, the language of state democratic politics—government and opposition, competition among parties, responsibility to voters—would be completely unintelligible (Majone 2009, 33).

4. CONSTITUTIONAL PLURALISM AND THE INSTITUTIONAL EQUILIBRIUM OF THE EU

Republican-inspired constitutional pluralism can help us understand the institutional equilibrium of the EU, the coexistence of communitarian law and state constitutions and international law in a non-hierarchical fashion (Zetterquist). We could say that it is better to replace constitutional metaphysics with pragmatic metaphysics. Constitutional practice can be more truthful than the traditional hierarchical model. Some

constitutional pluralists take this idea to the point of believing that the question of an ultimate constitutional authority remains open in EU law (Kumm 2005; Maduro 2003 and 2012). From this point of view, the “heterarchy”—understood as the network of elements in which each one maintains the same horizontal position of power and authority—is considered superior to the hierarchy as a normative ideal when there are competing constitutional claims. Against the classic idea of “supremacy”, we must now think about the relationship between legal systems in a mode that is pluralist, rather than monist, interactive rather than hierarchical (MacCormick 1995, 265), which means moving toward a more modest and constrained conception of primacy, as was suggested, for example, by the Spanish constitutional court in its ruling against the Constitutional Treaty (DTC 1/2004).

There is a long discussion about how communitarian law’s principle of supremacy should be understood or, conversely, how limits to the state delegation of sovereignty should be ensured. For some people, this means that “there is no nucleus of sovereignty that Member States can invoke, as such, against the Community” (Lenaerts 1990, 220), which would always keep an argument of subordination or a *Kompetenz-Kompetenz* in reserve. In recent years, this conditioning has become more settled, which we can see clearly, in the first place, in certain rulings of the states’ constitutional courts (especially in the case of Germany). It is also true that this holding back would not in any case be rigid, but a *resistance norm* that would function as a soft limit (Young 2000, 1594). It is not certain that the constitutional courts have adopted a position contrary to the idea of the primacy of communitarian law. Generally, they have adopted an intermediary position, trying to afford the best comprehension of rival principles that are in play (Kumm).

The other example of national conditioning of European politics is the introduction of national parliaments into European governance with the Treaty of Lisbon. We should not interpret this aspiration as the intent to return to a Europe controlled by the states; it is better to understand it as the rejection of the conception of “an autonomous and hierarchical legal order”, but not as a repositioning of a hierarchical relation of another kind (Maduro 1998, 8). As can be verified, the question of ultimate sovereignty is not presentable in the EU in its traditional format, with hierarchical security, but through a series of reservations that make it “weak” or contested, in other words, not very sovereign.

Therefore, from the perspective of constitutional pluralism, communitarian primacy does not establish a type of supranational sovereignty, but only regulates the interaction between the levels that constitute the institutional framework of the European Union. In any case, we can say that either the EU has not found a solution to the question about who has the competence to determine to whom competence corresponds (Schilling; Weiler / Haltern) or else it has stopped considering it relevant. This would be its principal innovation: the possibility of constituting a political community by setting this question aside.

5. A POLITICAL CULTURE OF LIMITATION

Let us examine the issue anew, from a practical perspective. The EU’s peculiar structure—its complex rounds of decision making and implementation—is what makes the power appear weak and indecisive. Without a doubt, there are many aspects of it that can be improved, but we cannot lose sight of the fact that when the formal instruments of power are weak, ensuring agreement is an essential part of their

decision making. It may be that we are judging the political quality of the European Union based on categories that come from the nation state, and we classify its peculiar form of governance as weak because we are too accustomed to perceiving any example of shared or semi-sovereign decision making in that way. Good proof of this is the fact that the emphasis on the state monopoly of violence underestimates the effectiveness of noncoercive procedures of governance (Mitchell; Zürn).

In complex Europe, we can find a manifestation of this “decentring of democracies” with which Pierre Rosanvallon indicates the pluralization of ancient popular will—personified in the king or represented in parliament, ritualized in the moment of elections—toward a deconcentration of sovereignty that is diversified in moments, instances, levels and functions. “A reasonably effective democracy is characterized by a degree of ambiguous and unstable centralization, the norm is fluctuation. Depending on the political entity, the issue and time [...], the intricate interaction between actors tends to generate oscillations between the concentration of power in the centre and its repositioning in the individual components of the system” (Donahue / Pollack, 117). That is why the consolidation of European democracy should not be considered with the *pathos* from which nation states emerged, which visualized the sovereign people without divisions; our objective would focus more on the less heroic task of guaranteeing the level of complexity and the political culture of limitation, mutualization and cooperation between diverse levels and actors.

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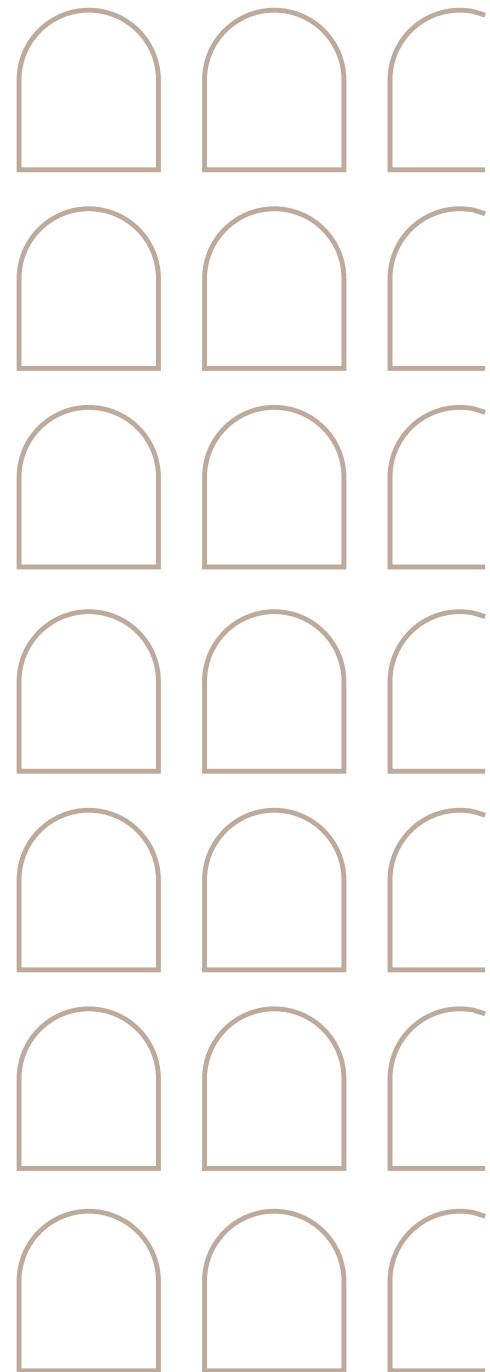
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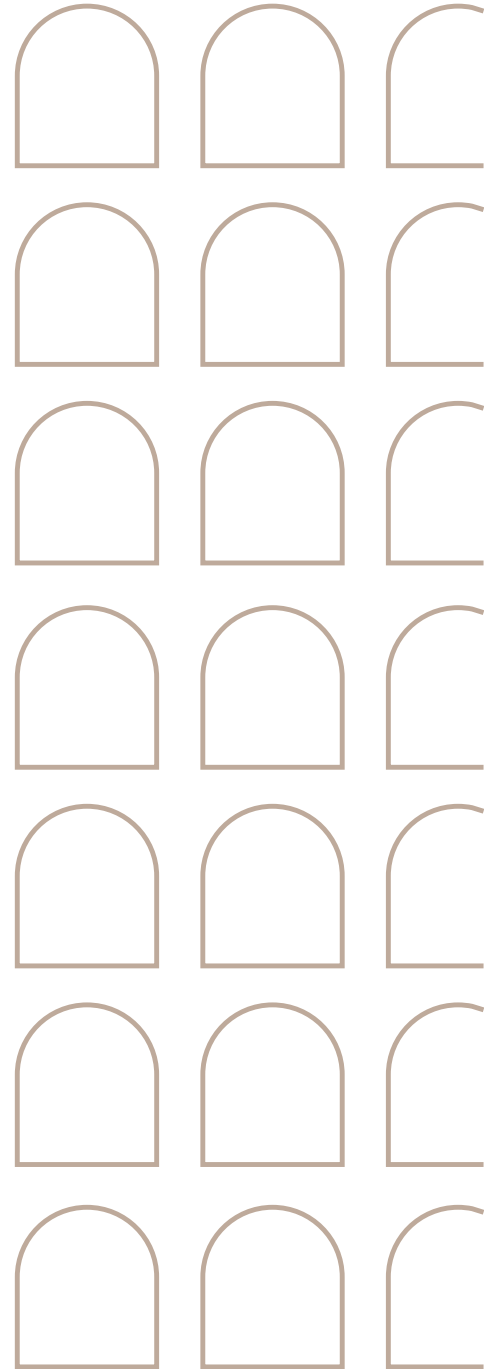
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STG Policy Papers

