

TEN PLUS ONE



**QUESTIONS AND
ANSWERS**

**ABOUT THE RUSSIAN
INVASION OF UKRAINE**

**AND THE EFFECT ON EUROPE
AND NORTH MACEDONIAA**



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This analysis is a joint effort of the members of the Working Group of Female Experts on Foreign and Security Policy and the Executive Director of the PRESPA Institute to answer ten plus one important questions related to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the effect on Europe and North Macedonia.



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TEN PLUS ONE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE AND THE EFFECT ON EUROPE AND NORTH MACEDONIA

Is this a conflict, a special operation or a war?

On February 24¹ this year, Russia launched a military invasion of Ukraine. The invasion is a complete escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict that began with the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014². The conflict has so far affected international relations. However, the war will affect not only the warring parties, but will tectonically shift economic and political relations globally, and the economic and humanitarian crisis will, more or less, be felt throughout Europe.

The entry of the Russian army on the territory of Ukraine violated the sovereignty of the state, to which Ukraine responded with a defence strategy. The fact that the armies of the two countries are in direct armed conflict and the objective is to conquer or defend territory meets all the conditions for defining the situation as war. On the other hand, the Russian Federation is trying to portray the war as a “special operation”, “protection of human rights” or “liberation of Russian citizens living in Ukraine”. However, this is not a reality, neither it is supported by any definition of war, nor is it accepted by international³ courts⁴.

In terms of a collective system of global security, according the United Nation’s Charter⁵, use of force can be made in two ways: for individual or collective self-defence, or by a decision of the Security Council to maintain or enforce peace. In a situation where Russia is a permanent member of the Security Council, which means a veto, and Ukraine is not a member of NATO, the two options for global direct involvement are quite uncertain. Hence, it is certain that unfortunately the war will last, maybe even escalate.

On the other hand, since long, nothing has united the world like the Resolution⁶ of the United Nations General Assembly condemning the “Russian aggression.” The attack on Ukraine brings back to mind the idea of the Eu-

- 1 <https://www.dw.com/en/russia-invades-ukraine-what-you-need-to-know/a-60895337>
- 2 <http://www.concordmonitor.com/news/politics/11209502-95/putin-signs-treaty-to-add-crimea-to-map-of-russia>
- 3 <https://www.ejiltalk.org/icj-indicates-provisional-measures-against-russia-in-a-near-total-win-for-ukraine-russia-expelled-from-the-council-of-europe/#:~:text=March%2016%2C%202022-,ICJ%20Indicates%20Provisional%20Measures%20Against%20Russia%2C%20in%20a%20Near%20Total,from%20the%20Council%20of%20Europe&text=This%20afternoon%20the%20International%20Court,Russia%20under%20the%20Genocide%20Convention>
- 4 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/icc-launches-war-crimes-investigation-russia-invasion-ukraine>
- 5 <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter>
- 6 <https://tinyurl.com/UNresRUSUKR>

ropean unification as a peace project, and revives the meaning of NATO's existence. Peace is the only right option. Unfortunately, given the current situation, peace options seem unattainable, and the need for reform of the global security system is becoming clearer.

What are the chances of a nuclear war?

From a security point of view, NATO membership involves us directly in the alliance's actions focused on the war in Ukraine, as well as in coordination to protect against a direct Russian threat to the allies. For now, the Allies have invoked Article 4⁷ for political consultation and preparation for defence against a possible further attack by Russia. The countries that convened the meeting under Article 4 are: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Slovakia⁸. To clarify, Article 4 differs from Article 5⁹ which calls for a reaction only when one of the allies is attacked.

The chances of a nuclear war are slim. If a nuclear bomb were to be detonated on the territory of Ukraine, depending on its size, the consequences would be felt in the neighboring countries, some of them EU and NATO members. Such a situation would cause a counterattack, in which case, the nuclear disaster would have consequences for North Macedonia. Another nuclear threat is the potential damage, whether it be intentional or unintentional, to a nuclear power plant that could cause a nuclear accident on Ukrainian territory.

These scenarios are extreme and efforts are being made to prevent them for a number of reasons. First, it would further threaten the Baltics and the countries of Eastern Europe, then, it would have catastrophic consequences for the Russian people, and finally, it would plunge Europe into a third world war.

How will the war affect the economy of North Macedonia?

The military conflict in Ukraine is expected to have consequences for the economy of North Macedonia, as is the case with other countries in Europe. This is primarily due to the obstacles to trade with Ukraine, which is a direct target of the military attacks, but also with Russia, to which North Macedonia has imposed economic sanctions and from which the country would expect sanctions in the coming period. Although Ukraine is not in the top 20 countries with which North Macedonia has the highest trade exchange, and Russia is in the 20th place according to the total trade exchange in 2021¹⁰.

NATO Founding Treaty, article 4:

"The Parties will consult together whenever, in the opinion of any of them, the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened."

