



**FRIEDRICH NAUMANN  
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# UNITED EUROPE IS OUR (ONLY) FUTURE



POSITION PAPER

# Imprint

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## Notes

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*We as the youth of Europe strongly believe in the European Union. However, we must reform the EU to fortify its position in the world and ensure peace in our home. With our demands we want to work towards reshaping Europe.*

***A united Europe is our (only) future.***

*This strategy paper is the joint product of 14 liberal youth organisations from all over Eastern and Central Europe elaborated at the third Eastern Europe Summit. The organisations met in September 2023 in Prague.*

# 1. Preface

More than 500 days have passed since Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine. Since then, we have seen a so-called *Zeitenwende* not only in the European Union itself but also in its member states.

Russia's aggression has also made the world question the current international order and its future. How can aggressive attitudes from Russia and possibly China be countered and prevented? How can Europe act united? And last but not least, where does the EU find itself among other global players?

The upcoming elections in the EU, such as the election to the European Parliament or the parliamentary elections in Poland, will play a crucial role in determining Europe's future, especially noting that democratic backsliding still has not come to a hold in numerous European member states. In addition, the topic of EU enlargement has gained even more relevance with the declaration of Ukraine and Moldova as candidate countries.

While the war in Ukraine is unfortunately far from over, speaking about the country's future is relevant. In rebuilding Ukraine, many researchers speak of a chance to fortify the democracy of the state and strengthen its position in the world. Ukraine's candidature to the EU is another step in this direction, raising the question of the EU's role in Ukraine's future. Meanwhile, the country's relation to NATO remains a highly discussed topic.

Considering these important developments, the third Eastern European Summit held by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom and Junge Liberale focused on the EU itself, its future, and its role in the international power constellation, while also considering Ukraine's future and outlook after the war. Accompanied by experts, the participating youth organisations discussed three main topics: "Ukraine after the war and the EU's role in rebuilding it", "The EU's future in times of elections, democratic backsliding and enlargement", and "Europe's place in the world among Russia, China and the United States".

This paper contains the collective demands of 14 liberal youth organisations across Central and Eastern Europe. We strongly believe that the following calls for action are essential in solving the aforementioned challenges and #ReshapeEasternEurope to strengthen it for the future.

## 2. Ukraine after the war and the EU's role in reconstruction

Following the illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine, massive destruction, relocation, and political instability have occurred throughout Ukraine. Having provided a path for Ukraine to join the EU, the EU must take up responsibility to aid Ukraine in its rebuilding efforts. The post-war reconstruction should follow the principles of sustainability and solidarity, focusing on innovations and green technologies. The post-war reconstruction is an opportunity to build back better, creating conditions that will help put Ukraine on a path of growth with a more resilient infrastructure, economy and democracy. Assisting Ukraine in its reconstruction efforts serves our mutual interest, as fostering a robust and resilient economy in our European vicinity and potentially welcoming it as a full member of the European Union aligns with our strategic objectives.

We therefore demand that the European Union shall:

- Engage in rebuilding Ukraine's infrastructure:
  - A key focus should be placed on the sectors of energy and public infrastructure. Following this, the civilian infrastructure should be rebuilt.
  - Within this demand, the EU must ensure that anything newly built is up to the newest EU standards and ideally utilise green technology.
  - In response to this exigency, the EU commits to devising potential strategies for addressing the aftermath of the Khakhovka dam rupture and determining the subsequent course of action.
- Incentivize European companies to invest in Ukraine, as this could also contribute to overcoming corruption. Possibly by:
  - The EU could provide insurance and collateral for European companies in a certain amount for several years post-war.
  - The EU could aid the Ukrainian government in formulating and developing incentives for Ukraine's private sector.

- Companies should devise a strategy of long-term reinvestment of a certain amount of their profits into the Ukrainian economy. This percentage should be determined post-war and dependent on the region of residence from the firms.
- Formulate systematic solutions for the reconstruction focusing on the member countries' specialities and capabilities.
- Consider waiving specific export/import regulations specifically for Ukrainian agricultural goods. The EU may uphold certain limitations on imports into the EU; however, it should gradually lift these limits to allow European agricultural goods producers to adapt to the new and increased competition.
- Recognize that combatting the remains of war is a task that needs to be addressed by the entirety of the EU. The EU should create a task force that combines know-how and tools from within the EU but possibly also from NATO and other states aiding Ukraine in freeing its territory from mines and other war-related weapon systems.
- Redirect all frozen Russian state-owned assets towards rebuilding efforts in Ukraine.

Foster Ukraine's energy sector to shift EU's energy dependencies from hostile nations to friendly nations. In doing so, green energy innovations should be encouraged and rewarded in Ukraine.

