

IBSBMUN 2022



# Study Guide European Council

Addressing instability in the bloc's  
Eastern flank





# Study Guide

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## Welcoming letter

Dear prospective delegates,

It is with utmost pleasure and excitement that we welcome you to this year's edition of IBSBMUN, and we are more than interested in the fruitful debates that will surely be taking place in our committee. We believe that this year's topic, *Addressing instability in the bloc's Eastern Flank*, while at a glance may seem complicated and difficult to digest, could spark some interesting debates and lead you to become more invested in world affairs and international politics.

The study guide is supposed to guide your research in the right direction, and we have especially designed it to be comprehensive and enough to give you an overall idea of the general topic. We highly recommend you do some further research in the name of the country you were allocated, in order to completely grasp the topics at hand and represent your delegation properly. In your personal research, you will have to expand on the ideas presented to you in this document, especially in regards to your own state's position, as your main purpose as a delegate should be to follow the interests of the country which you represent.

This document will follow a structure that, we believe, is easy to follow, from the broad definition to an introduction to the topics and various nuances, all the way to the bloc positions you are expected to take and legal frameworks.

We want you to make the most out of the debate and the entire conference, so, on a more personal note, feel free to contact us, in the case of any inquiries that you might get at any point during the conference or outside of it, too, be it regarding the topic or completely unrelated.

To end it, short and sweet, we once again welcome you with open arms to this edition of IBSBMUN and we want to wish you the best of luck on your preparation and performance! We can't wait to see you!

Best wishes,  
David & Eugeniu  
Chairpersons of the European Council

## **Committee outline**

The European Council is one of the 7 EU institutions. However, it is not one of the EU's legislating bodies, so does not negotiate or adopt EU laws. Instead, its main role is to determine the EU's general political direction and priorities - essentially setting the policy agenda for the EU.

Traditionally, this is done by adopting conclusions during each European Council meeting. These conclusions identify specific issues of concern for the EU and outline particular actions to take or goals to reach. European Council conclusions can also set a deadline for reaching agreement on a particular item or for the presentation of legislative proposals. In this way, the European Council is able to influence and guide the EU's policy agenda.





## Topic introduction

Several trends have led the European Union to examine its foreign policy more closely in recent years. One such tendency is the EU's growing recognition that it requires more independence in some external concerns, as well as the ability to act strategically sovereignly. Another trend is the EU's growing understanding that the world has grown more "geopolitical" - that unless it becomes the prominent actor it wants to be, it will lose its voice in a chaotic world as other nations become more forceful. As a result, President Ursula von der Leyen's European Commission has made it a clear goal to establish a more geopolitical Europe. Most EU member states share this goal, and their influence will dwindle unless the EU acts with greater ambition, power, and coherence.

The EU's primary objective in its eastern neighbourhood, as the European Commission President Romano Prodi expressed in 2002, is to be surrounded by a "ring of friends." The EU announced conflict resolution as one of its top priorities when it launched its neighbourhood strategy the following year. There has been a huge increase in conflict in the bloc's neighbourhood since then, but no commensurate growth in member states' ambition to confront this sensitive issue. Transitioning from communism to competitive democracy, rule-of-law administrations, and functioning market economies would benefit the EU not only in terms of peace and stability, but also in terms of economic growth, sustainable development, cross-societal and cultural ties, and long-term strong relations with its neighbours. Despite globalisation and the increased strength of long-range communications, in trade, investment, migration, and security, countries' local neighbours continue to be more significant than faraway powers.

While the EU's support for this change has yielded uneven results, it must recognize that a complete failure of the process in its eastern neighbours is possible and would have disastrous implications. Belarus serves as a cautionary example about what can happen when political and economic reforms fail. Now that Lukashenko is approaching retirement age and his credibility is rapidly eroding as a result of his suppression of opposition protests, there are concerns about succession, Belarusian sovereignty in the Union State, and the long-term viability of the country's economic model. Belarus will, at best, remain a weak and impoverished country on the EU's outskirts. In the worst-case scenario, it will turn into a co-belligerent client state that Russia will exploit to directly threaten and attack EU sovereignty and territorial integrity. Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia might become a Moscow-controlled hotspot of unrest, from which the Kremlin could launch clandestine subversion and conventional military operations. With no territorial protection equal to that offered by the Mediterranean, this would pose a greater threat to the EU's eastern member states than the upheaval in the south.