POLICY BRIEF

**AT (EN)LARGE: CAPTURING THE
VOICE OF CITIZENS THROUGH
CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES ON THE
EU LEVEL**

Author:
Luka Glušac



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief discusses citizens' assemblies (CA) as a way of deepening and improving public engagement in political decision-making at the EU level. While commending the EU for using citizens' assemblies in an unparalleled way during the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE), it demonstrates that the first CAs held on the EU level after CoFoE indicate that the EU institutions are still keen to keep strong control over the process and results of citizens' assemblies. The brief argues the EU needs time to develop more confidence and a better understanding of the potential of CAs to further democratise EU institutions and their decision-making process. Albeit they are no panacea for all the intricate problems of contemporary polity, CAs qualify among the best candidates to help increase the trust in and legitimacy of strategic decisions on the EU level. This policy brief recommends having CAs on EU enlargement with citizens from both current member states and candidate countries. Enlargement is a great candidate for citizens' assemblies due to its rich deliberative potential, derived from conflicting understandings and arguments of whether, how and when should the EU accept new members. Having citizens' assemblies on enlargement would be an exemplary showcase of the EU's commitment to inclusive, participatory, and deliberative democracy, and a strong statement of EU institutions' willingness to fully consider the opinion of their constituencies.

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Note from the author: Luka Glušac, Assistant Director and Research Fellow, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, University of Belgrade. Email: luka.glusac@ifdt.bg.ac.rs. I thank Irena Fiket for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this brief. All remaining errors are my own.

This text from guest author Luka Glušac is an outcome of the seminar 'An enlarged Europe as a civilization of consent. Can Europe be a laboratory for a new planetary politics?' organised by the Berggruen Institute Europe as a side event to the European Political Community Summit in Granada (3-5 October 2023).

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the Second World War, [there has not been a single decade](#) without a debate on the crisis of (the legitimacy) of democracy. Yet, this does not relieve the feeling that something is not right. This particularly refers to the problems of democratic efficiency and the lack of opportunities for citizens' participation and deliberation.

One of the ways to deal with the sense of crisis of democracy was the introduction of democratic innovations – that is, institutions and practices that are expected to deepen and improve public engagement in political decision-making. A widely used device of democratic innovations is deliberative mini-publics or citizens' assemblies (also known as citizens juries, deliberative polls, citizens assemblies, town meetings etc.). Citizens' assemblies (CA) are here defined as forums in which a sample of (lay) citizens, selected from the population affected by some public issue, discuss that specific issue.

[Nielsen and Sørensen](#) divide the story of the evolving relationship between the crisis of democracy and CAs roughly into four parts. First, the 1960–1970s, when CAs were motivated by a perceived democratic deficit originating from state centralisation and resulting in alienation; second, the 1980s, when CA inventions were motivated by societal conflicts over structural change; third, the 1990s, when CA formats were invented to address the inability of public organisations to handle complex challenges; and fourth, the 2000–2010s, during which time CAs were motivated by the inability of democratic institutions to govern efficiently and legitimately. We may say that we are currently in the fifth phase, which should ideally lead to the institutionalisation of CAs, on different governance levels.

As a forum of inclusive deliberation, CAs aim to improve the epistemic and moral qualities of public decisions as well as enhance their legitimacy. CAs rely on three core principles - [deliberation, inclusion and public influence](#), insofar as their design is based on inclusiveness, exposure to different opinions, reasoned opinion expression and the making of a collective decision, but it can vary from one CA to another. However, as argued by [Fiket](#), they all share some common basic features, aimed at ensuring the achievement of the ideals of deliberative democracy through moderated small group discussion, facilitated interactions with politicians and experts and formulation of policy proposals.

CAs have been organised for a variety of purposes, including civic education, consulting policymakers and, in an increasing number of cases, making policy decisions, particularly on the regional level, as in Tuscany (Italy) or Ostbelgien (Belgium). Inclusive and high-quality citizen deliberation has also been called for on the most important political decisions, such as constitutional issues, basic human rights, and issues with long-term effects.

The effects of CAs vary considerably. [Setälä](#) suggests shifting or expanding the scope of how mini-public (CAs) formats are evaluated: from the direct and measurable effects of individual experiments to the broader functional effects that putting different mini-public formats in the toolbox of decision-makers and institutions has on the democratic system. In other words, we should allow for sufficient time and the CA volume to assess their ultimate impact: (1) in policy terms; (2) influence on the overall political system; and (3) the effect on citizens and their competencies, as well as the level of interest for political engagement.

What is now already undisputed is that CAs could be used as trusted sources of information for voters. When accessible to the general public, reasoning processes in CAs could help citizens understand arguments for and against different policy alternatives and critically reflect on them. This helps those who didn't participate in CAs to make better-informed decisions and [to identify themselves more easily as a constituency](#) that could generate legitimate political authority.

The level of democratisation, local context and the very design of CAs are all recognised as important factors for their ultimate success. CAs can be easily misused and manipulated, thus calling for very careful timing, organisation and methodology. For example, it is easily imagined that policymakers may organise CAs to strengthen their position in the eyes of the public or to advance and legitimise policies they want to pursue. At the same time, they can also attempt to delegitimise and silence critical voices from the civil society, by using CAs as 'token' consultations. These factors come into play irrespective of the governance level which CAs seek to influence. While CAs have so far primarily been used at local and national levels, a rather unique attempt from a global perspective is their utilisation on a supranational level - in the European Union.

2. EUROPEAN UNION LEVEL CITIZENS ASSEMBLIES

Since 2005, the EU has continuously promoted various types of CAs. [The first EU initiatives](#) that took the form of CAs were two Citizens Conferences organised within the 6th Framework Programs (FP) financed by the European Commission. The most recent example, and what could be a potential game-changer, is the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE). The

Conference, which ran from April 2021 to May 2022, has opened a window of opportunity by offering an experiment with its four Citizens' Panels that each brought together 200 people selected by lottery from across 27 member states to deliberate in 24 languages for around six days.

Although many have hoped that CoFoE would lead to treaty change and institutional reforms, these hopes were quickly disappointed, and replaced by more modest expectations. The most prominent result of CoFoE has been introducing the citizens' assembly, as a new form of (deliberative) participation in the EU, which might be permanently institutionalised. The explicit hope is that the CoFoE could develop prefigurative power such that this format of including citizens in policy-making becomes [a permanent part of the EU political system](#). Indeed, a proposal to regularly hold citizens' assemblies made it into the [final report](#) of the Conference on the Future of Europe.