7 https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts/17120.htm

8 <https://theconversation.com/ukraine-invasion-why-eight-nato-members-triggered-article-4-of-the-north-atlantic-treaty-178054>

9 Treaty of Washington, Article 5: "The Allies agree that an armed attack on one or more of the Allies in Europe or North America will be considered an attack on all of them and, consequently, agree that, if such an attack occurs, each of them shall exercise the right to individual and collective self-defense recognized in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, assist the aggrieved party (s) in taking appropriate steps, individually and together with other allies, including the use of "to establish and maintain security in the North Atlantic region."

10 <https://www.stat.gov.mk/>

The fact that from these countries originate key products such as natural gas, oil and wheat, indicates that the Macedonian economy is facing significant price shocks and economic instability. Whether this trade takes place directly between North Macedonia and the two countries or through the channels of the European Union, the consequences are already being felt and will get worse if the hostilities do not stop soon.

The data of the Impact and Image Observatory show how dependent North Macedonia is on Russian energy. Graph (3) shows that from 2014 onwards, the trend of oil imports from Russia to our country has significantly decreased. Thus, in recent years, we cannot talk about import dependence of North Macedonia on Russian oil. However, Chart (4) shows a significant dependence of our country on the import of Russian gas. Natural gas may prove to be the product that may be most critical in the coming period, as a direct consequence of the hostilities and economic sanctions that are being imposed. The crisis in energy supply is expected to significantly affect the European Union. This, in addition to being transposed into a significant price shock for a wide range of products, not only in the member states but also in other countries, dependent on imports from the EU, as is the case with North Macedonia.

As for exports. Russia's share in total exports to our country in the period from 2011 to 2021 is slightly declining. The share of Russia in total import has fallen from 0.9% in 2011, to 0.7% in 2021. The pharmaceutical industry has the largest share in the total exports to Russia, followed by agriculture through the export of fruits and vegetables¹¹.

As in the case of Russia, exports to Ukraine are declining. In the last 10 years, exports to Ukraine decreased from 2.1% in 2011 to 0.2% in 2021. Even in Ukraine

Chart 1 Trade exchange with Ukraine 2011 -2020

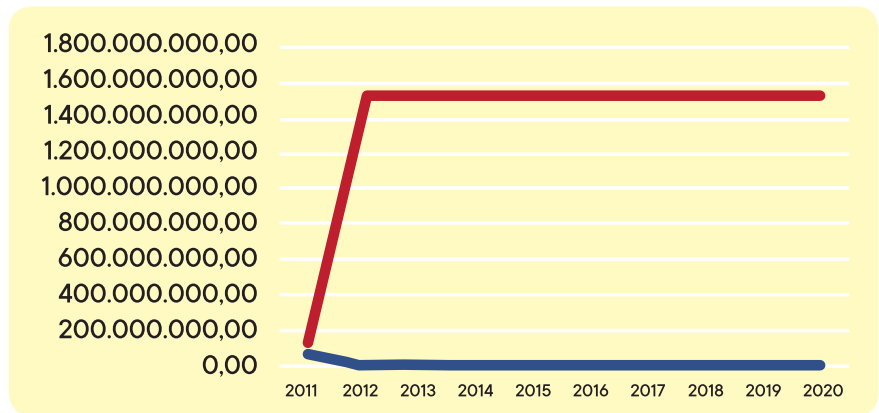
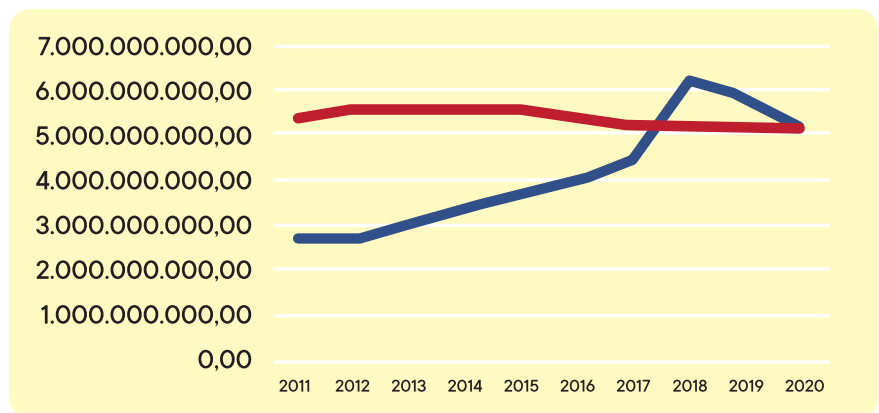


Chart 2 Trade exchange with Russia 2011 -2020



— Export
— Import

11 <https://finance.gov.mk/2022/02/26/123456-4/>

we mostly export medicines, electric batteries and agricultural products¹². In this segment, too, a decline in the total numbers is expected, which would mostly affect the production of medicines and agricultural products. However, compared to the import segment, the decline in exports would have far smaller economic consequences.

