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Ukraine's integration into the European strategic and industrial defence architecture

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Abstract:

This text analyses the transformation of Ukraine's role within European security and defence policy, especially following Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022. Far from being a short-term reaction, the European Union has adopted a long-term containment strategy based on economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and strengthening its eastern flank. In this context, Ukraine has evolved from a recipient of aid to an active strategic partner, particularly through its growing integration into the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). Industrial, technological, and financial cooperation between the EU and Ukraine has intensified through forums, innovative financial mechanisms, and the institutionalization of joint offices and projects, such as the Defence Innovation Office in Kyiv. This collaboration is also reflected in joint rearmament programs, accelerated technology transfer, and the co-development of military solutions adapted to real combat conditions. Ukraine's battlefield experience is now seen as a crucial asset for the doctrinal, operational, and industrial redesign of Europe's security framework. Finally, the *European Defence White Paper - Readiness 2030* solidifies Ukraine's status as a structural pillar in the emerging European security architecture, proposing its gradual integration into Europe's industrial, doctrinal, and strategic mechanisms - paving the way for a privileged partnership.

Keywords:

Ukraine, Defence, Integration, Autonomy, Industry, Resilience, Strategy.

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Introduction

Recent developments in Europe's position vis-à-vis the war in Ukraine are a clear demonstration of institutional resilience and strategic solidity in a context of high international uncertainty. In the face of alarmist predictions of a drift towards authoritarian populism or a fragmentation of Euro-Atlantic cohesion, EU member states have so far demonstrated a remarkable ability to maintain coherent policies of pressure on Russia, combining diplomatic, economic and technological tools.

In particular, the continuity of the economic and financial sanctions regime imposed on the Russian Federation since 2014—and substantially expanded following the launch of the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022—must be interpreted not merely as a situational response to a flagrant violation of international law, but as an essential component of a long-term strategy of containment against Russian geopolitical revisionism. This approach forms part of a doctrine of comprehensive deterrence, combining economic pressure, diplomatic isolation, and the strengthening of defensive capabilities on Europe's eastern flank.

As analyst Carme Colomina (CIDOB) has pointed out, the war has acted as a catalyst for an unprecedented "European geopolitical unity", causing a drastic shift in the defence policies of key actors such as Berlin and Brussels (Colomina, 2023). This transformation has been instrumental in framing Ukraine as a strategic partner rather than a mere recipient of aid.

The war context leading to the sanctions regime

As British historian Timothy Garton Ash has noted, 'Ukraine faces a long and arduous struggle to achieve a just and lasting peace', so it is not enough to contain Russia: it is imperative to sustain prolonged political, military and financial support for Kiev to prevent an uneasy peace from legitimising aggression and eroding the principles of international order (Garton Ash, 2025).

Since the illegal annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the European Union, in coordination with the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia, and other partners, has adopted multiple sanction packages, including restrictive measures against individuals and legal entities, a ban on the export of sensitive technologies, restrictions on the financing of Russian sovereign debt, and the exclusion of Russian banks from the SWIFT system. From February 2022 onwards, the intensity and scope of these sanctions multiplied: by May 2025, the EU had approved 17 sanction packages, including progressive embargoes on hydrocarbons, enhanced control of dual-use exports, and measures directed against the so-called "shadow fleet" facilitating the illegal trade of Russian crude.

The impact of these sanctions has been significant. According to World Bank and IMF estimates, Russian GDP fell by 2.1% in 2022, and although it showed signs of relative resilience in 2023 and 2024 thanks to energy revenues and trade with countries such as China, India and Turkey, access to advanced technologies has been severely restricted and it faces the current year with severe drops in output¹. The loss of Western components has slowed strategic sectors such as defence, aviation and microelectronics. In addition, the capital and brain drain has weakened the country's economic fabric in the medium term. Even though Russia has in practice adopted a "war economy" model, the macro parameters of the Russian economy are worrying in the medium term.