## Historical timeline

In order to understand the current situation on the eastern flank of the European Union, we must first understand this region and the complex history that animates its characteristic tensions. To this end, we propose a condensed version of the recent past, one which will inevitably be riddled with over-simplifications, but which will nevertheless manage to prove sufficiently illuminating. And because both history and politics are more often than not made by large groups of people, we will try to avoid the purely evolutive analysis of the events which took place in the last century, leading to our current situation, but, rather more pertinently to this topic, try to offer a dynamic picture of the general characteristics of the Eastern Europeans, whose defining traits have taken, at a first glance, very sharp turns during a relatively short period of time.

Such were the conditions of the imposition of the communist regime in the aftermath of the second World War, that, after the fall of communism in the majority of the eastern bloc around the year 1990, what followed was a resurgence of pre-war nationalist sentiments, based on a generalised sentiment of victimhood. Even though in the beginning praised as freedom fighters and staunch democrats, the leaders of the post-communist liberation movements soon proved to draw their legitimacy from both populism and nationalism, with stories of great national pasts and even greater national decline fuelling their sharp rise in popularity. For countries such as Poland or Hungary, a few centuries of perceived decline from their status as great regional powers led both leaders and the people they were leading to see democracy and liberalism as the source of their countries' decline, rather than any other factors.

It is at this point that we can draw our first conclusion – regarding the internal issues of the EU on its eastern flank. With Western Europe, especially the franco-german engine, moving with increasing haste towards secularism, diversity, equality for all citizens and a greener future, one cannot fail to notice the obvious incongruity between what is expected of eastern members of the union and their internal socio-political realities. For it is optimistic at best to ask of a population, which in the past half century has been forced to give up on its religion, to go over its religious principles and accept reproductive rights or same sex marriages, much as it is optimistic to ask a population which is consistently poorer than that of the west to bear equally the burden of transitioning to a greener economy. This incongruity between what is and what ought to be is mainly a result of inauspicious circumstances, and as so, taking into consideration the historical context, we may well assume that pushing forward on the same course may do more harm than good on a broader scale, in the long term.

Now that we have summarised what may be the historical context behind the bloc's internal disagreements, in order to reach a conclusion regarding the EU's most pressing external threat – the Russian Federation – we have to look at the past 30 years, the time frame since the fall of the USSR being of great relevance. At least as it is perceived, Russia is the EU's main aggressor, be it through on-line disruption of public life, cyberattacks, or threats of



traditional military conflict. However, the construction of the currently challenged European security order looks more and more unclear in its intentions the farther away you get from Bruxelles. We would not want to suggest that the West intentioned to back Russia into a corner or tried to threaten it in any way by expanding the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to the Kremlin's very doorstep, since that would be pure speculation, but it cannot be denied that, from Moscow's perspective, that is how repeated waves of NATO expansion may look like.

Figures vary when it comes to Vladimir Putin's approval ratings through the years, but what is indisputable is that there is still a significant portion of the Russian population that approves of him, or at least tolerates his policies. As so, we have to see that when he expresses viewpoints on the necessity of reclaiming or protecting the Czarist Empire's historic territories, it is not only an expression of his own point of view, but also that of a sizable part of the Russian populace. The Russian attacks in Georgia, Crimea and, allegedly, the Donbas region are manifestations of a sense of downfall which comes in direct opposition to the generalised cult of a glorious past.

## **Current situation**

!Given the rate at which the situation is escalating we strongly recommend you do your own research extensively.

### *Internal*

The European Union was nearly torn apart by the refugee crisis of 2015, when millions of refugees and asylum seekers poured across Europe's borders. Many members provided them asylum; others, such as Poland and Hungary, refused to participate.

Six years later, the present impasse between Poland and Belarus has echoes of that crisis, but European authorities argue this time that member states are unified in safeguarding Europe's borders and that unrestricted immigration is no longer a problem.

What makes this crisis unique, according to the Europeans, is that it was wholly manufactured by Belarus' dictator, Aleksandr G. Lukashenko, in response to European sanctions put on his country following a rigged election and a ruthless crackdown of domestic dissent.

"This area between the Poland and Belarus borders is not a migratory issue; it is part of Lukashenko's hostility toward Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, with the goal of destabilising



the European Union," stated Ylva Johansson, the European Commissioner for Home Affairs, in an interview this summer.

### Economic

The Russian Federation has engaged in a series of blackmail tactics against European countries, despite the fact that most of them rely on Russian gas supplies (the share of Russian gas represents over 40 percent of EU gas imports). Russia is attempting to destabilise Eastern European countries by offering significant price reductions to countries like Bulgaria (roughly 40%) and facilities to countries like Hungary, which will benefit from Russian gas through the Turkstream pipeline (which bypasses Ukraine and Romania) beginning in 2021.

