

## The EU's support to Kyiv after two years of war : what's next?

While the conflict between Israel and Hamas has diverted the attention of Westerners, the war between Ukraine and Russia enters its third year and continues to rage. **However, the European Union's support to Kyiv is evolving ambiguously.** On the one hand, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Ukraine in December 2023 and financial assistance of 50 billion euros from the EU is expected to be approved in February. On the other hand, observers have noticed a certain fatigue among political leaders and public opinion over the course of the last year.



**Against this backdrop, we ask Nicolas Tenzer, expert in international affairs,** teacher at Sciences Po Paris, non-resident senior fellow at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) and international political blogger on [Tenzer Strategics](#), about the state of power relations and the EU's stance on this conflict.

Q1. In your latest book, [Notre Guerre \[Our War\] released in early January by Éditions de l'Observatoire](#), you argue that Russia's war against Ukraine is also a war on our values of democracy and freedom, as well as against the international legal order. In your view, is this dimension not emphasised enough and taken into account in the debates about Western support for Kyiv?

**Nicolas Tenzer:** I do think that the majority of western leaders have not fully grasped the nature of the total war offensive by Russia. Too often they tend to confine it to a more traditional, even territorial, war dimension and analyse the so-called hybrid (disinformation) threats in that light.

**This tendency to downplay the war (the reasons for which I explain in my book) would force us, however, to review certain concepts that are too often used by international relations analysts, specifically realism, interest, and regime, and to better understand why crime and the violation of law are not independent subjects of strategic analysis.**

As a result, many have not been alarmed by the massive crimes committed in Chechnya since 1999-2000, then in Syria, where Russia alone, not to mention the Assad regime, murdered more Syrian civilians than Islamic State. They have not understood that crime was the message, and that through it, Moscow wanted to show that it intended to break free from all the rules of international law and thereby test democracies.

Some leaders continued to talk with Putin and to shake his hand, when they would never have done the same with Osama Bin Laden or Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, nor even with Toto Riina. The same crimes were committed in Ukraine back in 2014, and to a greater extent, since 24 February 2022 with the deliberate murder of civilians, the intentional targeting of hospitals, schools and residential buildings.

**This is a challenge to democracies and a drive to undo the international legal order.** Some have noted that Russia has violated hundreds of international treaties. Finally, through its manipulation of information and its support for extremist parties and all radical opposition movements, even if it did not create them, **Russia aims to sow chaos in democracies and bring into power extremist**

**parties favourable to its destabilising venture.** We are far from taking this threat seriously and responding with the necessary radicalism, including towards the Kremlin proxies in the West.

Q2. How do you perceive the balance of power between the Russian and Ukrainian forces on the ground? It seems that Ukraine's counter-offensive last summer (on which many Western observers pinned great hopes) did not yield results. Is there a real danger today that Russia will manage to advance its position and defeat Ukraine?

**N.T.:** If the Ukrainian counter-offensive yielded mixed results, it is primarily because the Ukrainian armed forces did not receive the weapons necessary from the West to conduct it. No country in the world could have done it more successfully without the ability to reach distant enemy targets. **Kyiv has not received the necessary long-range weapons, apart from the French SCALPs, the British Storm Shadows and twenty odd American ATACMS** – while all experts believed that Washington could have delivered 300 without depleting its stocks – **and so far, no aircraft.**

**However, the ingenuity and technological feats of the Ukrainians,** which has struck me every time I have returned to Ukraine since 24 February 2022, **have allowed them to hit major targets in Crimea and in the Black Sea, increasingly challenging the Russian position.** They have also shown that they can reach Russian territory. I would also like to remind you that military targets as well as infrastructure used by Moscow for its war are legitimate under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter and, moreover, the Allies themselves have the right to strike them within the context of assisting Ukraine under attack. The authorisation to do so with Western weapons must be made explicit.

**I do not think that Ukraine can be defeated by Russia, but if the support from democracies weakens** – not only Western support, as Japan, South Korea, and Australia, in particular, provide highly appreciated support – **there is a risk of a frozen conflict. But, as long as a portion of Ukrainian territory remains occupied, this means the continuation of the violation of international law and, concretely, the multiplication of acts of torture, summary executions and the deportations of Ukrainian children – a crime of genocide according to the 9 December 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.** This would also allow Putin's regime to rearm and launch even more violent offensives in just a few years.

