

# EU Solidarity in the Face of External Security Threats: the Example of the Crimea Platform Initiative

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## Abstract

The Crimea Platform is a diplomatic initiative of Ukraine, designed as an international coordination mechanism to reverse the 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian Federation. The initiative attracted the attention of EU member states, due to the very nature of the annexation – a result of Russia's aggressive and assertive foreign policy. However, attitudes to the issue of the annexation and the perception of its impact on the security of the EU vary greatly from one Crimea Platform participant to another, which leads to numerous discussions on the level of the security threat to the EU and the support to be provided to its eastern neighbours. For this article, I have used process tracing to track the formation of the attitudes to the annexation of EU members participating in the Crimea Platform, which is an essential step in conducting a comprehensive analysis of European solidarity in the face of external security threats.

*Keywords:* Process tracing; European Union; Crimea Platform; annexation of Crimea; Ukraine

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## 1. Introduction

Recently, the balance of power between geopolitical actors and their strategic security policies has been changing rapidly, resulting in the creation of new political alliances and the intensification of contradictions and confrontations between numerous participants in the international arena. To understand this changing picture, it is necessary to take into account a number of important factors that influence and alter the alignment of relevant political forces, such as Brexit, the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and disputes over the political status of Taiwan. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 can be

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considered the most important change in the geopolitical situation and a catalyst for the emergence of threats to the security of the world order. This war primarily affects Europe, because it is taking place in Ukraine, which, according to Matti Maasilta, the head of the EU delegation to Ukraine, 'has always belonged historically, geographically and from a cultural point of view [to Europe]. And during the full-scale Russian war, the European Union, which has declared the values of peace and sovereignty to be defining for itself, stands side by side with Ukraine' (Delegation of the European Union to Ukraine, 2023).

It is important to identify clearly the roles the major geopolitical actors play on the international stage and, in particular, the most important one, the European Union (EU). The EU maintains a common foreign and security policy, which gives member states the opportunity to act together on the world stage for the sake of stability, cooperation and mutual understanding. By helping to build security and stability around the world, the EU aims to make life safer for the people living within its borders. The EU is particularly active in promoting the human aspects of international relations, such as solidarity, human rights and democracy. This policy aims to raise people's living standards, build a common European market, maintain a single currency and strengthen Europe's voice around the world. Economic and political integration between the countries of the European Union allows them to make joint decisions on various issues. The policy covers a very wide range of fields from agriculture to culture, from consumer rights to transparent competition, from environmental protection and energy use to transport and trade.

The political orientation of the EU is of utmost importance, especially its ability to represent either a single strategically cohesive force on the world stage or a union of states, where the priority of the domestic interests of each state member prevails over the need to act together as a united front, which is ready to face and counter potential threats.

An example of such cohesion is the participation of EU countries in the Crimea Platform – an international consultation and coordination format initiated by Ukraine, and launched at an inaugural summit in Kyiv on 23 August 2021 (Crimea Platform, n.d.). The annexation of Crimean peninsula by Russian Federation was chosen as a case for conducting a comprehensive analysis of the conflict, and most importantly, as an assessment of the attitude to the annexation of other geopolitical actors, namely the EU as a whole and each EU member state individually. Such an assessment allows to track changes in the rhetoric of the EU countries participating in the Crimea Platform after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The list of participants is of particular interest due to its diversity in terms of the level of representation. It includes 47 states and international organisations, including Ukraine and all member states of the EU and NATO:

- At the presidential level: Ukraine, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Moldova, Slovenia and Finland.
- At the level of prime minister: Romania, Georgia, Croatia, Slovakia and Sweden.
- At the level of head of parliament: Switzerland and the Czech Republic.
- At the ministerial level: Turkey, Austria, Luxembourg, Ireland, Bulgaria, Montenegro, North Macedonia, the United Kingdom, the United States, Portugal, Germany, France, Netherlands, Albania and Italy.

- At the state secretary level: Norway is represented by the state secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Spain by the state secretary for the EU affairs.
- At the level of the ambassador to Ukraine: Belgium, Denmark, New Zealand, Malta, Japan, Australia, Cyprus, Canada, Greece and Iceland.
- The EU is represented by the President of the European Council, the Vice president of the European Commission and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.
- North Atlantic Treaty Organisation is represented by the Deputy Secretary General of NATO.
- The GUAM Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM) is represented by the GUAM Secretary General. (Crimea Platform, 2021).

