Changing Support among Different European Union (EU) Members During the First Year of the War in Ukraine

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Since the beginning of the Russian military aggression in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, NATO and the European Union expressed their full support for Kiev's right to self-defense and has extended various forms of military, humanitarian, financial and other aid.[1] The European Union, along with other allies, introduced ten different packages of sanctions against Russia for the first year of the war.[2] The latter included sanctions against individuals, financial sanctions (e.g., restricted access to financial markets, the SWIFT payment system, limits of financial flows, transactions in cryptocurrency) suspension of Russian media broadcasting, prohibition of sales and investment in key sectors (including energy, raw materials, precious metals, dual use technology) and different services, including boycott on Russian exports such as crude oil, natural gas, etc.[3]

The international aid, along with the sanctions regime on Russia, have imposed notable costs for the European consumers and have had an overall adverse effect on European economies (Medunic 2023; Demertzis, 2023). One of the consequences we can expect is the decline in public support for EU policies on Ukraine could be expected over time, at least in some of the member-states (*PBS Newshour* 2023). How has the support for Ukraine changed since the outbreak of the war? Has there been notable decline in the support for international aid and sanctions regime among some or all EU members? These questions have important implications for future EU policies on Ukraine, as well as for the cohesion of the allied efforts as a whole.

It should be noted that decline in the support among only a few EU members might impact adversely the organization's cohesion on the matter of EU sanctions on Russia and aid for Ukraine because most sanctions-related decisions within the EU require unanimity, i.e., if only one member disapproves a decision cannot be made (*CRC Insight*, 2024). Hence, delayed or rejected aid requests could have important adverse effects on Ukraine's ability to defend itself to resist the Russian aggression and could undermine Ukraine's ability to defend itself. There are at least several factors that work against continued support among the public in a number of EU members: First, the growing costliness of the sanctions on Russia for European consumer over time could well increase European consumer's skepticism about the sanctions' effectiveness and could very well create pressure to lift them and to cut international aid for Kiev. Second, domestic constraints captured by the initial public response to the war indicated that the level of support for EU policy on Ukraine among its members varies substantially.

Third, these divisions as a result of the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine has facilitated the emergence of a group of vulnerable EU and NATO members whose public has remained fairly skeptical about the West's support for Ukraine and are reluctant to accept sanctions against Moscow as a foreign policy tool to counter Russia's aggression (Ivanov, 2023, 106). In some cases, these public moods have brought to power pro-Russian governments, while on other cases they have contributed to high level of political instability and fragile government coalitions.[4] Using the fuzzy sets Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA), this paper explores whether this pattern of diverging and declining support for aid to Ukraine and sanctions on Russia among EU members continued over the course of the first year after the outbreak of the war and whether it is attributable to key conditions such as economic growth, democratic rule, geopolitics, energy independence from Russia and trust in social media. The study has several important implications: On a theoretical level the dynamics of the sanctions regime on Russia and the aid for Ukraine would provide better understanding about the effectiveness of international sanctions on senders' and receivers' behavior and the conditions under which this effectiveness declines over time. Furthermore, understanding the costliness of sanctions has implication about their use as a foreign policy tool. Additionally, the study highlights the possibilities for long-term EU vulnerabilities due to possible rifts among the EU and NATO members and how these rifts can be exploited by different adversaries.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL SANCTIONS AND AID ON THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Sanctions have increasingly become a preferred foreign policy tool to respond to an international conflict as they constitute a middle-ground approach between doing nothing and engaging in direct military actions. There are several groups of factors accounting for sanctions effectiveness, such as domestic politics, signaling and conflict expectation. Although the signaling approach

shares a broader skepticism about sanctions' ability to generate effective concessions and, therefore, approaches them mostly as effective signals, domestic policies ties sanctions' outcome to the internal characteristics and dynamics of the sender and the receiver nations (Drezner, 2011, 215-16).

Consensus has emerged in the literature that comprehensive sanctions tend to have low effectiveness (Weiss, 1999: 499-509; Cortright and Lopez, 2002a; Cortright and Lopez, 2002b; Brzoska, 2003; Wallensteen and Staibano, 2005). Their shortcomings can be attributed to a number of factors, most of which are related to successful implementation of the economic sanctions and the coordination of efforts for effective national control systems ensuring that embargoed goods do not "slip through the sanctions net" and that there are international supervisory mechanisms in place (Doxey 99). One possible way to increase effectiveness is to design smart sanctions as a "useful focal point for policy coordination among key stakeholders." Smart sanctions constitute one such version of targeted sanctions that focus on individuals, exports and financial transactions, but excluding humanitarian aid and other key exchanges (Drezner, 2011, 96–108).