The economic shocks of the war, together with the consequences of the post-pandemic crisis, inevitably requires the government to take clear, comprehensive and timely measures to mitigate them, guided by the needs of companies and the protection of the welfare of citizens.

Chart 3 Top 10 importers of oil and derivatives

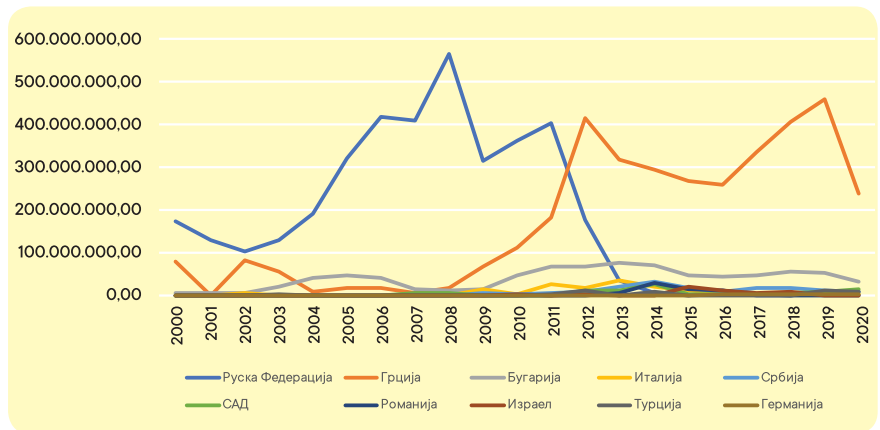
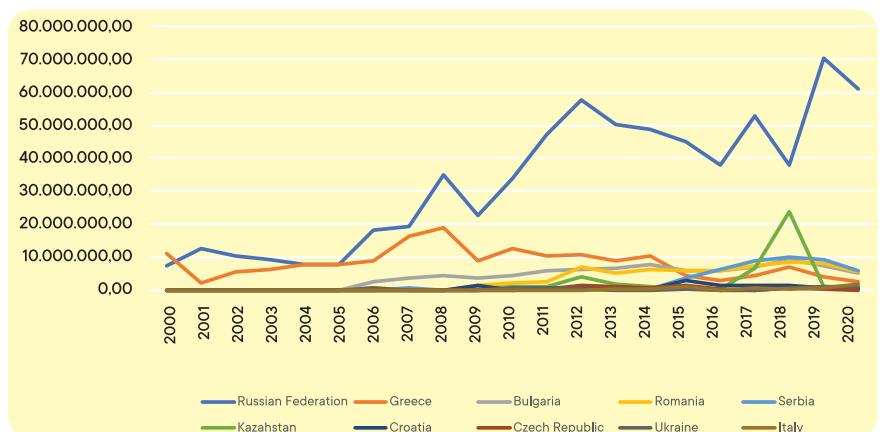


Chart 4 Top 10 importers of natural gas



How can North Macedonia help Ukraine?

North Macedonia has not developed a clear and systematically designed concept of collecting and delivering aid to Ukraine and the affected population. This indicates the lack of a coordinated and comprehensive strategic approach to the Ukrainian crisis, and the unwillingness of the institutions to take certain measures and actions on their own initiative.

All donations that North Macedonia announces or prepares for Ukraine, at the state level are not prepared on its own initiative or independently, but within the frames of NATO. This includes requests for military assistance. On February 28, 2022, the Minister of Defense announced that in coordination with the Allies, the country has received and is considering sending military assistance to Ukraine, according to its capabilities. However, there is no de-

¹² Ibid 15

tailed, official information on what exactly the aid will consist of and when it will be delivered¹³. In terms of humanitarian aid, it is collected and delivered so far only at the level of civil society organizations, private companies and individuals. Telephone lines and bank accounts have been opened for donation of funds, as well as points for collecting donations in clothes, hygiene items, food, etc.

Why is it important for Serbia to join the sanctions?

Serbia is the only country in Europe that did not join the sanctions against Russia¹⁴, but symbolically imposed sanctions on former President Yanukovich (these are the sanctions that the EU imposed in 2014)¹⁵. This is a worrying fact, not only for North Macedonia, but for the wider region and for Europe in general. There is a possibility for import of Russian products to Serbia, which would then be repackaged and sold as Serbian products. This would not only reduce the effectiveness of sanctions against Russia, but would pose a serious threat to consumer health due to a lack of control and insight into the quality and health aspects of the products.

An additional cause for concern is the constant and increased volume of flights between Serbia and Russia¹⁶. The Allies, as well as the European Union, must pay increased attention to potential violations of the sanctions' regime, both in the region and beyond.

