



Europe Has Enemies Within, Enemies Without

Description

The internal balances of the European Union are significantly transforming as a consequence of the US' proxy war with Russia in Ukraine. The countries that are close neighbours of the conflict zone — countries of Eastern Europe and the Baltic States — have a greater sense of involvement in the conflict in comparison with the countries of Old Europe. These New Europeans have had a difficult history that puts them on a pronouncedly 'anti-Russian' trajectory.

Their Manichean fears of Russia brought them closer to the US and post-Brexit Britain than to their natural allies in western Europe. Poland, the mightiest entity of New Europe, is investing massively in defence, which may catapult it as the leading military power in Europe.

In 2022, Poland concluded a huge arms purchase contract with South Korea: heavy combat tanks (four times more than France), artillery, fighter jets, for 15 billion euros. Warsaw also signed a contract last month to purchase two observation satellites from France for 500 million euros. Poland is determined to be ever more consequential in European affairs.

On the other hand, for Germany, Europe's powerhouse, the war is a particularly sensitive issue and it is caught up in a certain constant questioning of itself. Germany's Nazi legacy, its chosen dependence on Russian gas and the reluctance to deliver the first weapons to Ukraine put it in agony today over the issue of heavy tank deliveries.

Nonetheless, Germany promptly seized the Russian special military operation in Ukraine to announce on February 27 a sharp increase in its military spending to more than 2% of its economic output in one of a series of policy shifts. The government of Chancellor Olaf Scholz decided to supply 100 billion euros for military investments from its 2022 budget. (Germany's entire defence budget by comparison was 47 billion euros in 2021.)

Not to be left behind, President Emmanuel Macron said in June that Russia's operation in Ukraine had sent France into "a war economy" that he expected to last a long time. He announced in the weekend he would ask parliament to approve a new budget of €400 billion for the period 2024-2030, up from €295 billion for 2019-2025.

The new budget is intended to modernise France's military in the face of multiple potential new threats, Macron said on Friday, adding, "After repairing the armed forces, we are going to transform them. We need to do better and do it differently."

To be sure, the geopolitical earthquake in Ukraine caused tremors all over Europe and every country is evaluating its position and role. Although no country is questioning its European commitment, there is a palpable sense of disorientation. Scholz wrote in an essay two months ago in Foreign Affairs magazine that it was time for a *Zeitenwende*, or historic "turning point," on Germany taking responsibility.

Again, on Friday, Macron and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez signed a new treaty of joint cooperation, described as a historic friendship treaty to achieve common strategic objectives. They have decided to put behind the tensions over the proposed MidCat gas pipeline through the Pyrenees (which was blocked by France due to environmental reasons.)

But both countries have different motivations. France may be shoring up European support as it prepares to dispute with the US over the billions of dollars in subsidies for American companies as part of President Joe Biden's Inflation Reduction Act, which aims to fund a green transition. And Spain probably aims to become a more prominent player in the nucleus of European power, and is estimating that a tighter alliance with France will help.

However, by Sunday, Macron is celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Franco-German reconciliation of 1961 at a summit in Paris with Scholz, coupled with a joint Council of Ministers, with focus on recapturing the verve of the Paris-Berlin axis which used to preside over the EU until the conflict in Ukraine erupted. Whether that swagger can be recaptured remains to be seen.

France and Germany were not ready for this war in Ukraine, while the countries of the Eastern front were more vigilant vis-à-vis Moscow and immediately perceived the stakes. The political cost of this discrepancy is not quantifiable yet. Meanwhile, the balance of power in Europe has changed, and it is unclear whether France and Germany will succeed in forging a new balance.

For the present, Scholz has come under increasing pressure from allies to send German-made Leopard battle tanks to Ukraine, or to allow other countries to re-export from their own stocks. The US is leading this pantomime from the rear.

Washington is determined to put the final nails on the coffin of German-Russian rapprochement and disrupt the revival of the Franco-German axis to address jointly a European response to Biden's predatory subsidy law and map out pathways to protect European industry. The economic stakes are very high as, lured by US subsidy, a migration of European industry to America is likely.

France and Germany are deeply skeptical that Washington will make meaningful changes to the green investment plan. At issue is "the ideal of a Europe that is united and in full control of its destiny," as Macron said at the ceremony at Sorbonne in Paris today with Scholz by his side. Scholz in turn said,

“Today we strive side by side to strengthen the sovereignty of Europe.” They affirmed *amitié indestructible* (indestructible friendship.)

Indeed, Poland chose precisely today to train its guns on Germany, while Macron and Scholz were celebrating the 60 years of Elysee Treaty in Paris to shore up their alliance with a day of ceremonies and talks on Europe’s security, energy and other challenges.

Polish Prime Minister Morawiecki tore into Scholz in extremely harsh language threatening to build a “smaller coalition” of European countries if Germany does not agree to the transfer of Leopard 2 tanks. Morawiecki thundered: “Ukraine and Europe will win this war — with or without Germany.”

He accused Scholz of not “acting up to the potential of the German state” and of undermining or sabotaging “the actions of other countries.” Morawiecki raged in uncontrollable anger: “They (German politicians) hoped to pawn off the Russian bear with generous contracts. That policy bankrupted them, and to this day Germany finds it difficult to admit its mistake. Wandel durch Handel has become synonymous with epochal error.”

It is still 36 hours to go for the first anniversary of the Russian operation in Ukraine. But the war has spilled over to Europe. As Russia steadily gains the upper hand militarily and the spectre of defeat haunts the US and NATO, Poland is getting frantic. A tipping point is coming for it to recover its “lost territory” in western Ukraine if and when that country collapses — although Stalin had compensated Poland with more than 40,000 square miles of east German lands.

Europe is unlikely to be party to Polish revanchism, especially Germany. These sweeping political maneuvers can be seen as an attempt to adapt to the new world of war and, perhaps, as well to prepare Europe for the one that comes after.

*

Featured image: France’s President Emmanuel Macron (R) with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz as they arrive to attend a ceremony marking the 60th anniversary of the Elysee Treaty, Sorbonne university’s Grand Amphitheatre, Paris, Jan. 22, 2023

By M. K. Bhadrakumar

Category

1. Main
2. Politics-Geopolitics-Gov.-Events

Date Created

01/25/2023