The second Crimea Platform summit took place in October 2022 in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. Heads of parliaments and committees of inter-parliamentary relations discussed issues related not only to the current situation in Crimea with respect to human rights, freedom of navigation, the problem of the militarisation of the peninsula and the use of Crimea as a resource and military base for Russian aggression against Ukraine, but also to the steps Ukraine was taking in the process of de-occupying Crimea (Pecherskyi, 2022).

Such a significant number of participants clearly demonstrates the interest of the international community in Russia's aggression in Crimea and in the threat that Russia's foreign policy presents for the general security of Europe. The involvement of such a wide range of participants allows me comprehensively to analyse the responses of EU and NATO member states to Russia's assertive and aggressive policy and their willingness to act as a united front against potential threats and challenges.

## 2. Approaches and methodology

The goal of the research described in this article is to analyse the EU's ability to represent a single cohesive force in the international arena, capable of providing a unanimous response to security threats and other potential challenges common to EU member states. As an example, I analysed and assessed the attitudes to the annexation of Crimea of states participating in the Crimea Platform, with the aim of providing a comprehensive presentation of the initiative in its effort to address security threats and accentuate tendencies in the statements and actions of EU countries in the face of military aggression by Russia in Ukraine.

My methodology was to use qualitative comparison, complemented by process tracing, which is employed by international relations scholars and described elsewhere (van Evera, 1997; Collier, 1997; Bennett, 2010).

I considered process mechanisms as theoretical systems capable of linking causes and results (Beach & Pedersen, 2013; Rohlfing, 2012). In this understanding, a causal mechanism is defined as a theory of a system of interconnected parts that transfers causal forces between a cause (or set of causes) and an effect (Bhaskar, 1978; Bunge, 1997, 2004;

Glennan, 1996, 2002; Machamer et al., 2000; Machamer, 2004; Waskan, 2011), based on Hernes's definition of a mechanism as a set of interacting parts, ergo a set of elements that produces an effect which is not inherent in any of them. (Hernes, 1998, pp. 74–101). The theoretical causal mechanism by which an effect influencing an outcome is created describes each part of the mechanism by which causal forces are transmitted from cause to effect.

I suggest that, in research, parts of causal mechanisms can be usefully defined in terms of actors that engage in activities capable of transmitting causal forces from cause to effect (Beach & Pedersen, 2013; Machamer et al. 2000; Machamer 2004; Rohlfing 2012). I have taken factors (subjects, organisations or structures) involved in the activity as entities, where the activity is the producer of change or the element that transmits causal forces through the mechanism. At the same time, the actions in which entities are involved move the mechanism from the initial causal condition through various parts to the result (Beach, 2016, pp. 3–4). If we consider the EU member states that took part in the Crimea Platform as factors participating in the operation of the process, then the assessment of the event by participating states gives an impact on the result of the process of uniting these countries in the face of security threats. Therefore, the main part of the article is a thorough review and analysis of the official responses and comments of the state bodies of the countries participating in the Crimea Platform that aims to demonstrate the presence or absence of a tendency to mobilise EU members to face an aggressive and assertive Russian foreign policy.

In a theoretical analysis of the Crimea Platform participants as parts of a causal mechanism, they should show productive continuity, meaning that each part logically leads to the next part, and there are no large logical gaps. In this case, even such a description of the process tracing mechanism as an analysis of the responses of the subjects (participating countries) of the mechanism in terms of entities and actions is better than the complete absence of information about the mechanism. Thus, in conceptualising a causal mechanism, we must be able clearly to identify the various parts and how they are related through the nature of the evaluation of the process during research. In this case, the chosen methodology required the statements of Crimea Platform participants to be sorted and grouped according to their evaluation of the security environment in Crimea. It should be noted that the prevailing common feature of these statements demonstrates an attempt by the EU member states to resolve the conflict by purely diplomatic means, while ignoring or rejecting approaches aimed at changing and improving the security situation in the region in their own favour. The crisis has shown us that, without a common army, the EU cannot advance its interests in strategic regions, but only by using financial and diplomatic tools, which are often insufficient. Thus, the crisis has drawn attention to the future of the EU's common defence and security policy and the possibility of creating its own European army (Vlčej & Blažek, 2019, p. 64).

The research materials used in the article were designed to make explicit each part of the causal relationship between cause and effect, which allowed the causal logic of each of the relationships in the causal process to be studied in detail. (Russo & Williamson, 2007; Illari, 2011). It is important to note that this template for theorising causal mechanisms as theoretical systems can be applied to many different types of theoretical explanations.

