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## Institutional constraints and reform: European Union's responses to the Ukraine conflict challenges

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### Abstract

To fill the gap in the previous studies, the study aims to examine the institutional constraints and reform of the EU in response to the Ukraine conflict. Employing a combination of institutional economics approaches with geopolitical perspectives, the study finds that the EU should prioritize strengthening its institutional resilience and enhancing strategic autonomy to safeguard its interests and take a proactive role in shaping the global order. Aligning diverse policy interest groups with the common security and foreign policy of the EU can foster greater cohesion in foreign and security affairs. Furthermore, the study also uses a mathematical-logical framework to address institutional reform in response to external shocks, considering several factors such as institutional entrepreneurship, transaction costs, path dependence, and more coherent policy interests of member states for its adaptive efficiency. The institutional reform needs to address some institutional constraints of the EU, such as limited military capabilities, diverse policy interest groups, energy dependence on Russia, and geopolitical factors such as the global rivalry between the USA and China.

**Keywords:** EU, Foreign and security policy, Institutional constraints, Institutional reform, Ukraine conflict.

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### 1. Introduction

The ongoing "Ukraine conflict" pertains to Ukraine's geopolitical and territorial disagreement, which was instigated by the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, subsequently leading to armed hostilities in the eastern areas of the nation. The ongoing battle has resulted in increased tensions between Russia and Western nations, triggering a broader power struggle. The occurrence of this conflict has resulted in a significant humanitarian crisis, leading to the displacement of individuals and extensive damage to properties. Various diplomatic endeavors, such as the Minsk agreements, have been implemented

to ensure the establishment of peace. However, the persistence of this conflict can be attributed to intricate historical and geopolitical factors. According to [Bicchi \[1\]](#), the conflict has engendered a substantial corpus of scholarly works that clarify the various institutional obstacles and prospects encountered by the EU in dealing with this conflict.

The study significantly contributes by filling a substantial gap in earlier research. In response to the conflict in Ukraine, it builds a logical-mathematical framework for institutional reform in the EU with the overarching goal of promoting regional peace and advancement. This innovative strategy offers a proven and organized framework for handling challenging geopolitical situations by applying the relevant methodologies and recommendations for more effective policy creation and institutional reform in the EU.

This study conducts a comprehensive examination of the impact of the Ukraine conflict on the foreign policy and security of the EU, using both an institutional economics approach and a geopolitical perspective, with a key focus on the institutional constraints on the EU's common foreign and security policy. By employing qualitative methods, such as an extensive review of theoretical and empirical literature related to EU institutions, the study clarifies a wide range of sources to examine the institutional structures and decision-making processes of the EU in response to the Ukraine conflict [\[2, 3\]](#).

In addition, an institutional economics approach is employed to examine the institutional constraints, foreign and security policies of the EU in responding to the Ukraine conflict. The conceptual frameworks such as path dependence, institutional entrepreneurship, and institutional resilience theories are the vantage points for analyzing different policy interest groups of EU members, as well as conflicts of interest, causing the disunity of the common security and foreign policies of the EU.

In addition to the introduction, the study consists of four sections. Section 2 clarifies the study methodologies. Section 3 deals with the literature review. Section 4 analyzes the institutional constraints and mathematical-logical framework for the institutional reform of the EU in response to the Ukraine conflict. Section 5 concludes.

## **2. Study Methodologies**

The study employed qualitative methodology to identify institutional constraints and analyze how EU institutional reform is needed to address these constraints for a more coherent foreign and security policy in response to the challenges posed by the Ukraine conflict. Qualitative methods include primary and secondary data, conducting interviews with EU officers, specialists, and stakeholders to acquire insights into their viewpoints and reviews. Furthermore, reviewing relevant files, coverage reviews, and legal statements can provide valuable textual statistics for in-depth examination. Qualitative methods help to uncover the subtle factors impacting EU institutional change, shedding light on the processes of institutional reform in the context of the Ukraine conflict.

The study utilizes an analytical framework based on institutional economics to examine the institutional limitations faced by the European Union in relation to the Ukraine conflict. The institutional constraints consist of limited military spending capabilities, diverse policy interest groups, energy dependence on Russia, and geopolitical competition between China and the United States. Finally, the study provides a valuable addition to the development of a mathematical-logical framework for institutional reform of the EU in response to external shocks caused by the Ukraine conflict, which can provide policy implications such as the need for institutional entrepreneurship for a more coherent foreign and security policy of the EU.

## **3. Literature Review**

### **3.1. Empirical Review**

The conflict in Ukraine in 2014 caused geopolitical foreign and security challenges to EU foreign and security policy. The EU's goal is to strengthen its institutional resilience to deal with external shocks like this conflict. Nevertheless, the rapidly evolving situation escalated into a conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which necessitates stronger institutional reforms to address the constraints faced by the EU, along with its implications for European security and the challenges confronting the process of European integration.

The previous studies have focused on specific aspects of the Ukraine conflict and their implications for EU foreign policy and security. [Brack \[4\]](#) has examined the EU's energy security dilemmas in the context of the Ukraine conflict. [Juncos \[5\]](#) critically analyzes the emergence and prevalence of resilience discourses within the context of EU foreign policy. The EU Global Strategy (EUGS) prioritizes the development of state and social resilience in its neighboring regions as a crucial strategic objective of the EU. The EU Global Strategy (EUGS) incorporates the concept of resilience-building while also highlighting the importance of flexibility, customized approaches, local ownership, capacity-building, and comprehensiveness. The new European Union Global Strategy (EUGS) introduces the concept of "principled pragmatism" as a fundamental guiding principle in its approach to foreign policy. The observation implies a potential shift towards a more practical approach to EU foreign policy. However, upon closer analysis of the language surrounding the EU Global Strategy, notable conflicts arise between a practical and an ethical foreign policy. These conflicts ultimately diminish the effectiveness of resilience-building as a novel foreign policy framework. [Anghel and Jones \[6\]](#) argue that the EU's response to the COVID-19 epidemic highlighted changes and continuity in the European project's structure and functioning, and how European responses to the pandemic compare with those that occurred following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The study finds that there are more differences than similarities. The same actors do not always play the major role; European solidarity can be more difficult to engineer, and the requirements for making the entire effort more resilient can point in various directions, where the EU is a unique multi-level, multi-faceted actor that can adapt to changing circumstances. Furthermore, [Maranzano and Romano \[7\]](#) conducted a comprehensive examination of the economic measures adopted by the EU in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the subsequent inflationary conflict in 2021-2022. The study

employed both qualitative and quantitative analyses to assess the effectiveness and impact of these policies. A comprehensive examination is undertaken to analyze the macroeconomic and structural impacts of the pandemic and inflation throughout Italy, France, Germany, Spain, and the Eurozone. By conducting a comparative analysis of the financial and economic crises that occurred during the 2007-2009 period and the two subsequent crises in 2020-2022, it becomes evident that European Union (EU) institutions have implemented changes in their strategies for handling socioeconomic shocks and crises. The onset of the inflationary conflict predates the Russia-Ukraine conflict and can be attributed to the techno-economic shift triggered by the competition for commodities and the extensive global value chains. Nonetheless, the lack of a unified European public economic policy centered around a shared public budget could potentially amplify the underlying structural issues that the EU needs to confront. Specifically, this pertains to the problems posed by the green and digital transition, as well as the global geopolitical realignments. The longevity of the EU is contingent upon the decision to either assume a prominent worldwide role with a unified economic and fiscal framework or prioritize domestic individualism, thereby diminishing its impact.