*“ The EU shall incentivize European companies to invest in Ukraine, as this could also contribute to overcoming corruption. ”*

### 3. The EU's future in times of elections, democratic backsliding and enlargement

Europe is constantly changing – to repower the EU, we cannot treat enlargement or reforms as a challenge or a threat, but rather understand it as an opportunity to overcome the EU's weaknesses. We believe that deeper integration and enlargement can serve as a driver for progress. This mainly includes rethinking areas like the decision-making process, citizen's engagement and representation, funds management and the shape of European institutions. As part of Europe's young generation, we believe this would fulfil Europe's potential to be a peaceful, progressive and empowering home.

Therefore, we demand:

- The EU-Membership for Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and the Western Balkan's states until 2030 at the latest.
  - For this, the EU should set up clear paths and timelines for this enlargement, as this would provide the necessary and deserved perspective and credibility for the potential member states when it comes to fulfilling accession conditions.
  - Undoubtedly, these plans should contain a security policy as a pre-condition.
- Fundamental institutional reforms to ensure a well-functioning and effectively enlarged Europe. This is especially relevant for the European Commission, the decision-making process, and the European Parliament.
  - While every EU member deserves representation in the Commission, it does not need a Commissioner. We want to introduce Vice-Commissioners to clearer portfolios in a smaller, more efficient Commission. A rotation system would allow every country to have its own Commissioner every two terms.
  - In its reduced size, the Commission should cover areas like: Trade, Single market, Fishing, Security, Foreign Affairs, Development, Climate and Energy Affairs, EU budget,



- Migration and Justice, Cross-border infrastructure, and regional policy.
- Moreover, the decision-making process must be improved and more efficient. The number of votes based on unanimous decisions ought to be reduced.
  - We need to make the European Parliament more significant in the decision-making process for example by giving it the right of initiative. The voting age for the European elections should be lowered to 16. In this way the representation of every EU citizen will be enforced.
- A change in the communication and perception of the EU through better efforts of promoting its funds. The EU's benefits should be known in order to strengthen support and acceptance of the Union.
    - This could especially be enforced by reshuffling the EU budget to match the competences with real European value. Withholding EU funds when the Rule of Law is not implemented in a Member State should be based on an objective mechanism decided by the European Court of Justice.

*“ Fundamental institutional reforms are necessary in order to ensure a well-functioning and effectively enlarged Europe. ”*

## 4. Europe's place in the world among Russia, China and the United States

The global political playing field has fundamentally changed over the past decade through events like the Russian aggression in Ukraine or the emerging BRICS alliance. Rethinking Europe's position among big players like Russia, China and the US is crucial for securing our influence. The EU must improve its capabilities as a major player on the world stage to improve the living circumstances of its people, preserve and advance global peace, stay ahead in technological innovation and lead by example concerning human rights and democratic values. That is why we urge the European institutions to act towards these goals proactively and create a common vision and strategy for securing Europe's position in the world.

To achieve that, we call for the EU to:

- Make better use of its diplomatic capabilities and reputation, while prioritising actions towards the common strategic vision of the EU.
  - This includes actively communicating what the EU can offer to its partners, such as projects like Erasmus+, support given to emerging countries and successful peacekeeping missions towards potential partner countries and their population with the goal of strengthening the reputation and image of the EU worldwide.
  - Furthermore, increasing the cooperation between foreign ministries of member states, their embassies, and NGOs as a way of solidifying the EU's diplomatic position.
- Create new trade opportunities.
  - By finally concluding the long-lasting negotiations with MERCOSUR.
  - With industrialising countries and blocs such as India, Australia, the African Union and ASEAN with the ambition of creating a cooperative relationship benefiting both parties.
  - Including potential conditionality measures concerning liberal values and environmental sustainability.
- Commit to pursue technological advancement competitively.
  - Creating a better business environment to stop the unwanted brain drain of professionals and patents from the

- EU through less unnecessary regulation and bureaucracy is crucial.
- Additionally, the EU should actively strengthen ties and incentivize cooperation between the educational and private sectors across the Union, as a measure to secure the returns on investments in European education.
  - Finally, there should be an increase in investments from EU funds towards Research and Development.
- Grow the EU's geopolitical weight.
    - Providing security to vulnerable countries by joint European diplomatic missions such as the one in Armenia can provide more security and serve as a manner to create more support for the EU and fill the void Russia has left behind.
    - Also, using shared intel effectively plays a crucial part.

*“ It is crucial that the EU creates a better business environment to stop the unwanted brain drain of professionals and patents through less unnecessary regulation and bureaucracy. ”*



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