Naturally, entities and activities depend on the type of causal explanation, the level at which the mechanism operates and the period of its operation. In this article, I identify certain moments in the process of the event under study, when the key actions (official statements of the participating countries) directed the case to certain results, and not to others. The article focuses on those moments when small changes in these circumstances could have caused the case to go the other way and influence the outcome of such an event.

To generalise the researched information and form logical conclusions, I have used an inductive method of reasoning, as is often employed to obtain scientific knowledge in information and analytical activities. The method of induction is associated with the movement of thought from the partial to the general, from individual facts to general causes. At the same time, among the set of previous circumstances, a similar and repeated notion in each case is singled out, which is the probable cause of the phenomenon (Copi, Cohen & Flage, 2006). Among inductive generalisations, an important role belongs to scientific induction. In addition to formal justification, a generalisation obtained by inductive means provides additional meaningful justification of its truth. Scientific induction provides a reliable conclusion due to the fact that the emphasis is on necessary, regular and causal relationships (Govier, 2013). Using the induction method as a logical method of research related to the generalisation of the results of observation and experiment and the movement of thought from the singular to the general, I have formed a holistic picture that reflects the behaviour of the actors (EU countries) towards Russian aggression in general and the annexation of Crimea in particular.

Based on these points, the process tracing method traces back the causal process that produces the case outcome, at each stage inferring from the context what caused each cause. Process tracing emphasises the temporal sequence of events and requires fine-grained case knowledge (Collier, 1997, pp. 823–830). The traced process is represented by the statements of the Crimea Platform participants and their attitudes to the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014. Statements of Crimea Platform participants after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, namely the EU in general and each EU member state in particular, are an essential part of conducting a comprehensive analysis of the EU member states' degree of involvement in the Crimea Platform.

Naturally, the degree of involvement is represented by different forms and means, and therefore it is necessary to answer the following questions:

- What is the overall assessment of the Russian aggression associated with the annexation of Crimea given by EU member states participating in the Crimea Platform?
- Do the differences in approach to the mitigation and deterrence of the aggressor state among EU member states participating in the Crimea Platform influence the overall assessment of the annexation of Crimea as the threat to the security of the world order?
- How did Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 influence the attitude of the EU countries to the annexation of Crimea and did these events serve as a factor aimed at uniting the EU countries in the face of a military threat?

In the next section, I analyse examples of statements by representatives of the EU countries that took part in the 2021 and 2022 Crimea Platform summits to track changes in the rhetoric of assessments of Russia's actions in Crimea against the backdrop of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in order to make the research relevant and give full answers to the research questions above. To answer these questions, data need to be collected from various sources, including official statements made by EU member states participating in the Crimea Platform, comments and remarks by political experts and scholars and a declaration signed during the initial summit of the Crimea Platform by all participating states. Such a wide range of sources provides an adequate and balanced approach to process tracing and theory testing together with observations within the case of the support of the Crimea Platform initiative by EU member states.

### 3. Statements by EU member states at the first Crimea Platform summit, 2021

At the first summit of the Crimea Platform, each co-founder issued a statement, in which they expressed their views on the annexation of Crimea, concerns about the prospects for Ukraine's potential membership in the EU and NATO and recommendations for further tasks of the Crimea Platform initiative, including important areas such as the de-occupation and reintegration of Crimea into Ukraine and the restoration and transformation of infrastructure in Crimea.

One of the issues raised during the conference was that Ukraine would not be able to resist aggression from Russia alone and would need to unite the efforts of the international community to confront security threats jointly at the regional and global levels. In his opening speech, the president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky said that Ukraine would never be able to regain Crimea alone and, therefore, required effective support at the international level and at a new level of de-occupation of the Ukrainian peninsula. According to the president, the synergy of joint efforts resulted in withstanding Russian military aggression in Donbas and now this synergy should urge Russia to join in negotiations on the return of Crimea: 'The occupation of Crimea started in Moscow, the de-occupation of Crimea we will start in Kyiv' (President of Ukraine, 2021a).