Significant as of late 2021 when it comes to the economy is the cost-of-living crisis which is slowly setting in throughout the European Union. As energy prices skyrocket, most goods whose production or processing are dependent on a steady consumption of energy (heat, electricity, etc.) have had to compensate by increasing prices, a burden which has essentially been passed on to consumers. Were this not relevant enough, what with recent developments in the eastern part of Ukraine, the possibility of sanctions towards Russia from the EU and its partners seems increasingly likely, but also increasingly tricky. Since the Russian Federation, through the natural gas company Gazprom, is one of the main gas suppliers of the Union, and with other gas exporters unable to replace the high volume imported by European countries from Russia, imposing sanctions on the Russian economy might prove destructive for the Union as well.

Along with economic considerations come social and political ones too, since economic decline has been proven to be an auspicious environment for populism (see Greece and the sovereign debt crisis). We are already seeing what populism can mean for the broader interests of the Union, with countries such as Hungary who, in spite of being part of the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, is already dangerously ambivalent when it comes to the Kremlin's authoritarianism, their human rights violations, and their expansionist intentions.

### Strategic

The Russian Federation is taking steps to entice the major European powers (Germany and France) to its side by offering natural gas directly from Russia (via the NordStream 2 pipeline), while avoiding states like Ukraine, Poland, and Romania, which have tense relations with Russia and strictly adhere to the European Union's sanctions. As a result of the NordStream 2 project, Germany will receive a double amount of Russian gas directly from the source, and France will align itself with the Russian Federation's rapprochement program





(despite sanctions imposed on Russia, France continues to maintain a very good bilateral relationship, the two states having common interests).

The Alliance's and the EU's existing stability are jeopardised by the proximity of the two major European powers to the Russian Federation, especially when other states have a good attitude toward the Russian Federation (Hungary and Italy).

Lastly, in this brief, introductory, analysis, we have to mention one last aspect pertaining to the strategic interests of the Union, as it may well be the one which determines the external policy of the Communitarian Bloc in decades to come: the closer and closer diplomatic and economic ties of Russia to the People's Republic of China. This matters only if one agrees to the broad consensus of the academic community – that what we are now experiencing is the dusk of the Euro-Atlantic conception of international politics, concomitant to that of the international hegemony of the United States of America. As so, we will soon refer to a Pacific view of the world map, in which not even Russia can be considered a great power on a global scale. Unless the European Union acts decisively against the coming of such a future, Europe as a whole will increasingly become part of Russia's backyard, in a sino-russian paradigm.

The encroachment of the PRC in Europe and the European Union can already be seen, with countries such as Hungary showing great avidity towards Chinese investments, in spite of opposition parties' visible, but symbolic, counterattacks. Unsurprisingly, the countries most likely to take part in Chinese projects or investment plans are those which were previously part of the eastern bloc, and this is one of many signals that old divides were never actually mended. This poses an increasing strategic risk to the Communitarian Bloc, as one of its main strategic advantages is that of unity in both vision and action. Unless Russia is somehow appeased, most likely a coalition will form that will be even closer than that between the former USSR and the PRC (before the sino-soviet split, that is).

## **Previous measures**

The European Union's major goal in the Eastern Partnership is to create a "common area of shared democracy, prosperity, and stability," as the European Council recently stated. In addition, the bloc has announced other areas of interest in the region. For some European leaders, political transformation remains a precondition for achieving other objectives. In the aftermath of the Mueller Report and the incident surrounding President Donald Trump's decision to fire the US ambassador to Ukraine in 2019, efforts to combat corruption, organised crime, and money laundering inside the EU and the eastern neighbour have received some media attention. Finally, whether the EU can fulfil its aims in its eastern neighbourhood will be determined by the integrity and professionalism of local investigative and judicial agencies.



Workforce mobility and migration, infrastructure, young people, education, ethnic minority groups, digitalisation, steps toward economic alignment, the European Green Deal, healthcare, particularly in relation to Covid-19, and gender equality are all covered in joint EU-Eastern Partnership declarations. These are, however, apolitical and bureaucratic portfolios that reveal little about Europe's ability to carry out its foreign policy. They are also not places that have been weaponized by third parties against EU or Eastern Partnership countries. This is largely owing to the fact that Belarus and Azerbaijan, while legally part of the EU's eastern neighbourhood, generally follow different political rules. As a result, there is diplomatic pressure on the EU to interact with them – or to speak through practical issues that develop as a result of the Eastern Partnership's broad concerns.