Quickly, [several models](#) for institutionalising citizens' assemblies emerged, as a form of 'next level citizen participation in the EU'. The European Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) commissioned [a study](#) outlining how the European Union could use citizens' assemblies to meet 'mounting citizens' expectations for greater participation in EU decision-making'. According to this model, which takes inspiration from the CoFoE, there would be two types of EU citizens' assemblies: a permanent Citizens' Chamber and temporary Citizens' Panels, both composed of randomly selected EU citizens. The task of the Citizens' Chamber would be to deliberate on which topics Citizens' Panels should be set up (climate change, electoral reforms etc.), which would then work on concrete ideas for new EU policies. This process could be activated in both a bottom-up and top-down way – that is,

initiatives could be brought to the Citizens' Chamber by ordinary citizens, for example through petitions, and by the main EU institutions. [The decision](#) on whether to set up citizens' assemblies and how to implement their recommendations would be left to the Commission, EP, and Council. Similar ideas for a 'European Citizens Assembly' (ECA) have been suggested by Citizens Take Over Europe ([2022](#)), and most recently by Berg and others ([2023](#)).

Initiated and designed in this way, a permanent citizens' assembly would command a pro tanto legitimacy that would give it a powerful voice difficult to dismiss by the European Union's regular powers, argues [Patberg](#). Can we expect bottom-up models in practice? Many are pessimistic, claiming that we should expect EU institutions to strive for a model of citizens' assemblies that do not seriously challenge their position. Anticipating CoFoE, [De Búrca](#) argued that there is every reason to doubt the willingness of EU institutions and of member state governments to establish a citizens' assembly intended to have real influence.

In line with this, the Commission's communication on how it will follow up on the CoFoE's final proposals – particularly on the call for permanent citizens' assemblies – points in the direction of ad hoc mini-publics to be convened by the Commission at its convenience and on [carefully pre-selected topics](#). [The Commission](#) stated that it will 'enable Citizens' Panels to deliberate and make recommendations ahead of certain key proposals'. [The Commission Work Programme 2023](#) specified that the 'new generation of citizens' panels will deliberate on ...food waste, learning mobility and virtual worlds'. As expected, all three CAs concluded in 2023 without any notable public response. [Patberg](#) argues that if citizens' assemblies are employed in this way – that is, as forums for the deliberation

of feel-good topics predetermined by the Commission, then they serve as a façade of participation.

Such warning is shared by [other scholars](#) who perceive purely consultative CAs as types of 'focus groups' rather than legitimate forums of collective will-formation, where it often [remains obscure](#) as to how, exactly, their advice is taken into account. Although well-based, these views overlook the broader benefits of CAs, even if implemented in this way. [Bohman](#) advanced the argument that CAs at the EU level, can serve to extend citizens' exercise of communicative freedom in transnational public spheres to more formal settings; these, even if they have been established by regular political institutions, cannot be fully controlled by them. He posits that by interacting with deliberative institutions at various levels, members of CAs also interact with each other, thereby beginning a process of deepening democracy over which the delegating institution has no direct control. As empowered members of various polities and of the EU itself, [such participants](#) can make claims to other publics and to other institutions as they exercise their political rights as members of the European polity. Such pressure has the potential to challenge and contest EU institutions and to push for their democratisation. In other words, CAs could strengthen the capacity of citizens to initiate deliberation about common affairs, including the design of the EU polity. The potential of CAs to generate democratic legitimacy [rests on the propensity of the citizens](#) included in the CA to recognise themselves as members of the polity and to identify as a constituency that is (self)empowered to authorise and control government.

3. TOWARDS CITIZENS' ASSEMBLIES ON ENLARGEMENT

To continue to grow, the EU has to continue to enlarge. This is the bottom line of the supporters of the EU enlargement. It is now clear the EU needs to come up with a comprehensive set of legal, political, and economic set of measures to prepare for enlargement.

With Ukraine and Moldova being granted the status of EU candidate countries, a new incentive for enlargement appeared on the EU horizon. As the Western Balkan countries have already been a few years deep into different stages of the accession negotiations, it has become clear that the EU has to reflect more strategically and resolutely on these developments and decide if it wants to embrace new members, and if yes – when and how.

Clearly, candidate and accession countries have to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria, with a special emphasis on the rule of law requirements that have become more prominent in the EU accession process in recent years. A more difficult question seems to be what the EU has to do to get ready for any form of enlargement.

Many new research and policy documents have been developed recently, seeking to cut the Gordian Knot of EU enlargement. Those are primarily aimed at structural, legal and procedural reforms of the EU institutions. Still, one has to ask what is the role of the EU citizens and those of accession countries in this process. Should their opinion(s) on such a strategic issue be heard only through the voices of their elected political representatives, or should they be allowed to discuss the issue of EU enlargement themselves? This refers to both the EU citizens and those of accession countries.

CoFoE failed to include citizens from accession countries, and went largely unnoticed by the larger public, especially in candidate and accession countries. However, as argued by [Milanese](#), “if this exercise was a test-run before running citizens panels on enlargement and the redesign of the EU that will come with it, including this time citizens from the accession countries, tied to really consequential decisions that need to be made with a timetable for making them, then the EU has an innovative tool at its disposal to both help build social consensus for enlargement and to reassert its dearly held commitment to democracy.”

Holding a CA on EU enlargement, with citizens from both current and future member states would be, indeed, an exemplary showcase of the EU's commitment to inclusive, participatory, and deliberative democracy. Enlargement is as a strategic topic as one can be, with a direct impact on EU citizens' lives.

With the support of trusted local partners, experienced in conducting CAs, the EU could facilitate national citizens' assemblies on the topic of enlargement in the member states and support their organisation in the candidate countries, together with central CA on the EU level.

Enlargement is a great candidate for CA, due to its rich deliberative potential, derived from conflicting understandings and arguments of whether, how and when should the EU accept new members.

CAs on enlargement may have different starting points and purposes in the member states compared to those in candidate and accession countries, depending on the nature of the public discussion of the issue. If there is a lack of public discussion on enlargement, CAs could be used to inform citizens and discuss pro et contra

arguments. If the public discourse is saturated with one-sided views on enlargement, a CA could help bring in another side of the story, be it pro or against enlargement. For instance, looking from the candidate/accession country perspective, if a CA results in strong support for the EU membership, this can influence the government to invest more effort in reforming and addressing the outstanding issues needed for the accession. One can potentially see Albania or North Macedonia as examples of this case. On the other hand, if a starting position is the lack of objective and evidence-based public discussion about EU membership, as in Serbia, a CA can help rectify this, using the power of communicative freedom.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Democracy is a 'moving target', which needs to be continuously reshaped and reformed to keep up with social and economic change, and to continue to match citizens' expectations. This applies to democracy on local, national, and international levels.

On an international level, the European Union has gone the furthest in developing and utilising different democratic innovations. To that end, it serves as a laboratory for advanced innovative democratic tools aiming at increasing the level of participation and deliberation and closing the gap between citizens and decision-makers.

The Conference on the Future of Europe used CAs on the European level in an unparalleled way. Many sought this as a signal of readiness to introduce them as an additional and rather independent "institution" of the EU. Yet, the first CAs held on the EU level after CoFoE indicate

that the EU institutions are still keen to keep strong control over the process and results of citizens' assemblies.

Although CAs on the EU level could be still considered "only" consultative forums with only potential power, their kinetic energy is clear. It seems potent to keep pressuring the EU to continue and further improve its approach to and usage of citizens' assembly.

The EU needs time to develop more confidence and a better understanding of the potential of CAs to further democratise EU institutions and their decision-making process. What is already clear is that CAs stimulate mutual understanding between citizens, and between citizens and politicians. Albeit they are no panacea for all the intricate problems of contemporary polity, CAs qualify among the best candidates to help increase the trust in and legitimacy of strategic decisions on the EU level.