All participants in the Crimea Platform expressed their support for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and for further adherence to the policy of not recognising Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea (Crimea Platform, 2021). The Crimea Platform is viewed as a format designed to constantly remind the international community of the crisis in Ukraine and to remind Russia of the illegal annexation of Crimea, which contradicted the official statement of Russia on the legal status of Crimea, according to which the act of transferring Crimea to Russian control was legalised by a referendum on the peninsula and therefore closed to further international discussion (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russian Federation, 2021). The creation of the Crimea Platform is an attempt to attract the overwhelming majority of geopolitical players, especially the G7 and NATO members, as the most influential and, therefore, those capable of

providing continuous and effective support for Ukraine and keeping the Crimea issue on the international agenda. The president of Estonia, Kersti Kaljulaid mentioned this in her statement. She acknowledged the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine, as well as the partial occupation of Ukrainian territory, and stressed the importance of having a constant reminder of the situation in Ukraine: 'Ukraine's territorial integrity must be restored, and until that happens, the question should be raised about how the situation in Ukraine is to be remembered all over the world. It is important that the Minsk rules are followed and that the rest of the countries maintain unity regarding the sanctions imposed against Russia.' It was noted that the strengthening of the Russian military presence posed a serious threat to the security of Ukraine and the Black Sea region (Office of the President of the Republic, 2021).

Representatives of the participating countries discussed the importance of observing international law in resolving territorial conflicts. The prime minister of Slovakia, Eduard Heger defined the annexation of Crimea as illegal and assured delegates that 'time will not relieve Russia of its responsibility for its actions or the international community's need to pay attention to Ukraine' (Government of the Slovak Republic, 2021).

Relevant statements on the violation of international law were made by representatives of other countries at the summit. In particular, the importance of crucial measures aimed at the defence of international law was stressed by the president of Poland (Official website of the President of the Republic of Poland, 2021), the president of Latvia (President of the Republic of Latvia, 2021), the minister of foreign affairs of Austria (Federal Ministry of the Republic of Austria: European and International Affairs, 2021), the president of Finland (President of the Republic of Finland, 2021), the president of Slovenia (President of the Republic of Slovenia, 2021) and the minister of foreign affairs of North Macedonia (Republic of North Macedonia: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

Many leaders emphasised the important role of joint action by the world community against Russia's aggression, which provided the opportunity to resolve the issue of the annexation of Crimea by peaceful diplomatic means.

In particular, two participants addressed the significance of preserving the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, namely, the prime minister of Croatia (Government of the Republic of Croatia, 2021) and the minister of foreign affairs of Italy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy, 2021).

These statements reflect the determination of these states to insist on abiding by international law and to demonstrate that the illegal annexation of Crimea will remain the focus of international attention.

My research identified numerous differences in the approach to further cooperation with Ukraine following the annexation of Crimea. The main geopolitical players showed significant interest in economic cooperation and financial investment in energy projects in Ukraine. For example, the United States and Germany were committed to investing in the Green Fund for Ukraine to promote and support programmes aimed at developing its renewable energy sector and the modernisation of its gas transmission systems, thus ensuring the energy security of Ukraine as well as of Central and Eastern Europe. According to a joint statement by the US and Germany, such investments would not only contribute to the fight against climate change but would also support European



energy security by reducing demand for Russian energy (German Federal Foreign Office, 2021).

Germany's minister of the economy and energy, Peter Altmaier stated that his country did not and would not recognise Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea; the EU had imposed sanctions and would prolong these continuously until the reason for sanctions ceased to exist (Yevropeyska Pravda, 2021). The minister assured delegates that Germany together with Ukraine called for peaceful negotiations and the restoration of international order. Particular attention was devoted to the topic of energy security in the context of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline, the joint statement by the US and Germany on support for Ukraine, European energy security and our climate goals. According to the minister, the statement was a strong and important message that Germany acknowledged the strategic significance of Nord Stream 2 for Ukraine and the commitments of Germany, enshrined in the statement, opened up great and, above all, sustainable opportunities for Ukraine. Germany was committed to protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, not only in international law, but also in energy security (German Federal Foreign Office, 2021).

Several participants pointed out that the annexation of Crimea posed a threat to the security of the Black Sea region. Bulgaria, together with NATO and GUAM, expressed concern about the militarisation of the Crimean peninsula, which posed a security challenge. These participants were interested in maintaining free navigation in the Black Sea and access to Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. NATO helps ensure the security of the Black Sea by conducting military exercises such as Breeze 2021 in the region, which aim to enhance interoperability among participating units and strengthen NATO's readiness in the region (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, 2021).

The problem of the security of the Black Sea region and the militarisation of the Crimean peninsula by Russia were mentioned in the statements of many national leaders at the summit, as well as by representatives of international organisations and unions. Thus, the president of the European Council, Charles Michel reaffirmed the EU's refusal to recognise the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia. According to the president, the EU had dedicated more than €16 billion in its effort to mitigate negative consequences of the annexation for Ukraine. The Crimea Platform was perceived as an international forum, the main goal of which was to remind the international community about the illegal annexation of Crimea and its violation of international law and rule-based order, in order to keep this issue on the international agenda. The president addressed the ongoing militarisation of the peninsula by Russian forces, which greatly affects the security situation in the Black Sea region, persecutes Crimean Tatars and violates their rights by an occupant (European Council, 2021).