From a strategic point of view, sanctions aim to degrade the Russian state's capacity to sustain a protracted war and limit its room for manoeuvre to engage in further destabilising actions in the post-Soviet space. It is not, therefore, a matter of retroactively punishing behaviour, but of imposing increasing costs on an authoritarian-expansionist model that threatens the stability of the European continent. In doctrinal terms, this logic is in line with what some analysts describe as "*strategic denial*", i.e. preventing a hostile actor from rebuilding its coercive power apparatus without resorting to direct military confrontation. As Lawrence Freedman quotes in *Strategy: A*

¹ <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/el-fmi-eleva-cuatro-décimas-el-crecimiento-de-rusia-para-2024%2C-hasta-el-3%2C6-%25/87776208>

History (2013), "*....denial, not merely deterrence, is often the more tangible strategic goal when facing a potential aggressor*".

Finally, the sanctions strategy is complemented by positive measures aimed at strengthening the resilience of Russia's neighbouring states, in particular Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, through privileged access to financing, energy cooperation, structural reforms and possible accelerated integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. Sanctions thus become one of the pillars of a two-pronged approach: containing the aggressor and strengthening the victims of imperial revisionism.

Equally important, the sanctions regime is legitimised not only by the decision-making bodies, but also through consolidated social support. The autumn 2024 Eurobarometer shows that 71 per cent of European citizens support maintaining sanctions, which gives European political leaders a tacit mandate to uphold firm policies towards the Kremlin, even in the face of recent foreign policy reversals by allies such as the United States². This dimension of democratic legitimacy strengthens Europe's position in multilateral fora and limits the room for manoeuvre of those actors who advocate a premature normalisation of relations with Moscow.

Within this framework, European capitals have intensified their coordination with key transatlantic partners, without relinquishing their incipient strategic autonomy. European diplomacy has underlined the need for a firm and cohesive response, as was made evident at the multilateral summit held in London in March 2025, which brought together more than thirty countries, including NATO members and allies of Ukraine. On that occasion, both the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Keith Starmer, and the new Federal Chancellor of Germany, Friedrich Merz, concurred in stating that any relaxation of the sanctions regime, without a credible political resolution of the conflict, would constitute a serious error that would compromise not only European security but also the credibility of international law.³

In sum, the positions adopted by the EU Member States reflect a strategic maturity of their liberal democracies in the face of a prolonged crisis that threatens to reshape the global balance of power. The defence of the sanctions regime must not be interpreted merely as a tactical reaction to Russian aggression, but as a key element in preserving the rules-based international order, in which sovereignty, territorial integrity, and multilateralism are fundamental pillars. Nor should the value of the current sanctions regime be overlooked in a potential negotiation scenario to reach a peace agreement.

² <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/3215>

³ <https://es.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/03/02/europa-acuerda-medidas-para-la-paz-en-ucrania-pero-necesita-el-apoyo-de-eeuu>

In this sense, Ukraine is not only a theatre of conflict, but a symbol of resistance and reaffirmation of the fundamental values of the European project.



Image 2 Source: NDTV

The US sanctions regime against Russia

Although not the primary focus of this document, it is essential to address the sanctions regime applied by the United States to Russia due to its convergence with European measures and its implications for policy towards Ukraine and its defence needs.

Since the illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, the United States has developed a comprehensive and sophisticated sanctions regime against the Russian Federation. Under the leadership of the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC)⁴, the US regime has evolved from a reactive set of measures into a structural web of individual, sectoral and secondary sanctions, with legislative backing and extraterritorial reach.

The starting point was President Obama's issuance of executive orders, followed by the enactment of the *Ukraine Freedom Support Act* (2014)⁵ and, subsequently, the *Countering*

⁴ The US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control ("OFAC") administers and enforces economic and trade sanctions based on US foreign policy and national security objectives against targeted foreign countries and regimes, terrorists, international drug traffickers, those involved in activities related to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and other threats to the national security, foreign policy or economy of the United States.

⁵ <https://www.congress.gov/113/plaws/publ272/PLAW-113publ272.pdf>

*America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA, 2017)*⁶, which expanded Congress's sanctioning powers and unified sanctions in the financial, energy and defence sectors. Following the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Biden administration intensified these measures, including the exclusion of Russian banks from the SWIFT system, the freezing of Russian Central Bank assets abroad, and widespread restrictions on high-tech trade, especially in semiconductors and industrial software.

The US approach is characterised by its ability to impose secondary sanctions on third countries or companies that make it easier for the regime to circumvent sanctions. This extraterritorial dimension is one of the main points of divergence with the EU, whose system is based on intergovernmental consensus and lacks legal instruments comparable to those of OFAC. Moreover, while the EU prioritises political cohesion and multilateral legitimacy, the US applies its sanctions with greater tactical flexibility and enforcement capacity.