Russian influence in Serbia is significant, given the fact that Serbia, besides Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina, is the only country in the region that is not a NATO member and has no such aspirations given historical developments. In this context, we should mention the "Serbian-Russian Humanitarian Centre" in Nis, the functioning of which has long been questionable, both for independent journalists in Serbia and for the security structures of other countries¹⁷¹⁸. The centre was established by a bilateral agreement between Serbia and Russia in 2009¹⁹, and confirmed three years later by a detailed agreement²⁰.

Is there a genuine pro-Russian sentiment in North Macedonia?

PRESPA Institute's Image Observatory shows that there is no original pro-Russian sentiment among the citizens of the country. It is a mixture of factors that give the impression of authentic and complete orientation in support of Putin's aggression on Ukraine.

13 <https://vlada.mk/node/27932>

14 <https://rs.n1info.com/english/news/daily-says-air-serbia-to-cut-flights-to-russia/>

15 <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2022/03/15/serbia-aligns-with-eu-sanctions-over-ukraine-for-first-time/>

16 <https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/news/serbia-doubles-number-of-flights-to-russia-despite-eus-ban-on-russian-aircraft/>

17 <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/12/24/bear-never-sleeps-position-serbian-russian-humanitarian-centre-nis/>

18 https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/russias-low-cost-influence-strategy-finds-success-in-serbia-with-the-help-of-fighter-jets-media-conspiracies-and-a-biker-gang/2018/10/03/49dbf48e-8f47-11e8-ae59-01880eac5f1d_story.html

19 http://demo.paragraf.rs/demo/combined/Old/t/t2010_11/t11_0332.htm

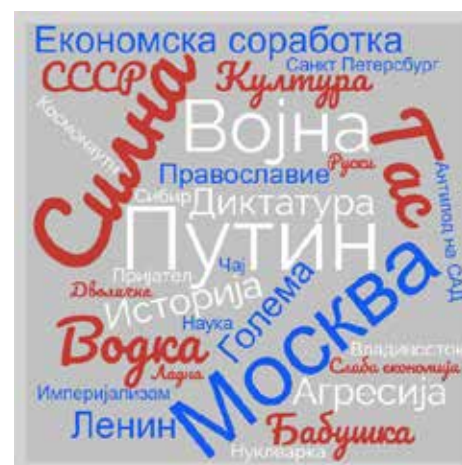
20 http://www.parlament.gov.rs/upload/archive/files/lat/pdf/predlozi_zakona/4123-12Lat.pdf

To the question “In general, which country or international alliance / union is the best friend of North Macedonia?”, Left to choose their own answer, without help or offered alternative answers, very few citizens choose Russia. In the Image Observatory for 2020, only 4.4% of citizens chose Russia, while in 2022, this percentage was halved. In a poll in January this year, only 2.2% voted for Russia. Among ethnic Macedonians, this year, only 3.5% recognize Russia as the country’s best friend. The percentage remains low, but far more interesting when the answer to the question is considered through the prism of party affiliation or ideological affiliation.

The voters of Levitsa expressed the highest support for Russia. As many as 6.9% of them recognize Russia as the best friend of the country. For the voters of Levitsa, Russia is the second choice for the best friend, right behind Serbia which is the choice of 68.1% of them. This political party was also the only one that did not vote for the Resolution²¹ of the Assembly of the Republic of Northern Macedonia condemning Russia’s invasion on Ukraine, had an official meeting with the Russian ambassador²² to the country and expressed public support for the invasion in an attempt to make a political point. For the voters of VMRO-DPMNE, Russia is the third choice for best friend, right behind Serbia for which 57.7% voted and the United States for 6.3%. Russia appears as a choice for best friend of the country and the SDSM voters. However, only 1.1% of their voters recognize Russia as North Macedonia’s best friend. For SDSM voters, Russia is the last choice for the country’s best friend, behind Serbia, the United States, Germany, the European Union, Turkey, Kosovo, Albania and NATO.

To understand the views of citizens expressed through surveys, the Image Observatory used qualitative research which showed that support for the European Union i.e., its recognition as the best friend of the country suffered the most damage due to the blockade of the enlargement process, support in dealing with the pandemic and the lack of condemnation or prevention of the narrative to which the Bulgarian public has been exposed in the last two years. For the citizens, the period of the last two years is a period of expressed hostility from Bulgaria, which did not meet with condemnation from the EU, which leads us to the narrative that “ *Serbia, as well as Russia are our Slavic brothers, Orthodox nations*”²³ or that despite the alliance of The United States, we “*have closer nations, with which we share history, identity, culture, values’ that should be our allies.*”²⁴

Additionally, the Image Observatory monitors associations for a number of countries. To the question “What is the first thing that comes to your mind when (state) is mentioned, that describes the state?” Macedonian citizens most often associate Russia and Ukraine with “Vladimir Putin” i.e., with “war”. Russia is also described by citizens as “Great”, “Orthodox”, “Military force”,