The minister of foreign affairs of Bulgaria, Svetlan Stoev reaffirmed his country's consistent support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including territorial waters. He expressed concern about the increasing militarisation of Crimea and the Black Sea region (The Republic of Bulgaria: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021).

The general secretary of the Council of Europe, Marija Pejčinović Burić stressed that the Council of Europe was the first international organisation to condemn the annexation of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol. The general secretary supported the fulfilment of the



Minsk Protocol and decisions of the Paris Summit to stop the armed conflict in Donbas (Council of Europe, 2021).

Analysing the statements of national representatives, in particular their assessment of the results of the summit, I found that some participants saw the summit as an opportunity to pursue their own goals. For example, some leaders, while comprehensively condemning Russia's actions in Crimea, said they wanted to see Ukraine fulfil certain conditions and obligations, reflecting nuances in relations between their states and Ukraine.

Thus, the prime minister of Romania, Florin Cîțu supported the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and expressed adherence to the non-recognition policy of the annexation of Crimea. At the same time, the prime minister said that Ukraine's aspiration to join the European and transatlantic communities should be reinforced by boosting economic and social reforms to achieve democratic transformations of Ukrainian society and its future prosperity. According to the prime minister, the strengthening of democracy, full support of the human rights of every citizen and the proper functioning of state institutions were the key to the challenges and threats that Ukraine currently faced (Government of Romania, 2021).

The president of Lithuania, Gitanas Nauseda stated that Lithuania 'has never recognised and will not recognise the occupation and annexation of Crimea'. The president stated that the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine correlate with the interests of the entire democratic world. Special attention was paid to the reforms in Ukraine, directed at strengthening of governmental institutions, ensuring the rule of law, battling corruption and creating a competitive economy (President of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021).

The president of Hungary, János Áder supported Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity. However, he made a critical remark about the poor treatment of national minorities in Ukraine, citing the ban on their mother tongue in schools and the restrictions on the language in public life, which act as an obstacle for a country that strives to build a democracy and violate the interests of the country that represents the majority of the nation (About Hungary, 2021).

The minister of foreign affairs of Montenegro, Đorđe Radulović approved efforts undertaken by Kyiv to find sustainable diplomatic solutions to the issues that Ukraine currently faced. The minister stressed that diplomacy was the best answer and there was no alternative to finding diplomatic solutions to important global challenges. The minister stated that Montenegro and Ukraine had a traditional friendship and close bilateral ties, and cooperated closely in tourism and the economy (Government of Montenegro, 2021).

The state secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway, Audun Halvorsen stated that Norway had aligned itself with the EU's restrictive measures against Russia in response to its illegal annexation of Crimea and violations of international law. He stressed that Norway supported Ukraine's chosen Euro-Atlantic path by providing approximately 200 million kroner per year to assist Ukraine's European integration. This required that Ukraine implement necessary reforms and continue the fight against corruption. Norway's agenda also included large investments in renewable energy in Ukraine and an agreement (MoU) on nuclear safety cooperation (Government of Norway, 2021).

Comments on the results of the summit from the American political scientist and political economist Francis Fukuyama (2021) are relevant here. His view was that the Platform was not designed to change Russian thinking but was rather aimed at Western audiences, giving Ukraine's friends an opportunity to register their support. However, the strongest representation at the Platform came from countries that had experienced Russian occupation themselves, been part of the former Eastern Bloc or of a state, such as the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia: Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Moldova and Finland. At the summit, these states were represented at the head-of-state level by their presidents, unlike the US and Germany, which were represented by ministers of energy, rather than by the secretary of state or the vice president.

The summit ended with the adoption of a joint declaration signed by all the participants condemning the annexation of the Crimean peninsula by the Russian Federation and continuing political and economic pressure on Russia. Further sanctions against Russia are envisaged, and called Russia for a dialogue to end the occupation and consider the possibility of supporting economic and infrastructure projects aimed at the development of regions adjacent to Crimea.

The summit established an office of the Crimea Platform, the main tasks of which are to monitor the human rights situation on a daily basis, collect information on the growth of military activity on the peninsula, and monitor the environmental and economic situation in the temporarily occupied territory (President of Ukraine, 2021b).