Q3. In your book and in your numerous interventions, you strongly advocate for an increase in the pace of arms delivery to Ukraine. Do you think that in Europe this perspective could be limited by a weakening of the sensitivity and cohesion of public opinion regarding the support for Kyiv? Are you particularly concerned about the consequences of the European elections in June 2024?

**N.T.:** I fear more the lack of determination of governments than the fatigue of public opinion. **Polls in most EU countries show that the majority of people understand the danger of Russia and side with Ukraine,** even if some are sensitive to this weariness and especially to the enemy's propaganda that aims to instil a certain defeatism in public opinion. Saying that the war is responsible for the rise in inflation, the increase in energy costs, and export problems and claiming that it bears a cost on public finances is simply a falsehood.

**A December 2023 study by the Estonian Defence Ministry showed that the war could be won by early 2025 if the Allies contributed 0.25% of their GDP to military aid for Ukraine.** This is ultimately very little, and the long-term gains would be considerable, not only in terms of security but also

economically-speaking. **The longer we postpone the moment of decisive aid, the greater the cost of the war – first human, then financial – will become.**

In *Our War* I show that there the West is guilty of not *wanting* to save tens of thousands of Ukrainian lives when we could have done. This should haunt us. **The leaders of European countries should speak a lot more about the stakes of this war, explicitly define their war aims, and tirelessly talk about war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and the crime of aggression committed by Moscow.** We must act decidedly so that Ukraine can win convincingly, and Russia be radically defeated, first in Ukraine, then where Moscow continues its policy of aggression – in Georgia, Belarus, Syria and certain African countries in particular.

**This would have long-term consequences both in terms of credibility of our deterrence elsewhere in the world, especially towards the People’s Republic of China, but also for global trade, energy and food security and sound development (ending acts of corruption conducted by Russia in particular).**

As I explain in *Our War*, it will also be necessary for the end of the war to help us define a more responsible and less selfish policy towards certain countries in the South. Finally, I also, of course, fear a wave of the extreme right at the 2024 European elections, which could have disastrous effects on the coherence and strength of European positions in support of Ukraine. However, I doubt that it will manage to obtain a majority in the European Parliament.

Q4. You are also an advocate for Ukraine’s accession to NATO and the EU. Regarding the latter, how do you think the negotiation process would unfold? Do you think that member states will be able to show consistency in their support for Kyiv and prepare for the heavy consequences that membership in terms of European governance, public finances and common policies would entail?

N.T.: I must confess that I show a certain degree of consistency myself in this support. Already back in 2008, in a small book called *Quand la France disparaît du monde [When France Disappears from the World]* (Grasset, 2008), I imagined a future scenario where I portrayed a Ukrainian European Commissioner! **The negotiation process will certainly be fraught with obstacles**, and we can be sure that certain governments inclined to support Russia (especially Hungary and Slovakia) will present poisoned pills.

**However, I believe that the process could take more like 5 or 7 years rather than 10 or 12**, even in an accelerated and derogatory procedure that no one is willing to accept, and that Ukraine is not demanding anyway. **It will need to be shown that, on sensitive issues like the Common Agricultural Policy, cohesion funds, new technologies, the green transition and industrial policy, other European countries stand to gain from Ukraine’s membership, as well as Moldova’s. All of Europe will be strengthened.**

Specifically on the agricultural front, I do not see internal competition, especially since Ukrainian agriculture is more oriented towards export outside of the EU’s territory, and that joining the EU will put it on an equal footing with other European agricultures in terms of environmental and phytosanitary standards, not to mention the expected increase of Ukrainian wages. The weight of Ukrainian agriculture will also enable the EU to speak with a stronger voice in trade negotiations with the rest of the world.

**In terms of European consciousness, a subject that cannot be undermined when we see the questioning of the fundamental values of the EU in certain countries, Ukraine will be the driving force for a refoundation linked to the spirit of freedom and resistance.** What Ukrainian citizens

will contribute to Europe in terms of consciousness forged by the experience of war, in terms of historical perception and gravity, will be a decisive asset for other democracies, provided that European leaders understand it and manage to share it. **Kyiv will become the intellectual centre and, so to speak, the spiritual centre of Europe more than Paris, Berlin and Rome.** But other European states will need to rise to the level of Ukraine, which is not yet guaranteed.

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*Interview conducted on 26 January 2024*