Another relevant difference lies in the energy dimension. While both actors have implemented partial embargoes on Russian hydrocarbons, the exposure of several European countries to energy dependence hindered the immediate application of more severe measures, such as a total embargo on Russian natural gas. The United States, by contrast, being a net energy exporter, has adopted a stricter stance, including the prohibition of imports of crude oil and refined products from Russia since March 2022.



Image 2 Source: Ukraine World's Congress

⁶ <https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ44/PLAW-115publ44.pdf>

Despite these differences, the US sanctions regime coordinates closely with its European partners at the operational and strategic level, especially in the design of lists of sanctioned individuals and entities, and in the monitoring of frozen assets. Convergence has increased since 2023 through joint initiatives in the G7 aimed at exploiting the profits generated by frozen Russian assets as a source of funding for Ukraine.

The arrival of the new Trump administration in the White House has so far not changed the sanctions regime in place.

The road to integration of Ukraine's defence industry

One of the most strategically significant yet frequently underestimated developments in the context of the conflict between Ukraine and the Russian Federation is the progressive and intense integration of Ukraine's defence industry into the European Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). This dynamic should not be understood as a symbolic gesture of political solidarity, but rather as the materialisation of a long-term structural cooperation, aimed at reinforcing both Ukrainian resilience and European strategic autonomy in the defence sector. Unlike past assistance-based approaches, the prevailing logic is founded on the principle of reciprocity: Ukraine gains self-sufficiency, and Europe secures access to technological and operational capabilities developed under real wartime conditions—a win-win scenario.

The war in Ukraine has served as an unprecedented accelerator of military innovation in twenty-first century Europe. The Ukrainian imperative to survive, resist, and adapt has driven the urgent development of highly sophisticated tactical and technological solutions, many of which are now rapidly transferring to the European industry through direct partnerships. This phenomenon is transforming the nature of cooperation: it is no longer solely about integrating Ukraine into existing frameworks but about enabling Ukraine—through its practical combat experience—to reshape aspects of the European operational paradigm. This is the true shift.

Since 2023, the Ukrainian government has promoted a series of initiatives to internationalise its defence industrial and technological base. One of the most significant milestones was the EU-Ukraine Defence Industries Forum in May 2024, which marked the beginning of a new phase of institutionalised cooperation.⁷ This forum not only brought together high-level government and

⁷ [Joint press release: EU-Ukraine Defence Industries Forum bolsters cooperation between Ukrainian and European defence industries - European Commission](#)

business actors, but also served to lay the foundations for shared governance of industrial processes linked to the war effort and post-conflict reconstruction.

In September 2024, the opening of the EU Defence Innovation Office in Kyiv was a decisive step in consolidating these dynamics⁸. This office has been established with the intention of being a strategic coordination node to facilitate the flow of information, mutual recognition of capabilities and the promotion of joint initiatives in defence R&D and innovation. Its design responds to a logic of functional polycentrism: it acts simultaneously as an institutional contact point, a technological intelligence centre and a facilitator of access by Ukrainian actors to EU funds and programmes. In addition to serving as an operational interface, this office symbolises a conceptual shift in the relationship between Ukraine and the EU. For the first time, Ukraine is being seen not only as a security beneficiary, but as an active provider of solutions, technologies and practices relevant to the entire Union. The participation of start-ups, technology centres and armed forces in these exchanges shapes a dense network of cross-border collaboration with long-term implications for European defence governance.

Moreover, the European contribution to sustaining the Ukrainian war effort is not limited to the logistical and technical field. Financial resources of unprecedented magnitude have also been mobilised through instruments such as the European Peace Facility, and the EUR 50 billion Ukraine Facility.⁹ The latter operates as a hybrid loan and grant platform, designed not only to strengthen Ukrainian resilience, but also to foster its progressive institutional integration into the EU's normative and functional acquis.¹⁰

⁸ [Defence Cooperation with Ukraine strengthened as EU Defence Innovation Office opens in Kyiv](#)

⁹ [European Peace Facility - Consilium](#)

¹⁰ [Ukraine Facility - European Commission](#)

<u>Type of assistance</u>	<u>Approximate Amount</u> (€)	<u>Main Source</u>
Military	54 billion	Includes €6.1 billion from the European Peace Facility and €44.2 billion in bilateral contributions from EU member states.
Financial and Humanitarian	82 billion	It comprises €31.5 billion in direct financial assistance, €27.3 billion mobilised through the Ukraine Facility, €13.2 billion in contributions from Member States, and €4.8 billion in humanitarian aid.
Support for Ukrainian Refugees in the EU	131 billion	Expenditure by EU member states to support approximately 4.4 million Ukrainian refugees.
Estimated Total EU and its Members	267 billion	Sum of the above categories.

