Building a Resilient Europe

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Building a Resilient Europe: Ukraine and Enlargement States as Drivers of EU Defence, Civil Protection, and Preparedness Integration

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Thesis: EU enlargement must evolve from a political process into a security-driven integration model, incorporating Ukraine's wartime expertise and real-time innovation into European defence and resilience systems.

Conclusion: Integrating Ukraine into EU defence-industrial, technological, and preparedness frameworks will strengthen strategic autonomy, accelerate innovation, and reinforce long-term European security.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 fundamentally reshaped Europe's security architecture and exposed structural weaknesses in the European Union's approach to defence and crisis preparedness. What had previously been a gradual and often fragmented process of coordination among Member States has rapidly evolved into an urgent need for systemic integration. In this context, EU enlargement can no longer be understood solely through political or economic criteria, rather, it must be reframed as a core instrument of European security policy.

The war has highlighted critical vulnerabilities, including insufficient defence readiness, fragmented procurement systems, and underdeveloped civil protection mechanisms. Simultaneously, it has accelerated the emergence of a European "security economy," in which defence, technological innovation, and industrial policy are increasingly interconnected. This transformation reflects a broader shift in EU priorities toward resilience, strategic autonomy, and rapid adaptability in the face of hybrid threats. Importantly, candidate countries are no longer passive actors awaiting accession.

Instead, they are becoming active contributors to Europe's collective security framework. Ukraine, in particular, has demonstrated an exceptional capacity to innovate under extreme conditions, adapt to evolving threats, and integrate civilian and military systems in real time.

This policy paper argues that EU enlargement should be reconceptualised as a platform for integrated security cooperation. Ukraine should be positioned not only as a future Member State but also as a strategic partner

whose experience and capabilities can strengthen the European Union's defence-industrial base and preparedness systems. Such a shift would enhance resilience, improve efficiency, and reduce long-term security costs across the Union.

Ukraine's wartime experience has transformed it into a highly dynamic environment for the development and testing of modern security solutions. Its defence ecosystem extends far beyond traditional military operations and includes significant advancements in drone technologies, cyber defence, electronic warfare, and the integration of digital infrastructure into national security systems. Unlike conventional

European defence models, which often rely on long procurement cycles and rigid institutional frameworks, Ukraine has demonstrated a capacity for rapid innovation, iterative development, and cost-effective deployment. This agility allows for real-time adaptation to changing battlefield conditions and hybrid threats, providing valuable insights for European policymakers.

A key factor behind this success is Ukraine's human capital. The country has cultivated a unique ecosystem in which engineers, IT specialists, and military personnel collaborate closely. This integration of technical expertise with operational experience has enabled the development of practical, scalable solutions that are directly applicable to contemporary security challenges. For the European Union, integrating Ukraine into its security architecture offers several strategic advantages. These include faster innovation cycles, access to combat-tested technologies, and the expansion of industrial capacity without the need for extensive new infrastructure investments. Furthermore, Ukraine's experience in managing hybrid threats such as cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and infrastructure sabotage provides a valuable foundation for strengthening EU resilience systems.

Rather than significantly increasing overall spending, this proposal advocates for targeted reallocation within the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework for 2028–2034. A more strategic distribution of resources would allow the EU to address emerging threats while maintaining fiscal discipline. A substantial share of funding should be directed toward modern shelter infrastructure, particularly in urban areas and high-risk regions. These investments should prioritise dual-use solutions, ensuring that infrastructure serves both civilian and emergency functions. Additionally, increased funding for cybersecurity and digital public safety systems is essential to counter the growing prevalence of hybrid threats.

The proposed allocation is summarised below:

This approach reflects lessons learned from Ukraine, where civil protection systems have proven critical for maintaining societal resilience under sustained pressure.

The creation of a European Strategic Reserve would significantly enhance the EU's ability to respond rapidly to crises. Such a reserve should include essential medical supplies, adaptable logistics systems, and pre-

positioned assets in strategically important regions. In addition to material resources, preparedness should also incorporate psychological and social support mechanisms, recognising the broader societal impact of crises. Ukraine's experience in managing large-scale civilian displacement and infrastructure disruption provides a practical model for designing such systems.

The integration of Ukraine into the European defence-industrial ecosystem represents one of the most effective pathways for strengthening EU security. This process should be based on joint production, shared investment, and technological cooperation between European and Ukrainian companies. Joint ventures and localised production facilities, particularly in areas such as drone manufacturing, ammunition, and equipment maintenance, would allow for rapid scaling of production capacity. At the same time, integrating Ukraine into the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base would facilitate knowledge transfer and standardisation.

The mutual benefits of such cooperation are outlined in the table below:

This model changes the position of Ukraine from a recipient of aid into an active contributor to European security and industrial resilience.

Effective security policy must extend beyond infrastructure and include institutional and societal dimensions. The development of coordinated preparedness standards across the EU would improve interoperability between Member States and candidate countries. Such systems should incorporate inclusive design principles, including gender-sensitive approaches and equitable access to resources. Joint training exercises and simulation programs would further enhance coordination and ensure that systems function effectively under real crisis conditions.

Candidate countries across Eastern and Southeastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, and Ukraine) face similar security challenges, including hybrid threats, infrastructure vulnerabilities, and limited defence capabilities. Addressing these challenges through isolated national policies is both inefficient and ineffective. This proposal advocates for the creation of regional security clusters, in which candidate countries collaborate closely

with EU Member States and Ukraine. Such clusters would facilitate knowledge sharing, reduce duplication of efforts, and strengthen collective deterrence. Ukraine is uniquely positioned to act as a bridge within this system, transferring operational experience and technological expertise.

The implementation of this policy framework should rely on existing EU institutions, ensuring both feasibility and efficiency. The European Commission would be responsible for coordination and funding allocation, while the European Council and the Council of the EU would provide strategic direction. Operational support should be delivered through the European Defence Agency and existing initiatives such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), which facilitate joint capability development. To ensure effectiveness, administrative procedures must be simplified, and

funding mechanisms must be accelerated. Public-private partnerships will play a critical role in bridging the gap between policy and implementation, particularly in the defence-industrial sector.

Despite its potential benefits, this approach involves several risks. Regulatory fragmentation across Member States may hinder coordination, while slow procurement processes could delay implementation. Additionally, fiscal constraints and reliance on external suppliers remain significant challenges. These risks can be mitigated through the harmonisation of standards, the introduction of flexible funding mechanisms, and the diversification of supply chains. A phased approach to Ukraine's integration would further reduce systemic risks while allowing for gradual adaptation.

The ongoing transformation of Europe's security environment requires a fundamental rethinking of EU enlargement. No longer limited to political and economic criteria, enlargement must now serve as a mechanism for strengthening collective security and resilience. The concept of a European "security economy" reflects this shift, integrating defence, innovation, and industrial policy into a unified framework. Within this system, Ukraine plays a central role, not only as a future Member State but as a key driver of innovation and operational effectiveness. Ultimately, the success of EU security policy will depend on the depth of integration between Member States and candidate countries. A more inclusive, cooperative, and strategically oriented approach to enlargement will enhance Europe's ability to respond to emerging threats and ensure long-term stability in an increasingly complex global environment.