The president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky summarised the results of the Crimea Platform founding summit by stating that world had not switched to an 'every man for himself' format. In fact, the world will continue to unite against injustice. He was, is and will be on the side of Ukraine – that is, on the side of truth, on the side of the principles of international law (President of Ukraine, 2021c).

The security policy of the EU is currently guided by NATO, which is led by the US, not by EU member states. According to the Biden administration's report on the current state of EU security and defence policy, this has created a defence division in Europe between a public that is acutely aware of geopolitical threats and those more isolated and focused on other external threats, such as security in the Mediterranean (Bergmann, Cicarelli & Lamond, 2021). This gap within the EU between Central Europe, the Baltic States and Western Europe is reflected in the statements made at the Crimea Platform summit. For example, Central European states perceived the annexation of Crimea as an open threat to the EU's security and defence policy, which called into question the ability of the EU to provide an effective long-term security and defence policy, not only in maintaining internal affairs, but also in addressing external threats, such as the promotion of their interests and basic values in the international arena.

When it comes to Russian sanctions, the divide defines not only the EU's foreign and security policy on Russia, but also its continuing relationship with Ukraine. Naturally, debates on such an important issue revealed different perspectives on sanctions policy held by two opposing latent coalitions. The first, Coalition 1, consists of Estonia, Germany, the UK, the EU (the president of the Commission and the president of the European Council), Finland, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Sweden and thus includes some of the politically and economically most powerful EU member states. By sheer numbers, let alone

by population and economic power, Coalition 1 is by several degrees of magnitude more powerful than Coalition 2, which consists of Slovakia, Hungary and Italy. This means that sanctions policy towards Russia birthed two potential, or latent coalitions of countries, pushing for opposing policies (Karlović, Čepo & Bienkendorf, 2021).

The alarming signs of diverging opinions within the EU on sanctions policy allow the US to argue that the EU is in crisis and therefore requires support and further consolidation of its security and defence policies within NATO (Bergmann, Cicarelli & Lamond, 2021). Both the EU and NATO revised their policies on Russia following the Crimea Platform summit, which led to the development of new recommendations and resolutions, including major changes in the EU's security and defence strategy.

Overall, the presence on the EU's daily agenda of recommendations and resolutions on new strategies and approaches to forming a new relationship with Russia demonstrates the cohesive and unified policy of the EU and NATO in a rapidly changing geopolitical environment. These moves are aimed to mitigate differences between EU member states in their perception of Russia's foreign policy, caused by different historical backgrounds and national interests. The Crimea Platform acts as a catalyst for further alteration and adaptation of the security and defence strategies of both the EU and NATO to the changes not only in the external policy of major geopolitical actors such as Russia, but also in the global security environment.

#### 4. Statements by EU member states at the first Crimea Platform parliamentary summit, 2022

The first Crimea Platform parliamentary summit was held in October 2022 in Zagreb, Croatia, against the backdrop of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This summit established and implemented an effective parliamentary dimension of cooperation between the participants of the Crimea Platform to promote global and domestic awareness of the situation on the Crimean Peninsula under the temporary occupation of Russia (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2022).

This context had a strong influence on the agenda of the summit, and was reflected in the statements of its participants. The rhetoric of the summit participants became unambiguous. The change of the Crimea Platform summit status to parliamentary testifies to the importance of its role for the participating countries and their representatives.

According to the summit organisers, the purpose of the event was to 'cover important issues concerning the occupied Crimean peninsula, namely: the prospects of bringing Russia and Russian officials to justice for international crimes committed in occupied Crimea; the issue of the future reintegration of Crimea after de-occupation; Croatian experience of territorial reintegration and the possibility of its application in Ukrainian realities in the future' (Zmina, 2022).

Summit participants expressed their position on the annexation of Crimea, taking into account new political threats and realities.

The president of the European Council, Charles Michel said that the EU did not recognise the annexation of the Crimean peninsula, noting that, since February 2022, Russia had been using Crimea as a springboard to invade other regions of Ukraine using missiles, and as a transit point to send Ukrainian people to filtration camps (Lysohor, 2022).

Chancellor Olaf Scholz of Germany said that the Ukrainians were bravely resisting the enemy, which deserved respect all over the world. The chancellor explained that the German and Canadian governments had agreed on a joint package of military aid for Ukraine, which would include air defence, missile systems and ammunition. In addition, Mr Scholz said that Germany, together with Japan, would provide Ukraine with aid to create additional grain storage facilities (Oliynyk, 2022).

