EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Two years on

After two years of Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine, we take stock of shifting sentiments around Europe.

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13th time's the charm

As this week marks the two-year anniversary of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, EU ambassadors agreed on Wednesday on a 13th package of sanctions against Russia, writes *La Libre*. As underlined by the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU, this package will be amongst the most extensive sanction packages approved by the EU. The explanation for this comes from the extensive list of people and organisations whose assets in the EU will be frozen. An additional 200 people will be added to the already existing list of people who are directly affected by the sanctions imposed by the EU since the beginning of the war. The supply network for drone components that ends up in Russian possession and used on the battlefield in Ukraine is also sanctioned, affecting companies not only in Russia but also China and Turkey. The package was set to be released already last week but was delayed by Hungarian interventions. In addition to the new sanctions, the current sanctions were renewed for another six months.

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Start making sense

In the wake of his recent passing, Alexei Navalny's vocal opposition to Russia's military actions, particularly the war of aggression against Ukraine, has resurfaced in *Le Figaro*. Despite facing trial and subsequent imprisonment, Navalny continued to denounce the war as "the stupidest and most senseless" of the 21st century, attributing it to Vladimir Putin's ambitions of expanding Russia's influence. However, Navalny's legacy is not without controversy, especially regarding his past remarks that raised scepticism in Ukraine. While he fiercely criticised the Russian invasion, his previous statements on Ukrainian sovereignty and Crimea's status garnered mistrust among Ukrainians. Despite Navalny's condemnation of Putin's nationalist fervour, his stance highlighted complexities in his views, especially including the fact that Navalny for a long time considered himself a nationalist. As discussions surrounding Navalny's legacy and Russia's actions unfold, his multifaceted perspectives serve as a reminder of the intricate dynamics shaping geopolitical tensions in the region.

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Of two minds

With this weekend marking two years of Russia's war against Ukraine, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR) conducted a survey in twelve European countries on sentiments surrounding the invasion, as reported by *Spiegel*. On average, only 10% of those surveyed believed that Ukraine will win, while unfortunately 20% foresee a Russian victory. However, the largest group, representing 37% of respondents, believe that Russia and Ukraine will find some way to peace. To be clear, the exact parameters marking victory or peace were not defined. The principle that Ukraine should capture all of its territory has lost ground, on average, since last year as well. Furthermore, a staggering 50% or more of respondents in Romania, Italy, Greece and Hungary put the onus on Ukraine to negotiating peace rather than defending itself or pushing Russia to halt its assault. Despite this worrying change of sentiment, many Europeans still support Ukraine's self-defence and sovereignty. On a positive final note, a majority still recommend a political solution and an emphasis on "lasting peace," and that Europe should continue or strengthen its support should Donald Trump win the upcoming US election.

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Staying out of it?

In another timely survey conducted solely in Austria, citizens displayed some conflicting ideologies and complicated approaches to neutrality and even the defence of their own country, writes *Die Presse*. While 78% believe in maintaining Austrian neutrality, 51% believe that this neutrality has been undermined or eroded by supporting Ukraine, and only 15% supported doing away with neutrality and engaging in more robust security and defence policies. Policies aside, a whopping 41% said that they would not take up arms to defend their own country, though most do not fear a Russian incursion into Austria. Overall, two-thirds of Austrians are indeed worried about the war in general. The majority of Austrians believe that Russia's invasion is completely unjustified but 42% do not want to continue supporting Ukraine's defence, and about 25% reason that NATO "provoked" the invasion to begin with. Finally, the country is roughly divided on the effects of EU sanctions and their efficacy. Two years on, the opinions of this vital non-NATO state are widely varied and conflicted, though it remains to be seen how this will affect future policy.

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