Having citizens' assemblies on EU enlargement would be a strong statement and evidence of EU institutions' willingness to fully consider the opinion of their constituencies. If such an opinion is reflected in the ultimate decision, that would be a triumph of deliberative democracy.

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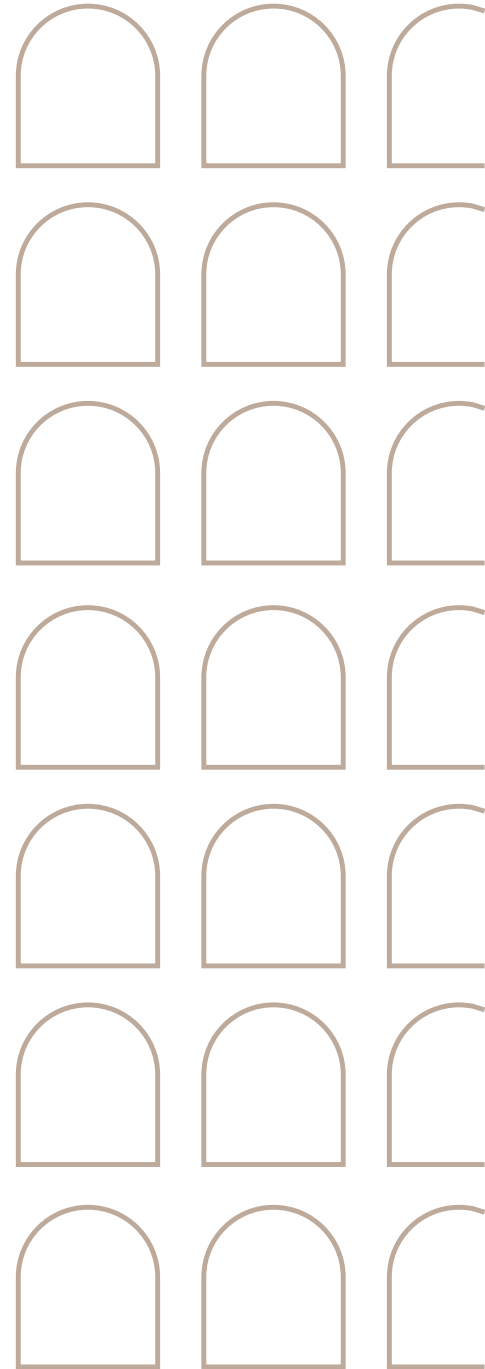
STG Policy Papers

POLICY BRIEF

THE EU'S PLANETARY ROLE: A DELICATE BALANCING ACT IN ENLARGEMENT POLICY

Authors:

Jusaima Moaid-azm Peregrina, José Ángel Ruiz Jiménez



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy brief encapsulates the evolving global standing of the European Union (EU) in light of its enlargement policy. The significance of enlargement in adapting to a changing geopolitical landscape is underscored, emphasising the delicate balance required between geopolitical and normative imperatives. Recent EU actions, particularly the initiation of accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova and granting candidate status to Georgia, spotlight the growing influence of geopolitical considerations. However, caution is advised to prevent the overshadowing of democratic reforms and the EU's value-based approach. To reconcile these imperatives, a nuanced two-pronged approach is proposed. Firstly, refining the enlargement process ensures alignment with EU values, while simultaneously expanding geopolitical influence by exploring other political solutions that do not compromise its internal balance. Embracing planetary boundaries, incorporating a global perspective, an adaptable internal architecture, and inclusive cooperation, provides a framework for this renewed EU's trajectory. The evolution of the European Political Community into a forum that vertically includes diverse stakeholders and horizontally extends participation ensures an informed and legitimate policymaking process. As the EU charts its course through the 21st century, integrating planetary boundaries positions it as a leader in fostering a sustainable and interconnected global future.

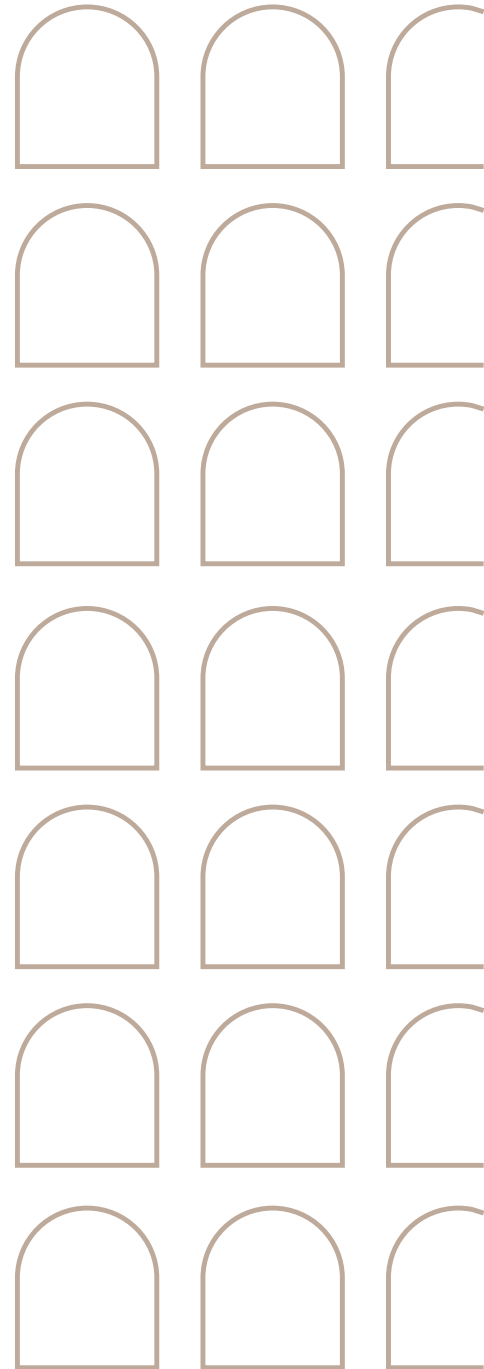
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1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union's planetary role is both intricate and evolving. As the last 2023 meeting of the European Political Community in Granada has demonstrated, it is evident that the EU's enlargement policy will play a pivotal role in shaping this global standing. The forthcoming decades will undoubtedly witness heated discussions and deliberations around enlargement as the EU navigates a shifting geopolitical landscape. Therefore, it is essential to understand that the interaction between internal and external dynamics, which converge during the EU's enlargement process, will become even more pronounced.

This piece will delve into the nuanced approach the EU must take regarding its enlargement policy, situated at the crossroads of geopolitical necessity and value-based imperatives. The EU's enlargement policy has evolved, serving various purposes beyond just admitting new member states. For example, it has been employed as a tool for stabilising Eastern European countries, directing them towards democracy and a market economy, while guaranteeing European security. However, as the 2022 war in Ukraine has made apparent, the geopolitical imperative is at the forefront this time: It is not just about widening the EU; it's about responding to a changing international multipolar order and preserving European influence.

2. THE ENLARGEMENT POLICY: A MULTIFACETED INSTRUMENT

The EU's enlargement represents an arduous process of political, economic, and institutional convergence, culminating in prospective member states' full integration into the EU's fold (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005). Officially, this process

embodies the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights (Sapir, 2022). However, the way it has evolved over the years (Emmert and Petrović, 2014) and the prevailing dynamics in the EU highlight a complex interplay between two distinct imperatives: the geopolitical and the normative. This interplay can be visualised as a *tertium*, where the EU seeks to strike a balance between its security interests, member states' national interests, and its values and norms, creating a complex landscape.