Rhinard, et al. [8] clarifies that the EU is confronted with a range of crises that surpass the immediate difficulties posed by Covid-19, Brexit, the Eurozone, and mass migration, ultimately striking at the fundamental essence of the EU. This work adopts a structural perspective rather than focusing on specific events to comprehensively examine all facets of the EU in a state of conflict. It further scrutinizes the consequences of these crises for both the EU as an entity and its individual member states. The crises and challenges encountered by the EU are no longer isolated and distinct incidents; rather, they should be comprehended as enduring circumstances that have altered the dynamics among member states, the operations of institutions, the nature of public involvement, and the possibilities for integration. Their study addresses both institutional matters and particular policy dilemmas, encompassing inquiries into matters of legitimacy and leadership, as well as the examination of democracy and Euroscepticism.

Chaban and Elgström [9] contend that by adopting a perceptual framework in the analysis of EU foreign policy, the comprehensive alterations after the complete Russian incursion into Ukraine in February 2022 have engendered significant prospects for mitigating the perceptual disparities that previously prevailed between the EU and Ukraine subsequent to the annexation of Crimea. There is a differentiation made between the modifications in attitudes between Ukraine and the European Union, the contextual changes that have occurred due to the conflict, and the alterations in EU policy regarding Ukraine's candidature. These developments present opportunities for bridging the current perceptual gaps, but they also pose obstacles for EU diplomacy. It is posited that the potential for perceptual shifts that have transpired can only be actualized if the EU demonstrates a commitment to a novel form of public diplomacy.

According to Mišik [10], the recent surge in energy prices and concerns over potential shortages in natural gas supplies during the winter of 2021/2022 have highlighted the limitations of current energy strategies in ensuring the European Union's (EU) energy security. Furthermore, the absence of a cohesive external energy security policy has posed challenges for the EU in formulating a unified energy response to Russia's incursion into Ukraine in February 2022. To successfully achieve its 2050 goals, the EU must accelerate its decarbonization efforts. Equally important is the need for the EU to assist its member states in terms of energy security, both domestically and externally, throughout the transitional phase. This assistance will remain crucial until member states can rely on domestic low-carbon energy sources to meet their energy demands.

Thus, the academic inquiry for the reassessment of these institutional constraints and the reform of the EU in dealing with the Ukraine conflict aims to fill the gap in previous studies. Furthermore, the Ukraine conflict has significantly changed the geopolitical landscape of the European Union, as the EU's proximity to the conflict zone and its dependence on Russian gas resources have provoked critical concerns for a more unified common foreign and security policy of the EU. In addition, geopolitical factors such as external actors' strategic interests, specifically Russia, China, and the United States, have influenced the institutional constraints and reform of the EU. Thus, incorporating these factors may be relevant for the logical-mathematical framework for the institutional reform of the EU.

### 3.2. Theoretical Review

The New Institutional Economics approaches (NIE) provide a relevant conceptual and analytical framework to understand how institutional systems can react to external shocks like the Ukraine conflict, where both economic and geopolitical factors are critical to institutional changes. When organizations face external shocks, they must adapt to ensure adaptive efficiency, reduce transaction costs, facilitate institutional resilience, and implement effective reform. For instance, consider the financial regulatory reforms initiated in the aftermath of the 2008 global financial crisis—a prime example of institutional change prompted by an external shock. This crisis revealed vulnerabilities in the regulatory framework and underscored the imperative need for institutional changes to safeguard financial stability. Subsequent reforms aimed to enhance transparency, mitigate risk-taking, and bolster accountability within the financial sector [11].

Nonetheless, NIE acknowledges that institutional change is not always a smooth process, and external shocks can sometimes lead to institutional rigidity or even breakdown. Path dependence, where institutions are shaped by their historical trajectories, can make it challenging to implement reforms quickly in response to external shocks [12]. Several factors regarding institutional changes in response to external shocks are as follows.

First, path dependency problems occur when historical events and initial conditions create a "path" for institutional change, making it difficult for institutions to deviate from this path. Mahoney and Thelen [13] argue that gradual institutional change occurs through a process of incremental adjustments to existing institutions rather than through abrupt or radical changes. Path dependency can be driven by various factors, such as transaction costs, cognitive limitations, and power relations, and it can have both positive and negative effects on institutional change. To theorize conflict-induced institutional change in the EU, Karchimakis [14] combines theoretical components from historical institutionalism and institutional

entrepreneurship to fill the theoretical gap left by previous literature and argues that institutional entrepreneurs play a significant role in the decision about a particular path, if any. The Greek government was one such agency in 2010, interested in changing the EU's institutional structure to navigate its financial conflict and gain access to the EU Council, the principal governing entity responsible for making decisions pertaining to institutional modifications. The entrepreneur initiates a process of institutional transformation through their proposition. However, when policymakers adopt a course of action, it is subsequently maintained by path dependencies.

Second, institutional transformation includes transaction costs, cognitive constraints, and power relations. The high transaction costs can put constraints on the process of institutional reform associated with coordinating and negotiating procedures. In addition, actors may face challenges of institutional change due to cognitive constraints and conflicts of interest, resulting in resistance and a hesitancy to promote the policy changes [13]. The power dynamics are also an important factor, where influential individuals or groups may create resistance towards institutional transformation to secure their privileged status and interests in the institutional control process [15]. Member states tend to use their available resources, acquired knowledge, and personal networks to actively oppose institutional norms and practices. In the realm of institutional dynamics, the phenomenon of institutional entrepreneurship plays a pivotal role in instigating institutional transformation. Institutional change can be constrained by these special interests or the cognitive inertia of the related stakeholders.