The Stability Pact was founded in 1999 at the initiative of the European Union with the goal of establishing and reinforcing peace and security in South-Eastern Europe. Countries and international organisations were invited to participate as partners.

In 2008, the Stability Pact was replaced by the Regional Cooperation Council<sup>1</sup>, which now governs regional cooperation in South Eastern Europe and promotes the region's European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

## **Main actors**

- *France*

During talks with leaders of the EU's eastern members in Budapest, France's President, Emmanuel Macron, emphasised his support for strengthening the European Union's exterior boundaries.

President Macron attended the Visegrad 4 summit in Budapest, which brought together members of the Visegrad 4 group (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), as his country is set to take up the EU presidency in January.

It is important to understand the significance of this presidency, since it allows Mr. Macron to attempt to implement some of the policies he has proposed during his tenure as president of the French Republic, not least among them his idea of a stronger, more strategically autonomous European Union. With new strategic plans for both NATO and the EU coming during this year, it is entirely possible that the French Republic could make use of present

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rcc.int/>



circumstances, emboldening member states to take a more active role in their common defence.

- Germany

The roots for peace, security and prosperity in Germany are laid by European integration. Despite the United Kingdom's departure from the EU at the end of January 2020, German foreign policy remains focused on advancing and enhancing that integration, particularly in light of difficult and, in many cases, crisis-ridden circumstances.

With the departure of Chancellor Angela Merkel, often called the *Putin whisperer*, many analysts were unsure of how German foreign policy would transform, especially as one of the three coalition parties, the Greens, who also have their president at the lead of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, declared publicly and repeatedly that they would want to take a tougher stance on both Russia and China. Chancellor Scholz has since taken a lot of criticism for being ambiguous in both his statements and his approach to the Ukrainian situation, namely for upholding the policy of not sending military equipment in areas with a potential for conflict.

Strategically, one of the weakest points which have remained largely unaddressed is the gas pipeline NORDSTREAM2, which represents a vulnerability in the fight against Russian expansion, since it would allow, were it to receive certification, Russia to bypass Ukraine when supplying the West with natural gas, essentially stripping Ukraine of one of its most important assets in any negotiation.

- Hungary

As we have already said, Hungary is one of the more divisive countries involved in the situation, with its Prime Minister being one of a few European leaders who got to meet with Mr. Putin over the last few months. The Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs has constantly denied that Hungary will receive more US troops on its soil, even if it is one of the countries which border Ukraine. As previously mentioned, its closer ties to both Russia and China have sparked suspicions in diplomatic circles that it may be the “weak link” of both NATO and the EU.

Internally, Hungary is actively challenging democratic values and Mr. Orban has repeatedly referred to his own approach with the term *illiberal democracy*, which has put his regime in direct opposition to the European Council and Parliament. His populist policies are also manifested in the field of economics, as the recent ceiling of some food prices pulled into question whether Hungary will choose to adhere to the sanctions imposed in the eventuality of them having repercussions in internal markets.



- Poland

The other problematic member of the European Union, with which Hungary has had many an agreement over aspects such as human rights, specifically those of the LGBTQ+ community, is Poland. It is important however to note that while Hungary may try to take the middle way when it comes to the Ukraine issue, Poland has chosen to aggressively defend Ukraine's rights as a sovereign state under international law.

Even as the Belarus migrant incident was developing in late 2021, Polish leaders of government condoned nationalist rallies during which they delivered speeches against Belarus, Russia and President Putin. These actions received a mixed response from other EU member states, if they received one at all, since while also publicly denouncing Mr Lukashenko's hybrid war tactics, they took notable xenophobic turns.

However, Poland is still one of the main actors in the region, as it hosts one of a few NATO permanent missions and has a large border with its neighbour Ukraine, making it a sure destination for refugees relocated by war, and, in a last case scenario, for western embassies temporarily relocating from Kiev or Lviv.

### **Points to be addressed**

1. How can the EU become more resilient in the face of fluctuating gas prices?
2. How can the EU deal with the risk of prolonged influx of refugees?
3. Does the EU need a separate security strategy from NATO?
4. How can the EU strengthen its land borders on the eastern flank?
5. How can the EU strengthen its maritime borders on the eastern flank?
6. How can the EU address internal disagreements before becoming security risks?
7. Are there merits in stronger EU-Russia ties?
8. Can the EU engage in diplomatic relations in spite of views different from their counterparts'?

### **Further reading**

- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/21/instability-grips-a-weakened-europe-as-global-predators-smell-blood>