- 21 <https://plusinfo.mk/sobranieto-usvoi-deklaraci-a-osuda-na-voenite-napadi-vrz-ukraina/>
- 22 https://www.sobranie.mk/2020-2024-aktivnosti-ns_article-sredba-na-pratenikot-apasiev-so-ruskiot-ambasador-bazdnikin.nspj
- 23 "Facing Stable Democracies or a Road with an Uncoordinated Trajectory" International Presence Index Survey Report 2019, <https://tinyurl.com/3ilindex2019>
- 24 Focus group participant, Macedonian, highly educated, resident of the Pelagonija planning region

“Antipode of the United States”, but also as “Dictatorship”, “Hypocritical” and “Aggressor”. The associations of Ukraine link it to its past as a part of the “USSR” i.e., recognize it through its aggressive neighbour “Russia” or “Russian language”, and describe it as “Corrupt” and “Inferior”. Of course, there are associations that link it to “Natural resources”, “Economic opportunities”, “Cooperation”, etc.

The PRESPA Institute’s Impact and Image Observatory in its research found that Russia is highly profiled in the public discourse. In the period 2015–2020, Russia has seen a steady increase in the number of mentions in the news and media posts, while on social media, especially on Twitter, there has been an explosion. Analysing media reports, in the period from February 23rd i.e., one day before the Russian invasion, to March 9th, there are 27,463 media reports referring to Ukraine and only 2,467 reports referring to Russia. The largest number of media articles was made on March 1, 2,777 articles referring to Ukraine i.e., on March 3rd, 249 announcements referring to Russia.

In the absence of a qualitative analysis of the announcements and verification of the facts, it can be mentioned only that the source of the announcements are about 50 media and portals, and at the top are the portal and the daily newspaper Vecer, as well as the portals Kurir, Infomax and Local i.e., Kanal 5 TV.

Chart 5 News referring to Ukraine

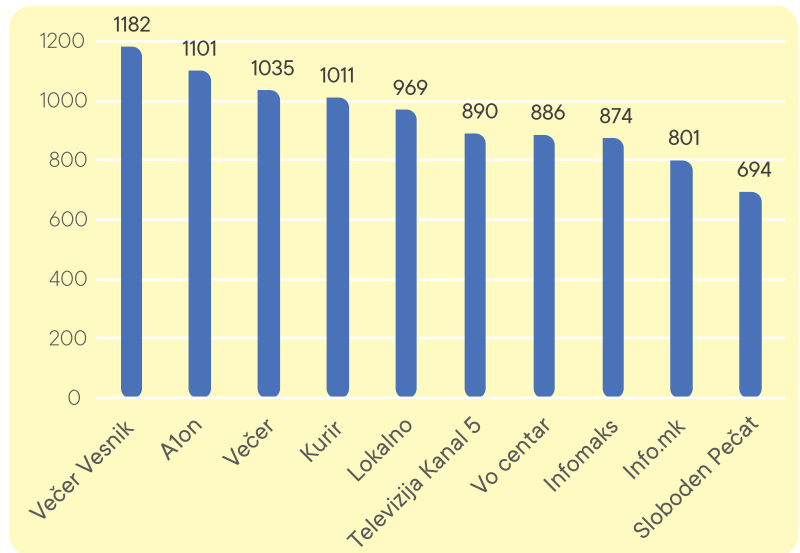
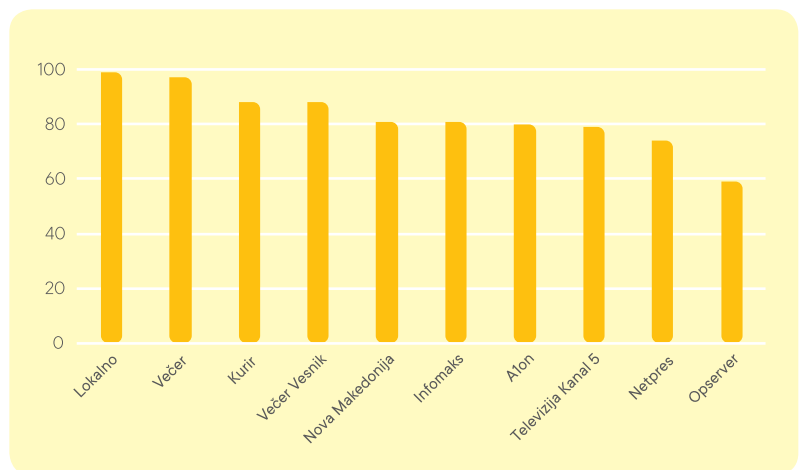


Chart 6 News referring to Russia



What is the European Union doing to help Ukraine?