Third, the enduring capacity of institutions and their ability to maintain existence over an extended period play a vital role in determining economic prosperity. Institutions can be categorized according to their level of resilience, which refers to their ability to sustain their fundamental structure and operations even in the face of changes in their environment. North [12] clarifies the concept of adaptive efficiency, where an organization can adapt effectively to new situations with strong institutional resilience. This organization can integrate new information and feedback. Furthermore, informal networks and fostering coordinated action among institutional stakeholders are also critical for institutional resilience. Laffan [16] argues that the EU faces significant institutional challenges during the global financial crisis in 2008. The EU has adopted a collective approach to crisis management, termed the concept of collaborative public entrepreneurship, which includes collaborative leadership and relevant institutional coordination to cope with shocks such as Brexit, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Ukraine conflict.

Fourth, the other institutional constraint is the interest group problem, where the actions and impact of common interest groups can change the policy direction at the expense of society as a whole. According to Domhoff [17], there exists a proposition that political power tends to be centralized among a select few affluent and influential persons and organizations who exercise influence over the political framework. Interest groups serve as a mechanism through which individuals with significant wealth and influence perpetuate their control [18]. As the size of organizations increases, the advantages experienced tend to diminish, while the expenses associated with collective action tend to escalate. Consequently, larger groups exhibit diminished efficacy in the pursuit of their goals when compared to smaller groupings. In the context of the European Union's security and foreign policy, various interest groups, including defense contractors, arms manufacturers, and think tanks, may engage in a competitive process to exert influence over the formulation of the EU's approach towards the conflict. This phenomenon reflects the active engagement of weapons contractors in attempting to gain strong influence over the European Union's defense policy for their self-interest groups [19]. Similarly, think tanks have been engaging in lobbying efforts to promote their influence on the foreign and security policy measures that align with their ideological and political commitments and preferences, as noted by Börzel and Risse [20]. Olson [18] argues that small interest group organizations that are well-organized can have stronger and more effective policy influences than larger, unstructured interest groups. Therefore, small groups can benefit from these rent-seeking behaviors in their pursuit of obtaining advantages for their own interests, often at the expense of the wider public. According to Albareda and Fraussen [21], the reliance of public officials on the input of interest groups during the development of public policies is crucial to understanding the mechanisms by which these interest groups impose institutional constraints on the democratic legitimacy of this process. The policy issues tend to be biased in taking policy positions and public resource allocation within the EU.

Nevertheless, these models have certain limitations in their ability to address the implications of specific external shocks, such as the Ukraine conflict. Firstly, there is a tendency to prioritize market-oriented institutions and assume that markets are invariably the most effective means of allocating resources. In the context of the Ukraine crisis, characterized by political instability and armed confrontation causing disruptions in economic activity, it can be argued that market-oriented institutions alone may not be adequate in fostering economic resilience and stability. Furthermore, NIE needs to incorporate geopolitical factors into the analytical framework, including the interventions of China, the USA, and NATO, which can perpetuate the conflict further.<sup>1</sup>

## **4. Empirical Analysis**

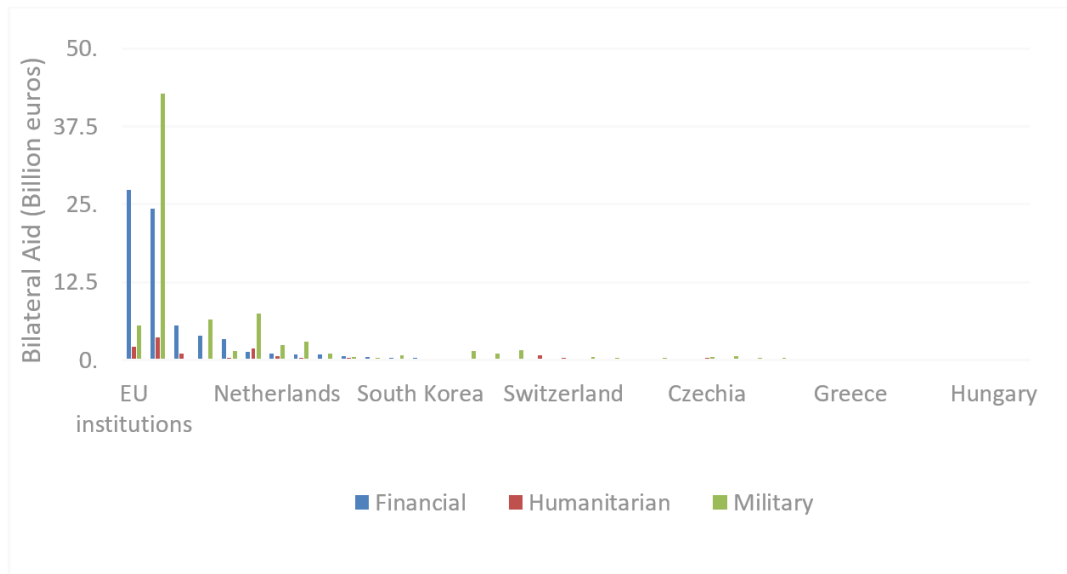
### **4.1. The Ukraine Conflict Catalyst for Cohesion in EU Foreign and Security Policy**

Prior to the Ukraine conflict, the occurrence of Brexit had indeed exposed weaknesses in the European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Brexit has prompted concerns about the EU's unity and its ability to effectively cope with global challenges, which has caused a more perilous position for the EU's institutional structures. Nevertheless, the Ukraine conflict has emerged as a catalyst for institutional and policy transformation within the EU. The member states of the EU have become more collaborative, resulting in a more robust Common Foreign and Security Policy as well as the EU's collective action to address the challenges posed by the Ukraine conflict. Indeed, between January 24, 2022, and May 31,