The prime minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte stated that the Crimea Platform had become an instrument for uniting many countries in support of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine as well as for the return of human rights, democracy and international law to Crimea (Suspilne Noviny, 2022a).

The prime minister of Belgium, Alexander De Croo reminded delegates that Russia continued to violate the rights of the indigenous population of Crimea and said that the Russian president would bear responsibility for the violation of international law.

The president of France, Emmanuel Macron stated that Russia had violated the principles of international law by launching an invasion of Ukraine and assured participants that the EU and other allies of Ukraine would support the fight against Russian aggression (Suspilne Noviny, 2022b).

The prime minister of Italy, Mario Draghi expressed unwavering support for the Crimea Platform initiative and for Ukraine. Mr Draghi condemned the illegal annexation of Crimea and its gradual militarisation (Oliynyk, 2022).

The president of Poland, Andrzej Duda said that the West should reconsider its relations with Russia after its attack on Ukraine; he stated that Crimea was, is and will be a part of Ukraine just as Gdansk or Lublin is part of Poland (Oliynyk, 2022).

The prime minister of the Czech Republic, Petr Fiala noted that the interests of Ukraine, Europe and the world in the de-occupation of the Crimean peninsula were moral and pragmatic because they contributed to the protection of the rights and freedoms of the Crimean population and ensured stability in the Black Sea region. According to the prime minister, the common mistake of the international community was that it did not react strongly enough to violations of international law, ignored many warnings and acted passively. Finally, Mr Fiala added that the Czech Republic had joined in supporting and helping Ukraine and the issue was now its highest priority (Simochko, 2022).

The president of Slovakia, Zuzana Čaputová noted that Russia's aggression in Ukraine may spread to EU countries, therefore Slovakia would continue to provide political, humanitarian, financial and military aid to Ukraine. The president stressed that the future of Ukraine could be decided only by the people of Ukraine without any external influence or political pressure (Simochko, 2022).

The president of Slovenia, Borut Pahor said that Ukraine was defending international democracy and freedom, and that the war in Ukraine had a direct impact on the security of Europe and, in particular, on the Western Balkan countries. The president assured participants that Slovenia would continue to deliver political and economic

support to Ukraine, and provide humanitarian aid and other necessary assistance (Simochko, 2022).

The prime minister of Croatia, Andrej Plenković said that his country continued to provide Ukraine with economic and humanitarian support and stressed that the war in Ukraine was a confrontation between democracy and autocracy (Simochko, 2022).

The prime minister of Romania, Nicolae Ionel Ciucă noted that, with its attack on Ukraine, Russia had created the biggest crisis in Europe since the Second World War with huge consequences for the whole world. According to the prime minister, with this brutal war, Russia was openly pursuing a policy of intimidation towards other countries (Suspilne Noviny, 2022a).

The president of Estonia, Alar Karis called for the trial of all those involved in crimes in Russia's war against Ukraine, and for efforts to make Russia's aggressive actions more costly – in particular to increase sanctions pressure (Suspilne Noviny, 2022a).

The president of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėda noted that Russia's invasion of Ukraine challenged the architecture of global security and the rule-based international order. The Crimea Platform provided an opportunity for the international community not only to discuss the de-occupation of Crimea but also to condemn Russia's violation of international law and further impose sanctions on Russia (Suspilne Noviny, 2022a).

Following the summit, the participants adopted a joint declaration condemning the serious and systematic violations of human rights and abuses by Russia in the temporarily occupied Crimean peninsula, and the illegal attempt by Russia and its proxies to falsify democratic tools and mechanisms, such as the recent so-called 'referendums' in regions of Ukraine.

The declaration also condemned the long-term militarisation of Crimea, attempts to illegally export stolen Ukrainian grain, obstacles to the realisation of the rights and freedoms of navigation in accordance with international law, the long-term change of the demographic structure in the temporarily occupied Crimea through the resettlement of Russian citizens and the expulsion of pro-Ukrainian activists from the peninsula (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2022).

In their speeches at the summit and in the joint declaration, the participants stated that they intended to continue political, diplomatic, financial, humanitarian and other support to Ukraine, in accordance with the procedures and legal jurisdiction of each participant, with the aim of restoring the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders, at the same time increasing pressure on Russia to end its temporary occupation of Crimea (Zmina, 2022).