On the one hand, the geopolitical imperative in EU enlargement underscores the Union's recognition that expanding its reach into neighbouring regions is not merely a normative pursuit or the abstract expansion of the ill-defined concept of Europe. Instead, it serves a fundamental security interest, particularly towards the East (Akhvlediani, 2022). As such, under this geopolitical imperative, the EU sees enlargement as a means to enhance state and societal resilience in regions adjacent to its borders, and to contribute to peacebuilding and stability while reinforcing its geopolitical actorness in these neighbouring countries. This perspective emphasises the need for the EU to bolster its geopolitical influence and security in an ever-changing international environment.

In contrast to the geopolitical imperative, the normative imperative focuses on the EU's commitment to a value-based approach in its enlargement policy. It envisions a shared identity among member states, founded on universal rights, democratic principles, and the rule of law (Sedelmeier, 2003). This approach allows for cultural pluralism while shaping collective will through processes that seek common understanding across different identities and interests. The normative imperative emphasises the importance of political and

institutional convergence in addition to economic alignment. It seeks to ensure that prospective member states not only adopt EU laws and regulations but also internalise European values, principles, and standards. In this context, incorporating members into the EU without fostering sufficient support for the normative imperative within their societies, or enlarging without alignment with shared socio-political values, carries the risk of giving rise to renewed European divisions within the EU's internal governance. These, in turn, present additional challenges to internal cohesion, fostering disengagement among both existing and aspiring member states. Such an approach could end up projecting an image of disunity that undermines the collective reputation and credibility of the EU.

In June 2022, the European Council conferred candidate status upon Ukraine and Moldova while also recognising the suitability of Georgia (European Council, 2022), a development that was largely influenced by Russia's aggression against Ukraine (Bourguignon et al., 2022). In parallel, the European Commission also took steps in this direction. On 8 November 2023, this institution adopted its 2023 Enlargement Package, recommending accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova (European Commission, 2023). Building on these recommendations, EU leaders have finally decided to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova while Georgia was granted candidate status in December 2023 (European Council of the EU, 2023).

Despite these developments, it is questionable that the accession process will progress at such speed: the established criteria are challenging for any aspiring nation to fulfil, particularly one embroiled in an ongoing conflict within its borders (Toygür and Bergmann, 2023; Besch and

Ciaramella, 2023). Nonetheless, this gesture has reignited discussions about the EU's role as a geopolitical player and elevated the geopolitical imperative to the forefront of the European Council's priorities.

However, there is a risk in conflating the two in the enlargement process. When the geopolitical imperative takes precedence over the normative imperative, it threatens to transform the accession process into a geopolitical game. The focus shifts away from the transformative journey and the internal changes aspiring countries need to undertake.

This shift in focus can have significant repercussions. Firstly, the emphasis on geopolitical considerations can undermine the EU's commitment to fostering democratic reforms and good governance in candidate countries. The transformative power of EU accession, which has historically driven positive changes in aspiring nations (Bender, 2023), might be seriously compromised. As a result, other countries aiming to join the EU may not be as motivated to undertake the necessary internal reforms, viewing accession as more of a strategic move than a commitment to shared European values.

Portraying a scenario where a focus on geopolitical motives takes precedence over the normative prerequisites and results in exemptions can strain relationships among the EU member states, and between the EU and potential candidates by creating inaccurate expectations on all sides. This misalignment may unintentionally extend the accession process, perpetuating an unending cycle of negotiations and conditions. Such stagnation can diminish public support within both the EU, "European fatigue" (Devrim and Schulz, 2009; Brudzińska, 2019), and aspiring countries, undermining the credibility of the enlargement process (Brudzińska, 2019).

However, the precedence of geopolitical interests over the normative is far from a new phenomenon in the enlargement process. In this case, the significant and somewhat overlooked "elephant in the room" stems from the fact that EU member states exploit the EU enlargement process for their domestic political gains rather than genuinely considering the merits and advantages of the process (Ker-Lindsay et al., 2017). For instance, regarding the Western Balkans, Germany has demonstrated a strong connection with these countries due to a substantial diaspora community, while Italy has been motivated by sound economic reasons. France aims to bolster its leadership within an expanded Europe, strengthening its standing, while Greece and Hungary seek to enhance influence both among EU member states and candidates, leveraging the process for foreign policy objectives (Ker-Lindsay et al., 2017). This self-serving approach hinders cooperation to instil genuine political will and unity among EU member states.

Additionally, an excessive emphasis on the geopolitical imperative in the EU enlargement process ultimately contributes to strengthening and consolidating the rivalry between the major blocs represented by the US and the EU on one side, and China and Russia on the other (Ruiz Jiménez, 2022). This consolidation resembles a sort of "armed peace" between opposing and increasingly militarised blocs, similar to the context preceding the First World War (Ruiz Jiménez, 2022).

Conversely, neglecting the geopolitical imperative is also associated with some risks. If the normative imperative takes precedence over the geopolitical in EU enlargement, Europe may inadvertently miss the opportunity to address pressing challenges in a timely and flexible manner and to renew its actorness on the global

scene. The normative focus could hinder effective political coordination to tackle critical issues such as migration, environmental sustainability, technology, security, terrorism, and armed conflicts. While upholding shared European values and principles is crucial, the EU also needs to adapt to evolving global dynamics. On the other side of the *tertium*, rigid adherence to the normative component of the *acquis communautaire* may hamper the EU's ability to produce an agile, coordinated response in policy formulation and implementation and, as such, respond to these challenges.

In light of the challenges deriving from this *tertium*, it becomes essential to raise a fundamental question: How can the EU avoid the risks of mixing these two imperatives in its enlargement process and at the same time, chart a path that aligns with its normative foundations while expanding its geopolitical reach?

3. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS: SETTING PLANETARY BOUNDARIES IN THE EU'S ARCHITECTURE

While reconciling the geopolitical and the normative imperatives is no easy task, we encourage the exploration of potential pathways for harmonisation. In this regard, a two-pronged approach could be pursued. First, the EU could refine the enlargement process by ensuring that this policy is used solely for its intended purpose and is firmly tied to EU values and standards. This means advocating for a process rooted in the *acquis communautaire*, while tackling the exploitation of the enlargement process by EU member states to advance their national geopolitical interests and agendas, sometimes to the detriment of EU values and principles.

However, while keeping the enlargement process principled, the EU must

simultaneously expand its geopolitical influence and leadership on the global stage. In addressing this geopolitical imperative, the EU could explore alternative avenues for expanding its global influence without compromising its normative values or internal governance through the enlargement process. For example, one notable approach focuses on areas where the EU can become a global leader, such as emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence (AI). By establishing itself as a centre of AI innovation, the EU can assert its influence on the global stage as a hub for these technologies but also establish itself as a significant player in shaping global rules and standards.

To do this, the EU must set planetary boundaries in its policymaking. The EU's potential geopolitical avenues and challenges, whether they pertain to climate change, environmental sustainability, migration, or emerging technologies, know no boundaries. As such, it is only natural for the EU's geopolitical reach to redefine its policy as planetary and reflect on the interconnectedness of global issues. When applied to enlargement, this approach goes beyond the conventional geopolitical benefits of enlargement and adherence to the EU. It seeks to redefine the EU's role in addressing global challenges and reflects the urgency of the issues at hand.

Operationalising these planetary boundaries within the EU means embracing a global perspective in, at least, three directions. First, systematic policy mapping, through which the EU could identify entry points for mainstreaming planetary boundaries into relevant strategies and policies. This has already been suggested for the global environmental dimension of the 7th Environment Action Programme 'Living Well, within the Limits of our Planet' and the Sustainable Development Goals in the EU (Hoff et al., 2017), which envisions

the EU's major role in addressing the planetary crisis and enabling the transition to a more sustainable world: It can do this by acting as a rule-maker and enforcer; as a major producer and consumer; as a source of significant funding within the EU; as a convening power; as an innovator and as a standard-setter (Hoff et al., 2017). At the same time, this could be replicated in other emerging policy areas in which the EU could assert itself as a global powerhouse.