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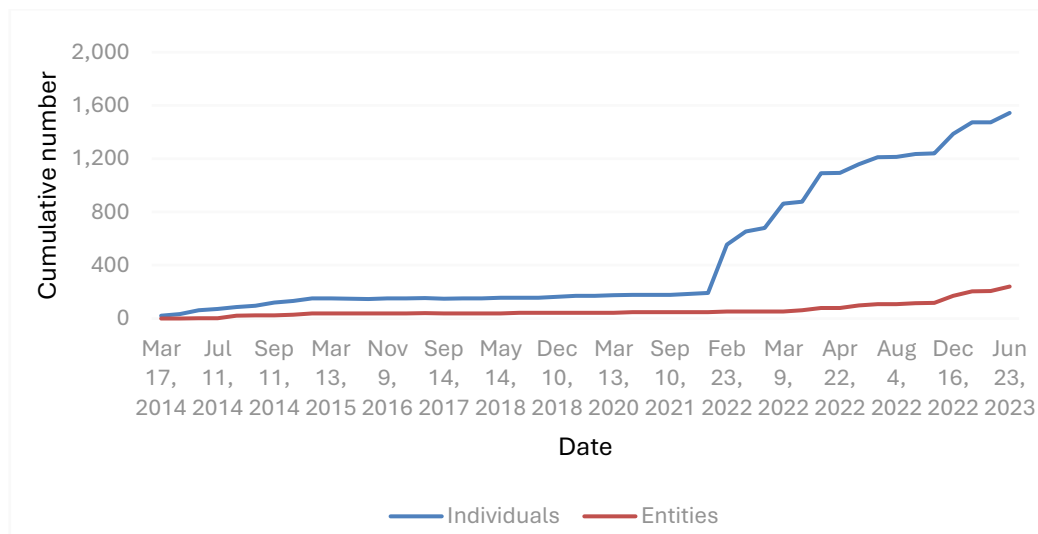
<sup>1</sup> The authors have also analysed the Ukraine conflict through the ABCM diamond of conflict using mindfulness approach to resolve this complex issue [22].

2023, the EU made the second highest level of commitments, amounting to around 35 billion euros, including military assistance to Ukraine, just behind the USA (see [Figure 1](#)).



**Figure 1.**  
Foreign Aid Contributions to Ukraine: A Comprehensive Analysis (2022-2023).

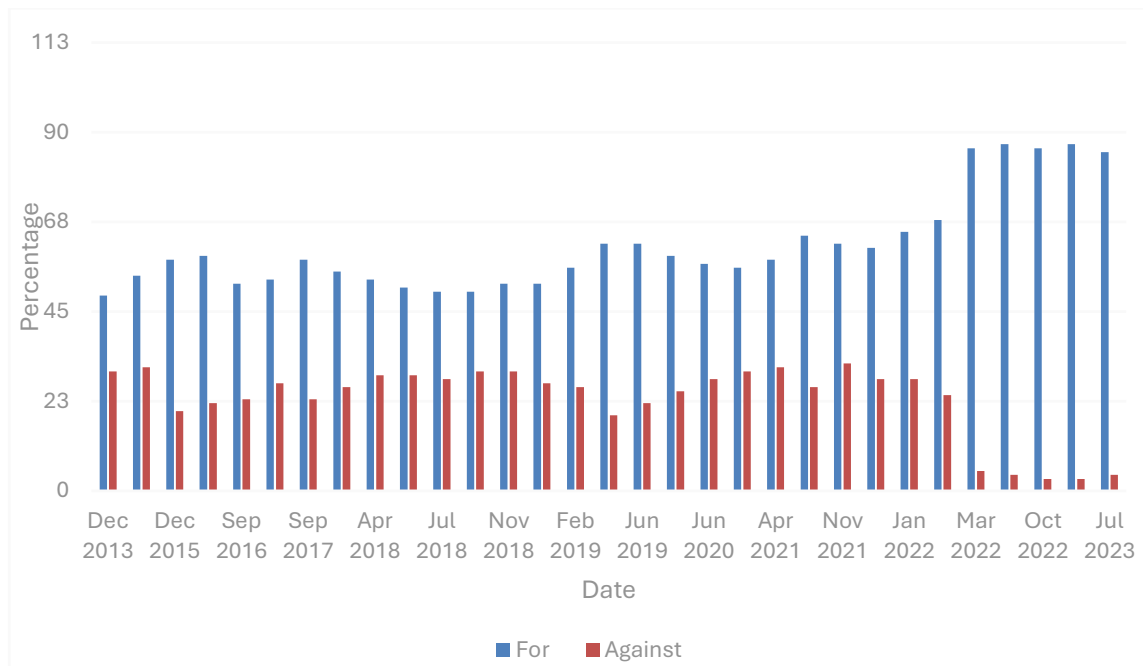
Furthermore, the EU imposed sanctions against 1,544 Russian individuals and 240 companies on June 23, 2023, due to their undermining of Ukraine's territorial integrity. These sanctions include a travel ban and asset freeze within the EU, as well as frozen assets, preventing them from obtaining financial resources in the EU (see [Figure 2](#)).



**Figure 2.**  
Ukraine Conflict Sanctions: EU-Imposed Measures on Russian Individuals and Entities (2014-2023).

Due to the Ukraine conflict, the level of support among EU citizens for Ukraine's accession to the EU witnessed a notable rise, progressing from less than 55 percent in 2014 to 85 percent as of July 2023, as indicated by surveys conducted among the Ukrainian population. This increase signifies substantial growth compared to the findings of earlier surveys. In July 2023, the proportion of individuals expressing opposition to Ukraine's accession to the EU was under four percent ([Figure 3](#)). The presence of uncertainty throughout the Ukraine conflict facilitated the establishment of trust between the many parties involved, namely the Member States and European institutions. The Ukrainian conflict unfolded concurrently with a decline in confidence in EU-Russia relations. As a result, the EU successfully reached a consensus and effectively implemented various mechanisms of coercive authority. To clarify this argument, we can observe European Union sanctions regarding the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbass [\[23\]](#).





**Figure 3.**  
A Decade of Perspectives: Public Sentiment Toward Ukraine's EU Membership (2013-2023).

In summary, the collective support from the European Union for Ukraine's accession to the EU and the increasing sanctions against Russia are clear evidence of the European Union's strengthened solidarity in response to the conflict in Ukraine. It reflects the European Union's commitment to addressing foreign and security challenges provoked by Russia. This further consolidates the EU's global position in dealing with global security conflicts.

#### 4.2. Institutional Constraints to EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy

EU faces four key institutional constraints in dealing with the Ukraine conflict as follows. First, the EU consists of diverse policy interest groups, where member states have varied national interests, historical ties, and economic interdependencies with Russia and Ukraine. This disparity causes divergent approaches and perspectives towards the Ukraine conflict and the imposition of sanctions on Russia. Second, the conflict in Ukraine is complicated by complex geopolitical factors. The member nations of the EU have distinct ties with global powers, including Russia, the USA, and China. The diverse geopolitical factors significantly shape the European Union's position on this conflict, complicating the formulation of a unified policy. Third, managing defense expenditures within the EU can lead to disagreements among member states, particularly when examining the potential consequences for collective security and deterrence. Lastly, several European Union member states are dependent on energy resources, particularly natural gas from Russia. This energy dependency creates a high level of vulnerability in the European Union's ability to enforce targeted sanctions on Russia.