Source: European Commission. Eurostat.

The financial key

A particularly innovative aspect of this mechanism is the partial financing through the profits generated by Russian assets frozen on European territory.¹¹ In this context, the so-called "Danish model" represents a novel formula applied to collective security. Under this model, Denmark acts as a fiduciary intermediary, managing the interest generated by the frozen assets and reinjecting it into defence, logistics and reconstruction programmes in Ukraine. This strategy combines principles of financial legality, fiduciary responsibility and strategic solidarity, making it a pioneering instrument of financial engineering that contributes to European security.¹²

In addition to providing liquidity without committing additional budgetary resources of member states, the model represents a proportionate legal response to aggression, in line with Article 41 of the EU Treaty.¹³ and the legal frameworks of international humanitarian law. Some countries advocate further steps in this direction; however, there is no unanimity on this issue.

¹¹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/02/12/use-of-windfall-profits-from-immobilised-russian-assets/>

¹² <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/>

¹³ Article 41 TEU allows the use of voluntary or extra-budgetary contributions to finance defence operations, without violating the EU legal framework.

Other initiatives such as Finland's ammunition shipment, financed by interest on these assets, indicate a qualitative shift in the way strategic resources are mobilised in the European framework.

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It is important to underline that these figures do not include the vast bilateral assistance provided by member states, which together far exceeds the common funds channelled from Brussels.¹⁵ . Thus, a multilevel architecture of assistance is configured, in which state actors, multilateral agencies and private companies converge under a logic of strategic co-responsibility.

In the current context of redefining European security priorities, continental rearmament faces structural limitations of various kinds: scarcity of industrial capabilities, bottlenecks in the supply chain, regulatory fragmentation and budgetary restrictions in several Member States. In this scenario, the different cooperation formats developed with Ukraine can be valuable references for designing more efficient, flexible and sustainable models of defence capability building. More than an isolated case, collaboration with Ukraine is becoming a strategic laboratory for industrial integration, accelerated innovation and shared acquisition of military means.

A particularly illustrative example of this collaborative efficiency is the joint acquisition, by Sweden and Denmark, of CV-90 combat vehicles, which included 40 additional units for the Ukrainian army.¹⁶ . This operation not only reduced unit costs through economies of scale, but also favoured technical and logistical interoperability between allies, and demonstrated the feasibility of using multinational platforms to meet the needs of third countries strategically relevant to European security.

Such formulas may be particularly applicable in regions like the Baltic States, where, despite some countries—such as Estonia—allocating more than 5 % of their GDP to defence, absolute economic scale limitations hinder access to high-end air-defence and anti-missile systems. Including Ukrainian needs in joint procurement programmes opens the door to co-financing schemes, decentralised production, and modular deployment, which may be replicated or adapted to other geographical contexts with similar structural constraints. Why not consider similar formulas among other EU countries with comparably small defence budgets, shared specific threats, and corresponding capability needs?

Another example of this logic is provided by the Swedish Defence Materiel Administration's deployment of a direct presence in Ukraine to support more agile and effective procurement and technical assistance processes. This deployment marks a significant institutional advance, as it

¹⁴ [Finland sends Ukraine ammo funded by frozen Russian assets | Yle News](#) | Yle

¹⁵ [EU Assistance to Ukraine \(in U.S. Dollars\) | EEAS](#)

¹⁶ [Joint infantry fighting vehicle procurement worth SEK 25 billion signed - Government.se](#)

allows innovative co-development methodologies—such as so-called "military challenges"¹⁷, through which emerging and technology companies are invited to propose disruptive and rapidly deployable solutions to meet specific operational needs on the battlefield.¹⁸

Implications for strategy

This approach, focused on operational demand and agility of response, has generated a virtuous dynamic of mission-driven innovation, in which time becomes the main vector of urgency, over and above traditional budgetary logic. The Ukrainian conflict is therefore precipitating not only a doctrinal review of Europe's strategic priorities, but also a profound mutation in its defence acquisition and technological development processes.