Second, the EU should adapt its architecture to internalise these planetary boundaries. This means creating a coordinated but flexible institutional framework that can seamlessly accommodate these boundaries across various policy sectors. It goes beyond compartmentalisation and allows the EU to address the multifaceted aspects of global issues.

Finally, closely related to this second idea, this architecture should provide for a process of co-operationalisation of these redefined planetary boundaries in the EU's architecture by opening these policymaking spaces vertically and horizontally. A planetary-adjusted architecture needs to be inclusive and participatory. In this regard, the existing European Political Community can evolve into a forum that reflects these principles.

On the one hand, horizontal inclusion within the European Political Community suggests that the EU could extend its participation to Southern neighbours and continue expanding to other potential participatory circles. The rationale behind this idea is to recognise the critical role that these neighbouring countries play in addressing planetary challenges and co-setting these boundaries in EU policymaking. Horizontal inclusion in the co-operationalisation of planetary boundaries involves not only partnering with these countries to address the interconnectedness of global issues but

also represents a shift from a purely EU-centric approach to a more inclusive and collaborative framework that embraces the diverse perspectives and contributions of neighbouring countries while fostering a sense of shared responsibility.

On the other hand, vertical inclusion suggests the European Political Community should concurrently become open to a wider range of stakeholders beyond traditional political elites and institutions. Extending participation to various segments of the population means involving groups representing diverse backgrounds, genders, ages, ethnicities, and social strata. The rationale behind this recognises that these segments can be disproportionately affected by global challenges, and widely lack political representation, but, at the same time, can offer innovative and practical solutions. Vertical inclusion can make policymaking more informed and strengthen its legitimacy by making the forum more aligned with democratic values. Consequently, it ensures that policies and actions have the consent and support of the people who will be impacted by them.

To implement this principle, the European Political Community would need to establish mechanisms for meaningful participation. This might involve holding public consultations, forming advisory panels that include representatives from civil society, women, youth, and other population segments, and ensuring that their perspectives are integrated into policy discussions and outcomes.

The challenges of the 21st century require the EU to think beyond its borders, integrate planetary boundaries, and become a beacon of hope for a world grappling with complex issues. As the EU embraces this new role, it can lead the way in redefining global governance and fostering a more

sustainable, interconnected, and peaceful future for all.

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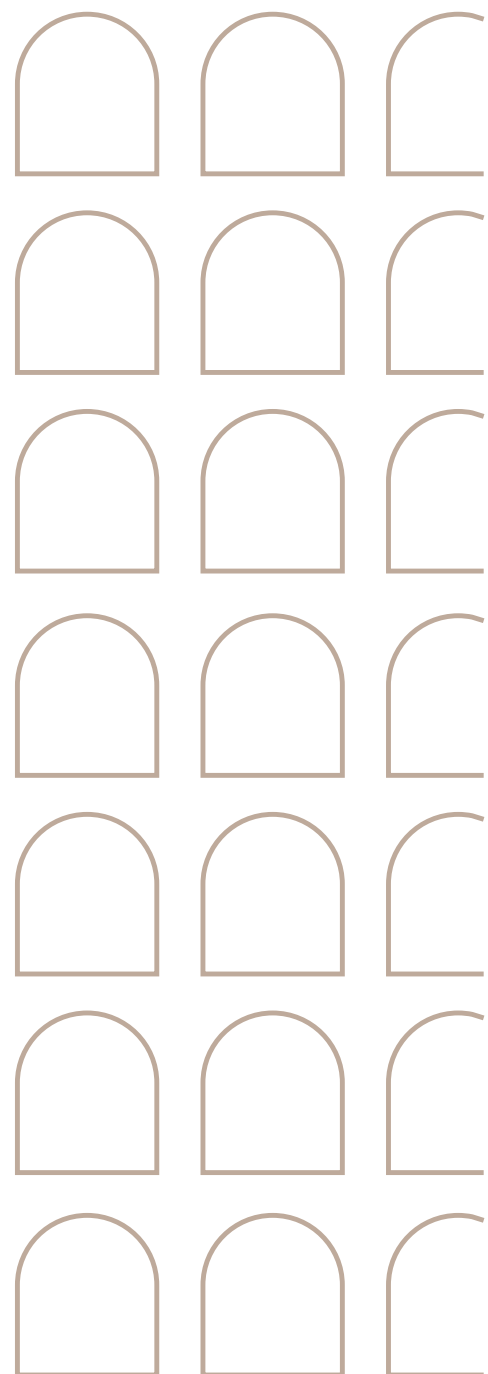
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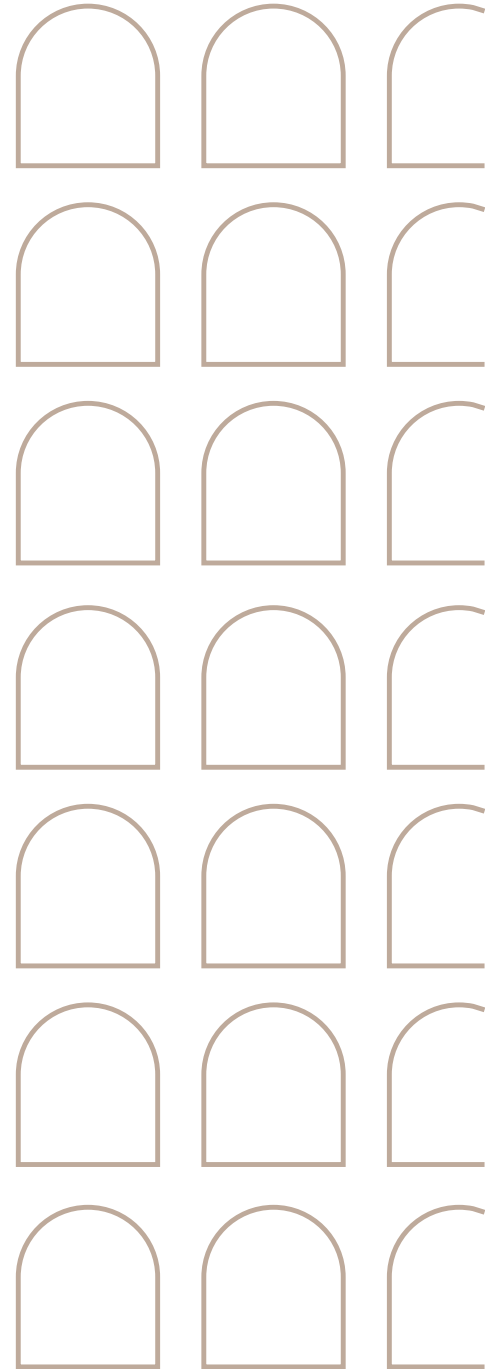
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STG Policy Papers

POLICY BRIEF

GOVERNANCE AMID COMPETITION: REFLECTING ON SPAIN'S 2023 EU COUNCIL PRESIDENCY

Author:
Álvaro Imbernón



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Spain's Presidency of the EU Council during the second semester of 2023 has come at a time of multiple crises (Russian aggression against Ukraine, energy, and global food crises) that play out against the backdrop of a worsening state of global governance, growing strategic and economic competition, technological disruption, and climate change. Faced with the challenge of adapting to a more geopolitical environment while protecting the rules-based international order on which the EU's governance rests, Europe must prepare for the worst while aiming for the best. Internal unity, social cohesion, alliances, and partnerships, including through new formats such as the European Political Community (EPC), are critical for reducing vulnerabilities and multiplying the EU's effectiveness as a global actor. As the EU adapts, however, it must also seek to lay the groundwork for better world governance in the future.