Indeed, countries like Poland and the Baltic states tend to support a robust response to Russia's actions in Ukraine, including tough economic sanctions on Russia, the provision of military assistance to Ukraine, and the strengthening of military capabilities within the EU. They consider Russia's actions a direct threat to their own security. Meanwhile, Germany and Italy have been more reluctant and are likely to be involved in diplomatic negotiations with Russia. These diverse policy interest groups weaken EU consensus on the Ukraine conflict [24]. In fact, Germany was the key commercial ally of Russia; thus, stringent sanctions could undermine its economic interests [25]. In contrast, Poland and the Baltic nations have strong alliances with the US in the region, such as NATO, to maintain a strong stance against Russia [26]. The exclusive consideration of economic issues is insufficient to provide a comprehensive explanation for the attitudes of EU Member States towards sanctions.

The positions of the EU Member States are shaped by a confluence of historical, cultural, geopolitical, and economic elements that overlap with one another. Enhancing the comprehension of the whole array of elements influencing the posture of countries will provide EU policymakers with enhanced capabilities to safeguard the delicate unity of the European Union. Germany and Austria perceive Nord Stream 2 as a project driven primarily by financial interests. In contrast, Poland, the Baltic states, and the Nordic nations hold strong opposition to the project, citing concerns related to EU energy security, the future of Ukraine, and environmental implications [27]. The presence of various interest groups within the EU might serve as institutional limitations on the implementation of a shared foreign and security policy, hence accentuating the difficulties encountered by EU policymakers in upholding cohesion (see Table 1).

**Table 1.**

EU sanctions policy toward Russia in the context of the Ukraine conflict.

Common policy interest group	Countries	Level of support	Policy position
Group 1	Germany, Sweden, Poland, the Baltic States, Denmark, and Finland	Hardline	These countries support sanctions as an instrument to terminate Russian aggression and the conflict in Ukraine.
Group 2	France, Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands and Croatia	Lukewarm supporters	Although these countries do not question the effectiveness of EU sanction instruments, they are not strongly supporting these instruments due to their geographical distance or significant economic relationship with Russia.
Group 3	Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia and Bulgari	Divided from within	Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Bulgaria have ambiguous policies regarding the conflict due to domestic politics and tensions among political groups (pro- and anti-sanctions political forces).
Group 4	Italy, Hungary, Greece, Cyprus and Austria	Russia's friends	Italy, Hungary, Greece, Cyprus, and Austria have a united policy position that sympathizes with Putin's regime. They share close political, historical, cultural, and religious relationships with Russia.
Group 5	Ireland, Luxemburg, Belgium and Malta	Bystanders	Italy, Hungary, Greece, Cyprus, and Austria are united in their sympathy for Putin's regime and openly advocate the lifting of sanctions. They traditionally share close political, historical, cultural, and religious ties with Russia.

Source: Extracted from Sbragia [27].

Furthermore, the geopolitical influence considerations encompass the endeavors of Russia to subvert and fragment the institutions of the EU using propaganda, disinformation operations, and cyberattacks. According to [Retzman \[28\]](#), Russia aims to capitalize on the divisions among member states of the EU to undermine their unified reaction to the war in Ukraine and other security-related issues. Russia has faced allegations of exhibiting assertive behavior towards neighboring nations, notably Ukraine. The act of annexing Crimea in 2014 and aiding separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine has been widely regarded as a breach of international legal norms and a potential destabilizing factor for the area [29]. Moreover, the military operations conducted by Russia in the Baltic region and the Black Sea have elicited apprehension among member states of the European Union. Certain observers perceive these measures as an endeavor to instill fear and establish hegemony over adjacent nations [28]. In addition, the conflict has improved the partnership between European Union (EU) security and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as well as the influence of the USA on the foreign and security policy of the EU [30, 31]. The European Union's absence of a unified defense policy makes the EU vulnerable to Russian aggression. Thus, the United States assumes substantial military power in Europe and plays a dominant leadership role in NATO [32].

However, the discernible disparities in the strategic interests of the USA and EU still exist with respect to the ongoing Ukraine conflict. Although both the United States and the EU endorse Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and have applied strong sanctions against Russia considering its annexation of Crimea and its engagement in the conflict in eastern Ukraine, the United States has adopted a more assertive position in relation to Russia, offering military and economic support to Ukraine, while the EU tends to employ diplomatic and economic strategies. Even the approach towards sanctions reflects greater hesitancy among certain member states of the EU in implementing stringent economic measures against Russia. The United States' engagement in the Ukraine conflict causes both advantageous and detrimental consequences for the security and economy of the European Union. On the one hand, the United States' backing of Ukraine has contributed to bolstering the nation's capacity to counteract Russian aggression and uphold its territorial integrity for the establishment of security stability within the region, effectively reducing the escalation of the conflict. On the other hand, the United States has extended economic aid to Ukraine to alleviate the conflict's burden on the EU. However, the prioritization of great power competition between the United States and Russia and China can undermine the united foreign and security policies of the EU [Gstöhl \[33\]](#). [European Commission \[34\]](#) considers that the escalating economic and geopolitical influence of China in the EU could disrupt the region, threatening EU unity and democratic principles. China's strategic interests in the Ukraine conflict may strengthen the power of Russia while making no relevant contribution to peace, security, and prosperity within the EU and Europe. China's involvement in the Ukraine conflict tends to destabilize the established Western-centric international order. Therefore, the EU will be required to tactfully manage its diplomatic ties with both China and Russia, considering the Ukraine conflict and wider geopolitical circumstances. According to the [European Council on Foreign Relations \[35\]](#), China's willingness to endorse and implement sanctions against Russia, which could potentially have adverse effects on its economic

interests, may be diminished. China's endeavors to establish alliances and foster a more multipolar global order have the potential to counteract the actions of the United States in the realm of global geopolitical competition. Consequently, the EU must exercise caution in assessing the potential of China's engagement in the conflict [36].

The other institutional factor is that the EU possesses constrained military capacities, and a considerable number of its member states exhibit hesitancy in employing military intervention to address the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. These circumstances have posed challenges for the EU in its efforts to discourage Russian aggression and offer substantial military assistance to Ukraine. The European Union's (EU) poor military capabilities mostly stem from the inadequate allocation of government funds by EU member states towards defense expenditures. Figure 1 illustrates that most European Union (EU) member states have a government expenditure proportion in their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that is below 2 percent (Figure 3).