## 5. Conclusion

The decision to establish the Crimea Platform summit can be regarded as a landmark step in world politics. My research provides sufficient data for the assessment of causal factors that affect the outcome of the decision and allow a comprehensive analysis of the degree of involvement of the EU member states in working together to face a security threat. The significance of the Platform lies in the fact that it is an example of an international political

initiative involving the consolidation of democratic states in the face of a threat to the security of the world order. This international solidarity allows a collective assessment of the Russian aggression associated with the annexation of Crimea, given by the countries participating in the Crimea Platform, to be made.

A review of the official statements shows that the participating states, despite some disagreements in the perception of the processes in Ukraine that affected the relations of these countries with Ukraine, acted as a united front and condemned the annexation of Crimea by Russia. An analysis of the statements of the national leaders and representatives, as well as representatives of international organisations and unions, given in this article makes it possible to state unequivocally that all signatories of the Crimea Platform Declaration condemned the violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Crimea, the militarisation of Crimea that undermined security and stability in Crimea and the Black Sea region, the violation of international law and changes to the demographic structure in the peninsula after the resettlement of Russian citizens there. My research demonstrates that differences in the approaches to the mitigation of the impact and deterrence of Russia among the participating states influenced the overall assessment of the annexation of Crimea as a threat to the security of the world order.

The unified statement to address the situation in the international arena, caused by the assertive policy of the aggressor state, faced an obstacle in the form of differences of opinion of EU members on the annexation and measures aimed at mitigating and hindering Russia's aggressive and assertive policy. However, against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the main scope of the summit goals broadened from a need to protect the basic principles of international law to the protection of security and stability in the region. The 2022 summit showed the ability of the EU countries to come up with a common political position, which was not only announced but also entailed certain decisions and actions that were to be carried out jointly by the participating countries.

At the 2021 Crimea Platform summit, major EU member states such as Germany, France and Italy were represented at the ministerial level and made mostly declarative statements that did not imply an active interest in conflicts outside the EU. The conflict between Ukraine and Russia was considered a private matter that took place solely between these two states, where the EU acted as a mediator between the two parties to the conflict, supervising negotiations in the form of treaties such as the Minsk agreements. However, during the 2022 Crimea Platform summit, these countries were represented at a higher level and the rhetoric of their representatives demonstrated a direct response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in the form of imposing sanctions on Russia and providing humanitarian, political, financial and military aid to Ukraine. It also showed unity among the EU member states in their readiness to support Ukraine in its fight against the aggressor, since the assessment of the scale of Russian hostilities in Ukraine went beyond the scope of a local conflict between the two countries and as a result, posed a threat to the security and stability of the EU. The shift in rhetoric of the representatives of the EU member states between the 2021 and 2022 Crimea Platform summits shows the ability of the EU member states to act as a united front in the political arena, positioning the EU on the international stage as a strong political player capable of having a unified response to global security issues.

As a format for discussing the de-occupation of Crimea and providing support and aid to protect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, the Crimea Platform has significant potential for development and expansion. The 2023 Crimea Platform summit, which is expected to be a second parliamentary one, will take place in Prague, Czech Republic, in the autumn (Radio Svoboda, 2022). According to the first deputy minister of foreign affairs of Ukraine, this unique format now unites more than 60 states and international organisations from Europe, North and South America, Asia and Africa, with Costa Rica becoming the newest participant in January 2023 (Kizilov, 2023).

Overall, the Crimea Platform summit format allowed EU countries to mobilise around the support of Ukraine and the liberation of the Crimea peninsula. By participating in the Crimea Platform after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the EU demonstrated both an instant reaction to a violation of human rights, democratic principles and international law, and the determination to ensure the protection of the principles of state sovereignty, territorial integrity and global security. The resolution of issues arising from the Russo-Ukrainian war, consolidation around the protection of democratic values, and the norms of international law require broader involvement of all state mechanisms in the world. The Crimea Platform as a political and diplomatic international component is important for the de-occupation of Crimea. The introduction of a parliamentary format to the summit plays an important role in continuing to repel Russian aggression, as well as in establishing security guarantees not only in the Black Sea area, but also in the region adjoining the EU. Interparliamentary summits are not only a tool for advocating further support for Ukraine against the backdrop of full-scale Russian invasion and the liberation of Crimea, but also a way to the next stage of developing mechanisms and forms of peace in the post-war period. The interparliamentary dimension of the Crimea Platform may act as an additional guarantee of an exclusively democratic path of development for Ukraine. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, a diplomatic way of liberating Crimea is no longer relevant. Further summits will show this; it remains to be seen whether the participants will be able to see and mark the specific role of the Ukrainians and indigenous population of Crimea in the issue of de-occupation and reintegration of Crimea.

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