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This text from guest author Álvaro Imbernón is an outcome of the seminar 'An enlarged Europe as a civilization of consent. Can Europe be a laboratory for a new planetary politics?' organised by the Berggruen Institute Europe as a side event to the European Political Community Summit in Granada (3-5 October 2023).

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1. INTRODUCTION: EUROPE AS AN ENDURING MODEL

The case for the EU as a model of transnational governance hardly needs making. When we look at the way European governments and societies interact today, compared to other parts of the world and to our own past, it is easy to put some of our everyday worries about the EU's challenges into a broader, more reassuring perspective. The EU is not perfect, but it delivers when it comes to its most basic (and most important) promise: to serve as a system for peacefully and productively ordering the behaviour of most European nations towards one another. An achievement that is easy to take for granted but is nonetheless exceptional.

For the past seventy years, the EU has succeeded at this task through a wholly original mix of rules, institutions, and channels for creating solidarity and avoiding most of the traditional shortcomings of previous historical attempts at building systems of international governance. Perhaps it is thanks to the balance between the intergovernmental and supranational elements in institutions and decision-making processes: Luuk van Middelaar's Europe of states, citizens, and offices. Perhaps it is also because we are a community of law, with common legislation binding and enforceable in court, yet simultaneously the product of consensus.

It is easy to be satisfied with this achievement and, simultaneously, to feel daunted by the EU's challenges in an increasingly geopolitical world. Certain ingrained habits in our collective psyche might explain this very European coexistence of —often exaggerated—optimism and pessimism. But perhaps it is also the product of holding the EU to two different, often irreconcilable standards.

On the one hand, we expect the EU to keep functioning as a novel kind of regional system that overcomes the limitations of a Westphalian regional order, preserving state sovereignty while avoiding the pitfalls of classic multilateral organizations, where consensus often trumps effectiveness. On the other hand, we increasingly expect the EU to tool up as a member of an increasingly fraught international community, handling the traditional levers of great-power politics and measuring up to more centralised polities.

In other words, we are asking the EU to be Kantian at home and Hobbesian abroad to use familiar terminology. Of course, it is not written that this combination should prove impossible. However, achieving this will require the EU to walk a path without a rulebook since our experience and constitutional nature differ significantly from others. Key to this journey is our unity and ability to adapt together to a more fragmented world.

2. LEARNING FROM RECENT MISTAKES

Jean Monnet famously wrote that Europe would be built through crises and would be the sum of their solutions. We have had ample opportunity to reflect on those words over the past four years, a time that some have labeled a state of permacrisis. Like the rest of the world, Europe has faced two major and overlapping crises: a pandemic and a war, with outcrops in the shape of an energy crisis, a global food crisis, an influx of people fleeing the war, as well as rising inflation — all that against the backdrop of climate change, technological disruption, and strategic competition. One might be forgiven for expecting a fair share of Europe-building in return.

And that's precisely what has happened. Learning from the mistakes of our reaction to the financial crisis, we have shifted from national responses to European solutions, some unthinkable only years before.

We have witnessed this during the pandemic, with the joint purchase of vaccines and the recovery plan, and with our common response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. In coordination with international partners, the European Union has adopted twelve packages of restrictive measures against Russia's war machine, the most comprehensive in its history. We have provided Ukraine with crucial military, financial, and humanitarian assistance, and Spain has proudly been at the center of these efforts. Spain has provided the most extensive package of humanitarian aid in our history, and we are the [fifth EU country in terms of displaced Ukrainians](#) who have been welcomed and benefited from the rights and benefits granted by the European Temporary Protection Directive.

There is a common denominator to all these efforts: our unity. Russia hoped its invasion would be met by a divided Europe, but nothing could have been farther from the truth. Indeed, over the last couple of years, our reaction to crises has moved from division and bickering to unity and solidarity. However, we cannot become complacent. As the lack of unity in the face of the Gaza tragedy or the rise of Eurosceptic forces has shown, the Union needs to continue delivering, adapting to a more disordered and fragmented world.

3. A WORLD IN TRANSITION

In the 1990s and at the beginning of the millennium, many thought we were heading towards an international context closer to what the European Union represents (pooled sovereignty, positive

interdependence, peaceful conflict management, economic openness, relevance of rules, multiple identities). But nowadays, the outlook is much bleaker. Today, we live in a world in geopolitical transition marked by three fundamental changes.

First, we face an international arena increasingly marked by strategic competition between great powers, with the focus shifting to the Indo-Pacific at the same time as insecurity in Europe's eastern and southern neighborhoods intensifies. The flip side of this competition is, paradoxically, a distraction of the great powers from their global responsibilities, leaving vacuums for increasingly assertive regional powers and placing multilateralism in a situation of questioning and tension. All of this is exacerbated by an increase in the number and intensity of conflicts, plus a growing erosion, even defiance, of the principles of the UN Charter. At the same time, the effectiveness of multilateral institutions is reduced, and the relevance of the misnamed Global South and transactional diplomacy grows.

Second, the international economy is increasingly gravitating towards economic security, and risk mitigation approaches at the expense of the efficiency maximisation that globalisation has sought in recent decades. These are times of instrumentalization of interdependencies, fragmentation of investment flows, and proliferation of sanctions and restrictions, with new technologies as the preferred terrain of geo-economic competition. All this against the backdrop of the climate emergency and the new dependencies created by the ecological transition.

Finally, our societies, emerging from a period of unprecedented prosperity, nevertheless show a growing disaffection with the distribution of the wealth created

by globalisation. Inequality at the national level, demographic challenges, and growing distrust of the ambivalent role of technology expose societies to feelings of disaffection that ultra-nationalism knows how to exploit and put at the service of its divisive objectives. The erosion of democracy, the rise of disinformation, and the return of identity politics introduce tensions between national politics and global cooperation, seriously threatening the freedom of governments to negotiate global solutions to the most existential problems that affect us all.

In short, and as President Sánchez stressed on the occasion of the assessment of the Spanish presidency of the EU Council, the international order is changing, and Europe has to change with it.

4. A PRESIDENCY TO ADVANCE AND PRESERVE UNITY

During the second semester of 2023, Spain took up the EU Council's rotating presidency after 13 years since our previous presidency. From its four priorities – strategic openness, green transition, social and economic justice, and European unity-- it is easy to glean that one of the overarching themes of Spain's presidency has been to contribute to this process of adaptation of the EU to the world's new economic and strategic realities.

A characteristic feature of this Presidency has been the frenetic activity at the legislative level. We have reached agreements on 71 files, such as the reform of the electricity market, the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, the reform of the fiscal rules, and the Artificial Intelligence Act. In addition, the declaration adopted by the heads of state and government at the informal European Council of Granada has provided a roadmap for making progress in critical debates on the future of the Union,

such as competitiveness and advance toward more solid defense capabilities.

The Granada Declaration makes a double commitment to the enlargement of the Union, always based on merit and the need to update, through reforms, critical aspects for European integration, such as the decision-making process, the composition of the institutions, or the budget. This debate is essential as the last European Council of our semester adopted a historic decision to give the green light to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova (also with Bosnia and Herzegovina when certain conditions are met) and grant candidate status to Georgia.

5. PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

The EU is overly dependent on others in areas such as energy, healthcare, digital technologies, and food. A substantial reduction of our vulnerabilities and dependencies is necessary, albeit without seeking unattainable and misguided notions of self-sufficiency. Along these lines, the Spanish presidency managed to close dossiers such as the Critical Raw Materials Act, the AI Act, the Digital Identity Regulation, the post-Cotonou framework, the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP), the reinforcement of the European defense industry (EDIRPA), as well as the signing of association agreements with Chile, Kenya, and New Zealand. The objective is to foster the development of strategic industries and technologies, increase and diversify our trade relations, and strengthen the resilience of our supply chains to protect us against coercion by third parties and unfair competition while at the same time preserving the integrity of the single market.