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 put Ukraine on the agenda of the European Council and of the Council of the European Union. Since then, the two bodies have repeatedly referred to this issue, every six months, when considering the restrictive measures imposed on Russia. Shortly before the start of the invasion on 23rd February²⁵, the Council of the EU intensified its discussion

25 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/02/23/russian-recognition-of-the-non-government-controlled-areas-of-the-donetsk-and-luhansk-oblasts-of-ukraine-as-independent-entities-eu-adopts-package-of-sanctions/>

on Ukraine and imposed targeted sanctions against members of the Russian State Duma (Parliament of Russia), other individuals from Russia, as well as restrictions on economic relations with the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. and other economic restrictions on Russia and its government.

The longer Russia's offensive in Ukraine continues, the larger the bloc of states accepting and enforcing these sanctions against Putin's regime. Apart from the accession countries, such as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Montenegro, the sanctions are supported by many others, including neutral Switzerland. It's important to mention that the number of sanctions is also changing. The Council is constantly introducing new ones, increasing their intensity or their scope. New sanctions²⁶ were imposed on February 25th and 28th, followed by two additional packages on March 2nd and 9th.

The Union did not stop at restrictive measures. On the contrary, more and more of the actions taken show that this truly is a matter of the geopolitical European Commission and geopolitical Union. At an informal meeting of European leaders in Versailles²⁷ last week, in addition to reaffirming all the sanctions imposed and condemning the aggression, the Heads of State or Government of the member states discussed in detail all aspects of the impact of the invasion. In doing so, not only the member states were taken into account, but also the whole continent, Europe. Important elements of the conclusions are:

- the discussion and the set goals for the **development of the defense policy**, which includes: 1) increase of the investments in the defence and development of joint defence capacities; 2) encouraging the development and implementation of joint defence projects; 3) development of capacities for conducting peacekeeping missions and other defence activities; and 4) synergy between civilian, defence and space research and investment in new technologies.
- the discussion and the set goals for **reducing the energy dependence and the diversification of the import of oil and natural gas**, which will include: 1) accelerated reduction of the use and the total dependence on fossil fuels; 2) diversification of supply routes for natural gas and development of technology and conditions for use of biogas; 3) development of the hydrogen market in Europe; 4) strengthening the use of energy from renewable sources and full synchronization of the supply networks in Europe; 5) improved energy efficiency; and 6) urgent planning.

26 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/>

27 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/european-council/2022/03/10-11/>

- the set goals for **strengthening the economic base and reducing the strategic dependence**, which includes: 1) reducing the strategic dependence in the sectors of raw materials, semi-conductors, health, digital transformation and food; and 2) activity at European level through the implementation of projects of common interest.
- objectives for **increasing the level of strategic investments**, which will include: 1) acceleration, simplification and reform of the procedures for administrative approval of investment projects; 2) creating a simple and predictable regulatory framework for small and medium enterprises; 3) promotion of skills that correspond to the development of labour markets; 4) completion of the single market in all its components; 5) creating integrated, competitive and attractive European financial markets; etc.

As further confirmation that we see a new geopolitical Commission and geopolitical Union was the introduction of the “**temporary protection scheme**”²⁸ and the use of the “**European instrument of peace**”. In effect, the temporary protection scheme is a legal instrument that facilitates access to asylum for refugees, and enables them to determine their place of residence, access to the labour market, housing support, health care and access to education. On the other hand, the “European instrument of peace”²⁹ is a fund outside the EU budget, which was used for the first time as an instrument of military support. By decision of the member states, 500 MEUROs from the instrument were approved for the first time in the history of the Union for the purchase of military equipment in support of the Ukrainian army.

Finally, when we talk about the EU and the novelties in the Common Security and Defence Policy, then it is worth mentioning that as a result of the Russian invasion and the new situation, the Danish government³⁰ announced an Opt-In referendum, which will open the door for further policy development and creating a common defence. Meanwhile, following the developments, more than one member state is effectively changing its defence and cooperation policies. Many of these changes will initially have a greater impact on NATO than it will on the European Union, especially in the area of defence budget. However, the potential of future membership into NATO of the neutral states Finland and Sweden will drastically change the way the EU functions and works, and will substantially contribute to improving European security.

28 <https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/eu-ministers-activated-temporary-protection-directive-for-ukrainians/>

29 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/european-peace-facility/>

30 <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/03/07/explained-denmark-s-surprising-u-turn-on-the-eu-common-defence-policy>

Can Ukraine overtake us in the Accession Process?

The Versailles Summit opens a new chapter in enlargement policy. European leaders have recognized their aspirations to join the Union, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. In the conclusions, they call on the European Commission to take the necessary steps to elaborate an opinion on the possibility of the three countries joining. Membership will not happen soon enough³¹. However, enlargement policy will have to be modified to sustain the pressures of the political situation. A mitigating circumstance is the fact that the new enlargement methodology leaves room for political management of the actual negotiations.