At the same time, major industrial players on the continent, such as Rheinmetall (Germany) or Thales (France), together with a growing number of SMEs and start-ups, have started to establish joint ventures with Ukrainian partners. Some of these initiatives are even being deployed on Ukrainian territory, which is a significant commitment to decentralisation of production and operational resilience in areas of active conflict¹⁹. This contrasts with the traditional slowness and complexity of defence industrial cooperation projects within the EU itself and offers valuable lessons on how to accelerate decision-making and simplify shared governance in times of crisis.

Among the most emblematic cases are a Baltic startup dedicated to the development of low-cost, high-production-capacity missile systems, and a Finnish company collaborating with Ukraine on artificial intelligence-based solutions for autonomous drones²⁰. Both examples illustrate how Europe's innovative ecosystem is benefiting from the extreme learning environment of conflict, generating capabilities that could redefine the balance between effectiveness, speed and affordability in Europe's future defence systems.²¹

In reference to our country, the company TECNOVE, specialised in vehicle armouring, has established an alliance with the Ukrainian company Practika to create a joint venture called Human & Safe Systems in Herencia (Ciudad Real). This 30,000 m² plant will manufacture tactical armoured vehicles with an estimated capacity of up to 40 units per month. Production will be carried out with national suppliers, including Escribano EM&E for the turrets²². The agreement was signed during the last International Defence Fair (FEINDEF) held in Madrid in May (12-14).

¹⁷ [Ny utmaning möjliggör innovativt stöd till Ukraina](#)

¹⁸ <https://www.government.se/government-policy/swedens-support-to-ukraine/>

¹⁹ [Integrated Arsenals? Mapping Defence Industrial Relations Between Europe and Ukraine](#)

²⁰ [Frankenburg Technologies - Tech to Win the War](#)

²¹ [Summa Defence and Ukrainian company Griselda form joint venture](#)

²² https://www.eldebate.com/espana/defensa/20250517/ucrania-cierra-acuerdos-empresas-espanolas-defensa-como-suministradores-directos_297712.html

Escribano EM&E itself has signed a memorandum of understanding with Ukroboronprom, the Ukrainian state consortium, to supply Guardian 30 remote weapon stations to modernise Ukrainian armoured vehicles and announces that possibilities are being explored to establish a local production line in Ukraine. Indra is evaluating the opening of an office in Ukraine to collaborate in the development of drones and countermeasure systems. Finally, Instalaza has held meetings with Ukrainian representatives to discuss the procurement of military equipment, including C90 rocket launchers and other weapons systems. This interaction between European and Ukrainian industrial, technological and military actors not only improves Ukraine's production capacity in the short term, but also allows for a direct transfer of operational knowledge from the battlefield. This empirical knowledge, derived from real combat situations, becomes a source of comparative advantage for Europe, allowing it to anticipate trends, adapt doctrines and reduce its technological dependence on extra-regional partners such as the United States. In short, cooperation with Ukraine is not only a conjunctural necessity, but a structural investment in the transformation of the European security and defence paradigm.²³

The EU-Ukraine relationship in the *White Paper on European Defence - Preparing for 2030*

The *White Paper on European Defence*²⁴, presented in March 2025 by Commissioner Andrius Kubilius and High Representative Kaja Kallas, aims to establish for the first time a comprehensive strategic vision of the defence industry and market at EU level, framing Ukraine as an indispensable partner in the security architecture of the European continent. The ongoing conflict has radically transformed European perceptions of the margins of action in security and defence, and the document (which can only address normatively what are EU competences, i.e. industry and markets) reflects this conceptual shift.

²³ https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/ARES_2024_12_107_Ukraine_Defence_Industry_PolicyPaper.pdf?utm_source=substack&utm_medium=email

²⁴ https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6d5db69-e0ab-4bec-9dc0-3867b4373019_en?filename=White%20paper%20for%20European%20defence%20-%20Readiness%202030.pdf



The *White Paper* recognises Ukraine not simply as a recipient of military assistance, but as an essential operational node in the development of a shared defence industrial and technological base. Ukraine's experience in conventional and asymmetric warfare, its rapid technological adaptation on the battlefield, and the flexibility of its military industry are seen as strategic assets. Consequently, their progressive (though not formal) integration into European Defence Fund (EDF) programmes, the Military Mobility Action Plan and dual innovation initiatives is proposed.