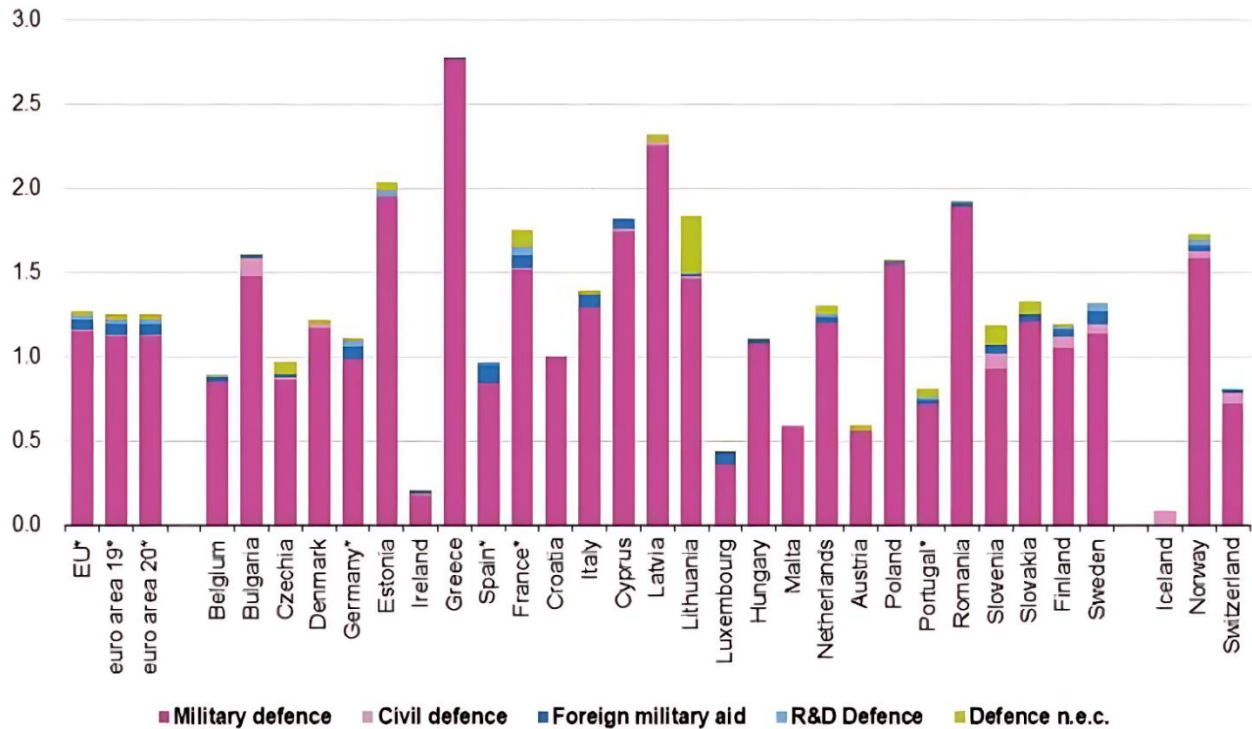


Figure 3.

Military expenditure of EU members as percentage of GDP, 2021.

Each member state has independently advanced its military equipment and technologies. The absence of standardized protocols and compatibility across various devices and technologies has posed challenges in formulating a cohesive defense plan. The European Commission has put forth a proposition for the creation of a European Defence Fund with the aim of facilitating transnational collaboration and research, ultimately resulting in enhanced military capabilities for the EU [37]. Furthermore, the EU faces institutional challenges in effectively coordinating its defense endeavors. The EU's handling of the Ukraine conflict garnered criticism for its perceived sluggishness and inefficiency, mostly attributed to the absence of efficient coordination among its constituent member states [38]. EU security has historically been strongly dependent on the United States, reducing its level of autonomy and hindering its own military capability progress. Based on the findings of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [39], the United States accounts for 44% of the total global military expenditure in the year 2020, while the collective military spending of European Union member states is only 15%. Hence, the European Union's defense reliance on the United States reflects a disunity of foreign and security policies in response to the Ukraine conflict.

Finally, a significant number of EU member nations are heavily dependent on energy supplies from Russia. This dependence puts constraints on the EU's capacity to enforce sanctions against Russia, as such actions are likely to impede the economic growth of these member states. Thus, these circumstances create conflicting perspectives within the EU in adopting a resolute stance towards Russia. The divergence of strategic interests among EU member states becomes more serious with the energy reliance of specific members on Russia and Ukraine. The energy security problems of several EU member states have raised concerns about the possibility of economic disruptions stemming from energy dependencies (Figure 4).