This importance of alliances is why Strategic Openness has been another of our Presidency's priorities, and the subject of

the informal EU Council celebrated in Granada. In addition, the debate in Granada was preceded by the publication of the report '[Resilient EU 2030](#)', coordinated by Spain together with experts and representatives of the other Member States as a reflection on how to adapt the EU to this new situation of geopolitical competition and less economic openness.

Equating autonomy with alliances may have sounded paradoxical a few years ago. However, Open Strategic Autonomy is about being strategic rather than more autonomous. This means [working together whenever possible and alone only where strictly necessary](#). Joint action is a multiplier of our action's effectiveness and, therefore, indispensable for our taking a more strategic approach.

This is also clear from an economic point of view. To reduce strategic vulnerabilities, the answer is not to close our economies but to diversify them further, avoiding being too dependent on unreliable suppliers and ensuring reciprocity. In what might have sounded like another paradox before the COVID-19 pandemic, the path to becoming more autonomous is to become dependent on more, not fewer, partners, thus spreading risks and rethinking our long-term needs.

Multilateralism remains the best tool for channeling this collective action. Even if current multilateral institutions face severe challenges, they are still standing. Many of our partners, especially in the "Plural South," want to make them work in a more inclusive way. Our primary focus should be a work of preservation and adaptation.

At the same time, we should be willing to work in newer, more flexible formats wherever there is an opportunity. The European Political Community is a prime example. Mini-lateral solutions can be sub-optimal, but they are often better than no

solution at all. As the EU's experience shows, the sum of small solutions and concrete achievements can add up to a working, more effective system than one created with the stroke of a pen.

Latin America must also be a part of the EU's new strategic awareness, and our Presidency has worked hard to put it back on the Brussels agenda. The [EU-CELAC summit in July 2023](#), the first in eight years, showed the complementarity and compatibility between the EU and Latin America and the Caribbean in achieving strategic goals. Our two continents share not only a profound cultural and historical substratum but also democratic values and an economic complementarity that make us natural partners. As Minister Albares often says: Latin America is the most Euro-compatible region on the planet.

With the EU-CELAC summit, a greater institutionalisation of the bi-regional relationship has been achieved, with a roadmap until the next summit in Colombia in 2025. Progress was also made in the Digital Alliance, Global Gateway projects, and critical raw materials and energy agreements.

6. EUROPE, CLOSER

Unity begins at home. Polarisation, ultranationalism, and disinformation can turn our societies inward-looking and our governments isolationist, creating domestic pressure to disengage with international issues that are, nonetheless, vital to our security and interests. This growing link between domestic and international politics is one of the reasons for our Presidency's motto: "Europe, closer." We must keep the European project close to our citizens to be accurately perceived as a provider of European solutions to shared problems.

Since entering the European Communities in 1986, Spain has been at the centre of efforts to build Europe as a social and rights amplifier. Spain promoted the concept of European citizenship in the Maastricht Treaty and has ever since continued to promote political and civil rights, like the right to vote and be voted for in municipal elections in the country of residence, the right to consular protection from a fellow member state, or the right to address the EU's institutions as a citizen. Commissioner Manolo Marín promoted the Erasmus program one year after our accession, enabling generations of Europeans to benefit from a shared educational area.

During our Presidency, we have focused on strengthening the European Pillar of Social Rights in various areas such as childhood, disabilities, occupational health, posted workers, minimum wages, and social security coordination. Social and territorial cohesion and the fight against the demographic challenge have been some of Spain's traditional flagships in the EU and have remained so during our Presidency.

Linked to this, making progress on the ecological transition and environmental adaptation has featured as another priority of the Spanish Presidency. We have advanced on the reform of the electricity market and have managed to close relevant dossiers such as the Gas and Hydrogen package, the Due Diligence Directive, the Nature Restoration Act, and the Industrial Emissions Directive, as well as a set of regulations that will help us have more durable, repairable, and recyclable products.

7. CONCLUSIONS: PREPARE FOR THE WORST, AIM FOR THE BEST

Over the past few years of permacrisis, we have shown that our defense of democracy and the rules-based order can create more

solid alliances than those of powers whose worldview is based on pursuing untrammelled power. Indeed, the experience of recent years has shown how mistaken the myth is that autocracies are role models in managing the economy, dealing with crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, or building strong alliances.

Principles, alliances, and rules are essential to prepare the EU for a more geopolitical and uncertain future while considering its specificity as a power. Principles create more robust alliances than those based on transient self-interest. Alliances, in turn, act as multipliers of individual action through the scale and complementarity of different domains across different international organizations. Finally, collective action demands rules to govern the behavior of states toward one another, creating a degree of certainty in expectations of others' future behaviour.

We must keep adapting the EU to the coming world: a world transitioning from rules to power, from economic efficiency to resilience, and from a widespread belief in social progress to uncertainty about the future and nostalgia – a feeling that ultranationalists can expertly manipulate. It is the best way to overcome the fears on the European horizon, such as fast aging, deindustrialization, missing the train of the technological future, or being less relevant on the world stage, and not leaving the field open to those who favor isolationism and inward-looking policies.

The paradox is that we are in a world of worsening global governance at a time of ever more existential global challenges. This makes for especially high-stakes and complex dilemmas. We must learn to think for ourselves while striving harder than ever to work with others so that we do not drag each other down into the same abyss --

environmental, technological, nuclear, or otherwise.

To remain a player in a world that increasingly hinges on geopolitics, we must learn to play by the rules of power, albeit an arduous, gradual, and long-term task. But, given our history, it would be foolish to forget that the greatest power comes from writing the rules. As the EU adapts to a world it was not built for, it must also work towards the world that could be. As the EU's founders did seventy years ago, it is up to us to conceive politics not just as the art of the possible but as the art of making possible what is necessary. And, as we prepare for the worst, we keep aiming for the best.

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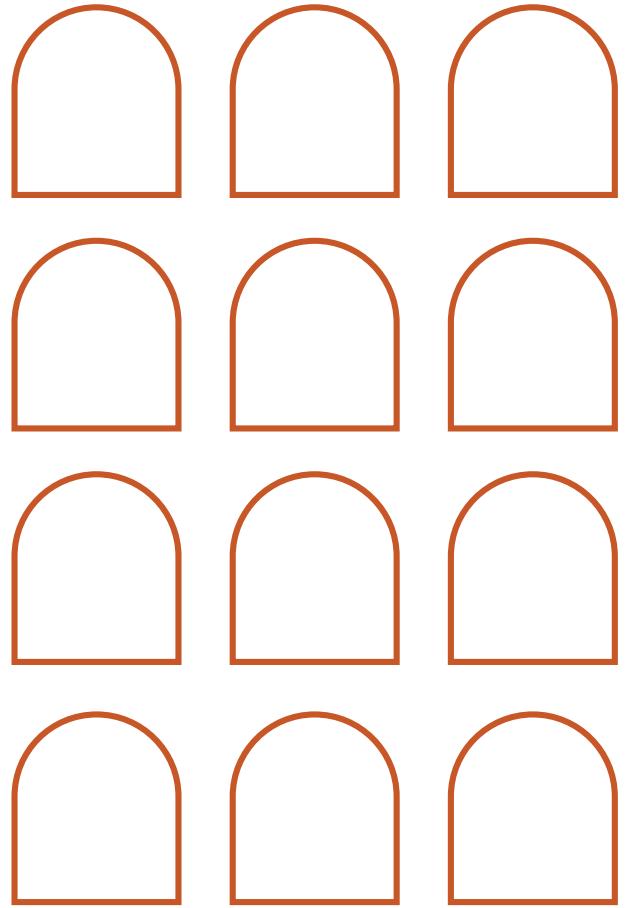
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