Hence, the war is a challenge, but it can create an opportunity for North Macedonia, as part of the enlargement process to argue for the need to accelerate it, but also to join the debate at European level in order to achieve reduction of its energy dependence and thus more easily deal with the impact of the war and the economic crisis. On the other hand, membership applications are a challenge, but also an opportunity for the European Union to contribute to European and world peace, but more importantly to its own relevance, by properly managing the accession process and especially the negotiations.

Can other issues undermine the unity of the European Union?

The European Commission at the end of 2021 opened the possibility of cutting the portions from EU budget intended for those member states that do not adhere to the values of democracy and the rule of law. The measure mainly concerned Poland and Hungary, which have long been under the watchful eye of the Commission when it comes to achieving democratic standards. However, the current situation in Ukraine is expected to mitigate the EU's response, given the geopolitical position of Poland and Hungary, and the unity needed for Western economic sanctions to be effective in putting pressure on Russia. What is unequivocally clear is that all member states are clearly behind the positions of Poland and Slovakia, and less so of Hungary on Ukraine. In addition, Poland and Slovakia, and to a lesser extent Hungary, enjoy this forced consensus on Russia and the Eastern Partnership.

31 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/11/eu-dashes-ukraines-hopes-of-quick-membership>

Are we ready for a new wave of refugees?

According to the latest information, more than 3 million people have left Ukraine and sought asylum in neighbouring countries³². The UNHCR estimates that if hostilities continue in Ukraine, Europe could face “the biggest refugee crisis of the last century”³³. At the moment, the institutions of North Macedonia have expressed their willingness to accept refugees from Ukraine, but there are no concrete steps on how this would take place³⁴. According to the latest information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, assessments are still being made for the accommodation capacities³⁵. If necessary, there is a possibility to create new makeshift accommodation facilities. Numerous questions arise about the physical accommodation capacity, the discrimination faced by refugees in the country, and the early integration that would be needed if hostilities in Ukraine continued.

North Macedonia is a transit zone for most of the refugees entering its territory³⁶. At present, the assumption is that Ukrainian refugees would not head to North Macedonia. Three weeks after the start of hostilities in Ukraine, no asylum application has been submitted to our country by persons from Ukraine³⁷. According to the UNHCR, refugees are always sent to neighbouring countries first in order to be as close as possible to home, or to countries with a similar language and culture³⁸. However, taking into account the high numbers of refugees, the linguistic and geographical proximity between North Macedonia and Ukraine, as well as the openness of other Balkan countries to receive refugees from Ukraine, there is a real possibility that some of the refugees will head to our country. In that case, the state would be unprepared to deal with the influx. Let’s start with the fact that currently the Reception Centre for asylum seekers in Skopje has a capacity of only 150 people³⁹. This means that even the majority of Ukrainian refugees do not choose North Macedonia as a destination, if the institutions, in the near future, do not properly prepare for the potential wave of refugees, the small number that would potentially enter the country to seek asylum, would face serious obstacles.

On March 2, the Government adopted the Information on the situation with the citizens of our country in Ukraine and the need to take measures to receive Ukrainian citizens who are forced to leave their country⁴⁰. However, so far, no estimates have been published by any ministry that indicate what the capacities of our country would be. It is positive that the Government expresses a clear will to use the existing capacities and increase them if necessary. However, there is a lack of specific information about the actual capacities and how to approach the creation of the *ad hoc* solutions in case of increased number of refugees. On top of that, there is no talk of accepting citizens of other countries fleeing Ukraine, a topic that often appears in the

- 32 [Situation Ukraine Refugee Situation \(unhcr.org\)](#)
- 33 [Latest issues - The Refugee Brief \(unhcr.org\)](#): “UNHCR has warned that the number of refugees could reach 4 million or more in the coming months, making it Europe’s largest refugee crisis this century.”
- 34 <https://vlada.mk/node/27957>
- 35 <https://tinyurl.com/dwMKrefu>
- 36 [The condition with Asylum in RSM 2020 \(myla.org.mk\)](#) p. 8
- 37 Ibid 32
- 38 https://www.radiomof.mk/s-makedonija-se-podgotvuva-za-mozhna-begalska-kriza-nad-milion-ukrainci-ja-napushtija-zemjata/?fbclid=IwAR2p01juJSZ4o_Q8BHNF
- 39 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHFfxVBvNYE>
- 40 <https://vlada.mk/node/27957>

international media these days that alerts that at the border crossings between Ukraine and neighbouring countries there is discrimination against refugees living in Ukraine, and have the citizenship of a different country, such as international students.

The influence that the racial, religious or ethnic background of the refugees will have on the “*choice*” made by the police when entering the Reception and Transit Centres cannot be predicted. So far, the state has not come up with an assessment of the capacities, nor with a plan to increase the existing infrastructure for accepting refugees in case it is needed. The progress in recent years, of the legal remedies for asylum is also limited, despite the commitment of North Macedonia to increase the protection capacity of asylum seekers⁴¹ at the Global Refugee Forum in Geneva in 2019.