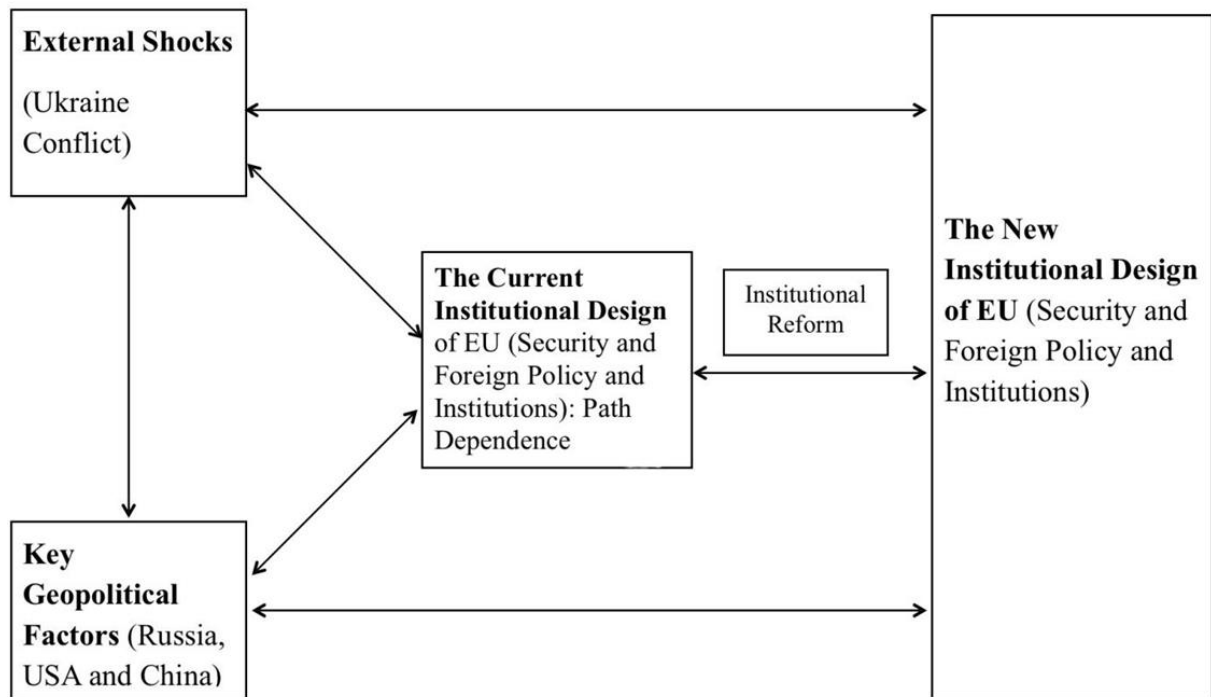


**Figure 4.**  
Energy Dependence of EU on Russia, 2020.  
Source: Statista [40].

Energy dependence causes divisions among the EU member states. Germany, Italy, and Hungary are highly dependent on Russia for energy supply; thus, it is difficult to formulate a confrontational stance towards Russia, while others advocate for a more conciliatory approach. Thus, the EU needs to deal with such institutional challenges in establishing a cohesive policy position towards the conflict in Ukraine [41]. Further, the institutional structures of the EU also face increasingly significant transaction costs in the decision-making processes due to the multiple actors, such as the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European Council, and the European Parliament, who need to coordinate negotiations and reach a common consensus. Consequently, this situation leads to time-consuming disagreements among EU members and institutions. The multitude of these entities tends to dilute policies and compromises that fail to meet the common objectives of the EU [27].

#### 4.3. The Mathematical-Logical Framework for the Institutional Reform of EU

EU has implemented various policy changes to deal with the conflict in Ukraine. They launched the European External Action Service (EEAS) in 2010, facilitating enhanced coordination of the European Union's foreign policy and augmenting its worldwide influence. The EEAS plays the role of spearheading the European Union's efforts in addressing the Ukraine conflict. The EEAS usually coordinates with member states to formulate a common foreign and security policy to deal with the Ukraine conflict [42]. Thus, the EU has also reached common sanctions against Russia as well as individuals and businesses that violated Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity [31]. In 2014, the European Commission provided €11 billion in financial aid to Ukraine [43]. Furthermore, the EU has actively promoted Ukraine for a stronger political and economic partnership [44] on one hand. On the other hand, the EU attempted to reduce energy dependence on Russia [45]. The institutional reform of the EU reflects its commitment to adapt to the Ukraine conflict. The EU also promotes stronger security cooperation between the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Nevertheless, the execution of these institutional measures may encounter political and pragmatic obstacles, hence giving rise to substantial deliberation and discourse among European Union member states regarding the most optimal course of action. To tackle the institutional reform of the European Union, this study presents a policy and institutional framework that seeks to effectively address external shocks and actors that impact the EU's foreign and security policy (Figure 5).



**Figure 5.**  
An Analytical Framework for Institutional Reform to the Ukraine Conflict.

Figure 5 illustrates that the institutional framework of the EU encountered notable obstacles amidst the Ukraine conflict, including but not limited to a lack of cohesion, constrained means and resources, protracted decision-making processes, suboptimal efficacy of sanctions, inadequate collaboration with NATO, and limited institutional capabilities. To effectively address institutional constraints, institutional redesign is critical for the common foreign and security policy of the EU.

The study employs a mathematical-logical model to clarify the analytical framework for the institutional redesign of the EU to address the external shocks resulting from the Ukraine conflict as follows. We define several variables:

- C: The aggregate cost.
- B: The cumulative benefit.
- S: The external shock variable.
- G: The geopolitical factor variable.
- P: The path dependence.
- Tr: Transaction costs.
- Ng: The size of the interest group.
- I: Institutional entrepreneurship.

Based on the cost-benefit analysis [18], the overall group benefit is represented by  $NgT$ , with  $T$  representing the rate of product collection. The extent of this gain depends on the group's size, denoted as  $Ng$ .

Individual member benefits:  $V_i$ , which is calculated as  $f_i = V_i / NgT$ .

However, we incorporate institutional constraints that can influence the cost-benefit analysis concerning institutional redesign. The gain to individual member states will be  $f_i NgT$ .

The advantage  $A_i$  that an individual member would get is.

$$A_i = V_i - C \quad (1)$$

However, in the presence of external shocks and geopolitical factors, the net benefit formula needs to be adjusted.

We can do this by adding a multiplier to the net benefit formula that reflects the impact of external shocks and geopolitical factors. The multiplier can be represented by a function of  $S$  and  $G$ :

$$A_i = [V_i - C] * h(S, G, P, Tr, I) \quad (2)$$

where  $h(S, G, P, Tr)$  is a function of  $S, G, P, Tr$  and  $I$ . This function can be defined as.

$$h(S, G) = (1 + w_1 S) * (1 - w_2 G) * (1 - w_3 P) * (1 - w_4 Tr) * (1 - w_5 I)$$

substituting  $h(S, G)$  in eqn (2) we obtain

$$A_i = [V_i - C] * (1 + w_1 S) * (1 - w_2 G) * (1 - w_3 P) * (1 - w_4 Tr) * (1 - w_5 I) \quad (3)$$

$w_1, w_2, w_3, w_4$  and  $w_5$  are weights that represent external shocks, geopolitical factors, path dependency, transaction cost, and institutional entrepreneurship, respectively.

The value of  $S$  can be determined by analyzing external shocks that may impact the policy. According to Equation 3, the external shock variable positively impacts institutional reforms for the EU and member states. The value of  $G$  can be determined by analyzing geopolitical factors that may impact institutional reforms, such as trade wars, sanctions, and political instability. Geopolitical factors impact institutional reforms in the EU. The value of  $P$  is determined by analyzing path dependency factors like culture and historical institutional arrangements. Since path dependency signifies the status quo, it

negatively impacts institutional reforms. The value of  $Tr$  is obtained by analyzing transaction costs such as administrative burdens, regulatory barriers, and information asymmetries. Cost variables negatively impact institutional reform in the EU.

Once the values of the weights  $w_1, w_2, w_3, w_4, w_5$  and  $S, G, P, Tr$  and  $I$  are determined, the change in  $A_i$  with respect to  $T$  will be given by

$$dA_i/dT = dV_i/dT - dC/dT \quad (4)$$

To maximize eqn 3,  $dA_i/dT=0$  and since  $V_i=f_iNgT$ ,

$$d(f_iNgT)/dT - dC/dT = 0$$

$$f_iNg - dC/dT = 0$$

Since this is a maximization problem the second order condition must be satisfied i.e.

$$d^2A_i/dT^2 < 0$$

$V_i$  the group gain is a function of  $Ng$  the group size. When the size of the EU increases, the complexity of institutional reform becomes more challenging, and coherence and collective actions become difficult to coordinate.