This approach is not merely tactical. The paper notes that the survival of the Ukrainian state is linked to the maintenance of a collective security architecture that must go beyond the borders of the European Union. In this sense, cooperation with Ukraine acts as a lever for transforming the very concept of "strategic autonomy", which is no longer understood exclusively as self-sufficiency vis-à-vis third parties, but as resilience shared with strategic partners.

One of the most innovative sections of the *White Paper*, section 5 "**Increasing military support to Ukraine (Porcupine strategy)**" proposes the opening of "industrial integration gateways" between Ukrainian companies and European defence manufacturers. It envisages facilitating Ukraine's participation in multinational consortia within the framework of the European Defence Fund (currently underfunded at €1 billion), and its eligibility for competitive calls for military innovation. This would include everything from the co-development of ground and airborne platforms to collaboration on unmanned systems, electronic warfare and artificial intelligence.

In addition, the need to establish a European Agency for Reconstruction and Security for Ukraine, whose function would be to coordinate the reconstruction of the Ukrainian military industrial complex with criteria of interoperability and technical standardisation with European and NATO standards, is already being considered in a possible post-conflict scenario.

From a doctrinal perspective, the *White Paper* suggests that the war in Ukraine has redefined the traditional parameters of deterrence and territorial defence. Ukraine represents the first case in the post-Cold War era in which a non-EU, non-NATO country acts as the first line of defence of the European order. This fact forces a rethink of collective security instruments: from rapid response capabilities to command structures, interoperability schemes and logistics in high-intensity areas. This is the essential debate that will have to be put on the table sooner rather than later.

The EU-Ukraine relationship, as defined in the *White Paper on European Defence - Preparedness 2030*, transcends the framework of solidarity and moves squarely into the realm of what might be called 'strategic co-determination'. Ukraine is no longer just a recipient of defence assistance, but a transformative agent of European military thinking. In this sense, the *White Paper* lays the foundations for a structural security cooperation that could anticipate, in the medium term, forms of privileged strategic partnership even before Ukraine's eventual formal accession to the EU, which, for now, seems a long way off.

Conclusions

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine acts as a catalyst for a potential structural transformation in the EU's security and defence policy. Far from being merely a tactical or temporary response, the continuity of economic and financial sanctions imposed on Moscow since 2014 (and substantially reinforced after the 2022 invasion) has proven to be an essential element in a long-term containment strategy. This approach does not seek merely to penalise Russia's actions, but to steadily erode its ability to project power and threaten European order.

In this context, the progressive integration of Ukraine into the nascent European Defence Technological and Industrial Base, despite its limited scope, represents a pivotal milestone in the evolution of the European defence paradigm. No longer is the relationship based on assistance alone, but on strategic reciprocity. Ukraine contributes operational knowledge, battlefield-derived technological innovation, and organisational resilience, while the EU provides access to programmes, funding, and markets. This symbiosis strengthens not only Ukraine's resilience, but also Europe's strategic autonomy in the military-industrial domain.

Similarly, the conflict has given the European defence industry access to an unprecedented innovation laboratory. The Ukrainian experience is being actively integrated by European manufacturers, from large consortia to start-ups, in the design of systems that are more efficient, cost-effective and adaptable to new hybrid threats. This interaction is transforming military acquisition and development methodologies within the EU itself, making them more agile and efficient.

The financial framework adopted to support Ukraine also represents an unprecedented advancement. Instruments such as the European Peace Facility and the Ukraine Facility, strengthened by the use of interest accrued from frozen Russian assets, have opened innovative pathways to economic sustainability and shared responsibility. This approach has sustained Ukraine's war effort while simultaneously establishing a potentially replicable model for future crises.

Finally, the *White Paper on European Defence - Preparedness 2030* consolidates and projects this relationship into the future, integrating Ukraine as a structural pillar of the new European security system yet to be defined. Far from being a peripheral appendage, Ukraine emerges as a co-determining actor in the continental strategic agenda. Its experience not only conditions European operational planning, but also drives doctrinal redefinition and governance of the defence ecosystem.

In sum, the EU–Ukraine relationship has ceased to be a matter of assistance and has become a structured alliance based on shared interests, mutual responsibilities, and a common strategic vision.

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