The shortcomings of the system that the state has established for the reception of refugees and the handling of asylum applications have already been recorded⁴². Even the Ombudsman estimated that the occurrence of discrimination and violation of the rights of asylum seekers occurs as a consequence of these shortcomings. Hence, in trying to escape the horrors of war, potential refugees coming to North Macedonia would face legal inaccuracies and a lack of standardized asylum procedures; lack of free legal aid for asylum seekers; vaguely defined criteria for entry into the Transit Centres Vinojug and Tabanovce, and the Reception Centre Vizbegovo.

Currently, most Ukrainian asylum seekers are women and children. These two groups have specific needs that the state needs to take into account. Hence, the most relevant is the issue of early integration i.e., guaranteeing the right to education, the right to work and the right to social protection of refugees. In the Reception Centre in Vizbegovo, the children’s right to education is satisfied and they attend classes⁴³. In the Transit Centres, however, access to education for refugee children is not always provided⁴⁴. The right of asylum seekers to access the labour market is hampered in North Macedonia in many respects. For example, an asylum seeker in North Macedonia is not entitled to a social security number, cannot be registered with an Employment Agency or open a bank account. In addition, the right to work of asylum seekers is inaccurately defined in the Law on International and Temporary Protection and there are inconsistencies with international standards to which the state is a signatory⁴⁵.

43 Ibid. 32

44 Ibid. 32

45 Ibid. 32

How can we deal more successfully with war and its effects?

There are many steps that can be taken. The war will have far-reaching consequences, and will have a very wide scope i.e., impact on many different sectors. In order to deal with the consequences more simply, we have singled out 10 plus 1 recommendations for the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and several line ministries i.e., administration bodies, as well as recommendations for the European Union.

- 1.** The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in anticipation of the potential refugee wave, shall urgently determine the accommodation facilities for receiving refugees from Ukraine, and to develop a detailed plan that will work on improving those shelters, addressing adequately opportunities for early integration, as well as legal inaccuracies and potential discrimination.
- 2.** The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Ministry of Economy, the Customs Administration, the State Market Inspectorate and other competent institutions, in the absence of Serbia joining the sanctions of the European Union and its allies, shall improve the control system of imports from Serbia, in order to thwart potential attempts to import Russian products repackaged as Serbian.
- 3.** The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shall continue the coordination with the allies within NATO, both in terms of collective defence and defence preparedness, as well as in terms of support for Ukraine's defence and assistance to Ukrainian citizens.
- 4.** The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Finance in order to support the economy and protect the citizens, shall develop and determine precise policies for control of prices of basic products and fuel, as well as to approach the creation of clear strategies for placement and support of the placement of products from the agricultural and pharmaceutical industry that were exported to the Russian and Ukrainian markets.
- 5.** The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Finance in order to assess the overall import dependence on Russian energy and participate in

the European dialogue shall prepare a new analysis, as well as to recommend urgent measures to modify the energy strategy.

- 6.** The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Secretariat for European Affairs shall identify priority projects programmed for funding through the Economic and Investment Plan, which refer to the green and digital transformation, such as the interconnector for natural gas between Greece and North Macedonia from “Alexandropolis”, as well as projects for supporting the transition from coal, with the aim of their immediate start and speedy completion, as a way to reduce import dependence on Russian gas.
- 7.** The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Secretariat for European Affairs shall identify projects that are programmed for funding through IPA-3, and could be reprogrammed in order to use the envisaged assistance to support policies that will help citizens in dealing with price shocks and economic consequences of the war.
- 8.** The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Secretariat for European Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs shall prepare a policy approach and talking points for participation in the political dialogue at the European Union level on energy diversification and reduction of the dependence on Russian natural gas.
- 9.** The European Commission, the Council of the European Union and the European Parliament shall take measures that will enable the countries from the accession process to be able to reprogram or reallocate i.e., start immediately the implementation of some of the programmed projects, in order to accelerate the green and digital transformation. diversification of sources and energy supply, as well as dealing with the consequences of the war on their economies.
- 10.** The European Council, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Parliament shall frame the dialogue on reducing dependence from Russian natural gas under the EU Green Deal and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and will open the dialogue on energy diversification for these countries, enabling them to use the “European Instrument for Peace” as an additional instrument to support these countries in dealing with the negative effects of joining the imposed sanctions.

11. The European Council, the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the European Parliament shall open accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania immediately, while also making a package of the countries that will potentially include Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, and within the framework of the methodology for accession negotiations move to accelerate those through political management of the process and ensure rapid accession of all countries from the package in order to prevent negative impacts from third countries and achieve full stabilisation of the continent.