However, the final effect of institutional reform depends on the cost-benefit analysis as well as institutional entrepreneurship to promote strong institutional reform in the EU for common security and foreign policy. Institutional entrepreneurs who want to establish a robust security and foreign policy for the EU need to be strong driving forces for institutional reform within the EU. Based on this analytical framework, the paper can clarify several important factors for institutional reform and the design of the EU in response to the Ukraine conflict as follows:

First, path dependence refers to the idea that historical events and decisions shape the current situation and limit future possibilities. In the context of the European Union's (EU) institutional reform for common security and foreign policy, path dependence can have negative impacts on the institutional reform of the EU for common security and foreign policy. Path dependence can stifle development in the context of the EU's institutional reform for common security and foreign policy. Historical choices and trajectories are major constraints that limit the EU's ability to evolve and respond effectively to geopolitical changes to address modern threats and conflicts.

Second, thus, it is critical to promote the EU's institutional entrepreneurship among EU members in order to maximize shared values, benefits, as well as local and national balance in reaction to external challenges in sharing common security and foreign policy. Institutional entrepreneurship includes proactive measures to encourage key reforms, as well as building a collective commitment among member states to overcome competing interests and to work more collaboratively and effectively in the implementation of the common foreign and security policies. The development of institutional entrepreneurship and the alignment of member interests can bolster the resilience of the EU and facilitate institutional transformations in the realm of collective security and foreign policy. The establishment of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is based on the Maastricht Treaty of 1993, which aimed to bolster the European Union's engagement in global politics [46]. Institutional entrepreneurs, such as the creation of the European External Action Service in 2010, were initiated by EU High Representative Josep Borrell to ensure the coherence and coordination of the EU's foreign and security policy [46, 47]. It helps to provide the EU with relevant capacities to address security challenges beyond Europe's geographical boundaries [46]. The Common Security and Defence Policy was initiated by a group of institutional entrepreneurs, specifically former French President Jacques Chirac and former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder [48].

Third, the rising transaction costs, high bureaucracy, and sluggish decision-making procedures might indeed impede the timely effectiveness of institutional reforms in the EU. Thus, transaction costs can be reduced so that the extensive involvement of several entities, encompassing EU institutions, member states, and various other stakeholders, can become less time-consuming and more effective.

Fourth, the institutional reform of the EU may face diverse policy interest groups due to their unique strategic objectives among EU member states. The EU's common security and foreign policy are strongly shaped by the dynamics of the global geopolitical landscape. The strategic goals of key actors such as the United States, China, and Russia could affect the EU's ability to pursue institutional reform effectively. Hence, it becomes crucial to enhance the institutional resilience of the EU to maximize collective benefits and reinforce regional stability in the face of the Ukraine conflict.

Fifth, the expanding membership of the EU can impose additional constraints on the process of institutional reform within the EU, as the possibility of encountering conflicts of interest and complications may arise from vested interest groups. Divergent agendas and interests among member states could lead to institutional challenges in achieving a consensus on common foreign and security policies. Therefore, it is essential to address the interests of individual member states in adopting compromises and attaining substantial transformations.

Finally, the high energy dependence, as well as the security benefits of military expenditure and capabilities, should be addressed to promote the institutional reform of the EU in response to the Ukraine conflict.

Therefore, strengthened cohesion among member states, streamlined decision-making mechanisms, and a more coherent foreign and security policy framework could offer advantages to the EU in dealing with external shocks more effectively. The EU can adapt and respond more effectively to changing circumstances.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

The study has applied an institutional economics approach to clarify how the EU responded to the Ukraine conflict, where institutional constraints and the reform framework have been analyzed in the context of the Ukraine conflict. The annexation of Crimea by Russia and its military intervention in eastern Ukraine in 2022 have induced a more coherent foreign and security policy. The EU encounters certain institutional constraints within the context of the Ukraine conflict, which have hindered its ability to respond efficiently. First, geopolitical factors, such as the involvement and influence exerted by global

powers like China and the United States in the Ukraine conflict, contribute to a complex and challenging environment for the European Union. These external players can hinder the European Union's missions to facilitate mediation and reach a peaceful resolution. Second, the European Union's energy dependency on Russia puts constraints on its capacity to adopt a robust policy towards Russia in Ukraine. The EU's reliance on Russian energy dependency makes it susceptible to potential disruptions and financial pressures. Third, the European Union's military capacity is also constrained when member states demonstrate varying levels of commitment to defense expenditure. Thus, the EU is mainly relying on diplomatic and economic means. Fourth, the EU faces diverse policy interest groups, as it comprises 27 member states that exhibit a range of distinct activities and historical connections to Russia. The divergent viewpoints and discordant policy stances among EU members pose institutional challenges to establishing a cohesive and unified approach towards addressing the Ukraine conflict.

The study findings clarify that the institutional change within the EU is not solely shaped by internal factors but also by external players. Path dependence (the historical legacy of each member state) has hindered the European Union's ability to respond to the conflict effectively.

This study's findings also argue that the correlation between external shocks, organizational change, and international relations is significant, offering a fundamental framework for future institutional studies in this field. Important factors such as path dependence, energy dependence on Russia, limited military capabilities, diverse policy interest groups, and high transaction costs associated with the institutional structures of the EU play key roles in formulating a more coherent foreign and security policy for the EU.

The study also proposes a mathematical-logical framework for the institutional reform of the EU to take costs and benefits into account when considering institutional changes in response to external shocks. The analysis includes several factors, such as institutional entrepreneurship, where individuals are motivated to drive institutional changes. Furthermore, the concept of path dependence is employed to reflect how past decisions and historical legacies can direct future institutional reforms, where diverse policy interest groups should derive more net benefits from a more coherent foreign and security policy. In addition, transaction costs associated with the institutional process, with the goal of minimizing inefficiencies and optimizing decision-making, should be considered for institutional reform. Institutional reforms are strategically harmonized with the goals of the EU and its adaptive efficiency to respond to external adversities.

The study suggests four key issues for institutional reform in the European Union's response to the Ukrainian conflict. First and foremost, the EU can improve the flexibility of its institutional framework for a more coherent foreign and security policy, such as conflict management, improved partnership, and mutual benefit and interaction among member states. Second, diverse policy interest groups should be coordinated for the common foreign and security policies of the EU while addressing individual concerns and challenges of member states. Third, the EU can democratize and leverage the interests of its member states to foster greater coherence in their foreign and security policies while adapting itself to changing geopolitical factors, such as competition between China and the USA in the global system. Finally, the EU needs to strengthen institutional structures and reforms for its military capabilities in dealing with external threats and military conflicts.

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