The EU sanctions on Russia were originally designed as "targeted," i.e., focusing on individuals in Putin's elite, specific Russian exports, financial and other services, media and other international outlets. However, the cascading effect of the 10 different rounds of sanctions has resulted in a more comprehensive package, which quite expectedly caused massive circumvention of sanctions via third countries such as the Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kirgizstan), Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as well as other "Kremlin-friendly" governments. The so-called "high priority items" of sanctions version (including manufacturing equipment and electrical components) have been the primary focus, most of which have dual (i.e., military and civilian) use. In these cases, we have seen a sharp increase in exports toward Kremlin-friendly third countries that almost entirely make up for the decline of exports toward Russia (Moller-Nielsen, 2024). Hence, the limited success of sanctions on Russia is quite expected, given that the Russian economy has shown a tendency to adapt to the EU and Western sanctions regimes since 2014 and has found ways to circumvent these restrictions and penalties in the past.[5]

Another argument congruent with the signaling approach highlights that sanctions create costs on sender countries, which will dampen the appetite of these nations to impose trade restrictions (Galtung, 1959: 67–68; Lindsay, 1986, 153–173; Kaempfer and Lowenberg, 1988, 786-793). The stronger the opposition to sanctions among the senders' domestic population, the greater dampening effect on sanctions (Belin and Hanousek, 2021: 256). Since the introduction of sanctions relies on approval of all EU members, it takes only a few in which the public disagrees to dampen any sanctions initiatives. The same logic applies to international aid, where it is natural to expect declining support due to the EU's reliance on energy imports from the Russian Federation and due to the fact that this reliance is not the same among all EU-27 members (Pospieszna, Skrzypczyńska and Walentek, 2020: 683-699).

Domestic political concerns seem to play a role in the decision-making of both the target and sender governments bearing a cost to both of them (Allen, 2005a, 117–138; Allen, 2005b, 117–138). From that perspective, public support for sanctions is also a function of subjective evaluation. If the public perceives that sanctions are effective, the latter tend to enjoy more public support. Alternatively, when the public perceives declining effectiveness, it is expected to note declining support (McLelan and Roblyer, 2017, 233–254).

Specifically, in periods of national or international economic stress, such as the post-COVID economic recovery and subsequent surge of inflation, recourse to sanctions "could be particularly unattractive" (Doxey, 1985: 90). In the case of sanctions against Russia, the cost for the EU members tends to be disproportionately higher for those who introduce the sanctions. This pattern can be explained with the fact that in hybrid and authoritarian regimes like Russia, leaders have an incentive to "create private and excludable goods for supporters, as opposed to public goods for the mass citizenry" (Drezner, 2011, 100; Brooks, 2008; Allen, 2008a, 255–274; Allen, 2008b, 916–944).

Not only do sanctions have redistributing effects among sender and target countries, but often times this redistributing effect may be asymmetric (Chan and Drury, 2000: 12). In the case of the conflict in Ukraine, sanctions on Russia bear especially high cost for poorer EU members whose geographic location is closer to Russia and that are more dependent on Russian energy imports.[6] By and large, type of governance system also matters in determining the sanctions' effectiveness. Coercion appears to work better when the target state is a democracy and also to worsen the level of democracy in these states (Bolks and Al-Sowayel, 2000, 241–265; Allen, 2005a, 117–138). Similarly, democratic regimes are more likely than nondemocracies to impose sanctions to pursue their foreign policy goals, but a political alignment with the target leadership leads to a higher probability of sender capitulation (Marinov and Nili, 2015, 765–778; Lektzian and Souva, 2003: 641–660; Attia et al, 2020). If these patterns are correct, they tend to favor Putin's authoritarianism and work to the disadvantage of the EU members from CEE. The 2017 French presidential election is

an example how exposure to sanctions against Russia caused an increase in the vote share for pro-Russian (and far-right) candidates (Crozet and Hinz, 2023).
Similarly, the combination of external factors, such as slow economic recovery after the COVID-19 pandemic could additionally contribute to declining support, at least among some EU sender nations, with regard to sustaining the existent and adding new sanctions or providing aid over time. As a result, it could be expected that many EU citizens would favor ending the RussiaUkraine war as they suffer from "the effects of war-related sanctions, resulting in various crises, such as food, energy, supply chain, economic, migration, military, and other crises" (Jakupec, 2024, 47).

The logic behind the connection between trust in social media and support for international sanctions on Russia and aid for Ukraine is based on the assumption that misinformation about latter is most likely to spread via social media. This includes misinformation on the war in Ukraine that could lead for an eroding support for the official EU and national government positions among citizens of certain EU countries.[7] Therefore, high trust in social media exposes greater vulnerabilities to misinformation on the war in Ukraine.
Finally, the model presented in this paper expects that eroding public support for the war effort could also result in reduction, delay or elimination of various forms of aid to Ukraine. It should be noted, however, that literature on aid is not conclusive about this connection. In fact, studies have shown that in some cases aid performance increased or decreased in accordance with public opinion, while in other cases, performance went against public opinion (Otter, 2003, 115–125).

DECLINING SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE AND THE EMERGENCE OF SUBGROUPS

Our previous work has shown that initial public opinion predispositions in the European Union after the beginning of Russia's aggression on February 24,2022, led to the emergence of a group of "spoiler" EU nations, such as Bulgaria, Greece and Cyprus, but also Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia where the public support for sanctions on Russia and assistance to Kiev is disproportionately lower that the rest of the Union. The emergence of a group whose public is sympathetic to Moscow could have a number of adverse consequences—the undermining of NATO and the EU's institutional capacity to agree on common actions against Russia (i.e., new sanctions or aid packages for Kiev), incentives to circumvent existing punishments, and or possibly to exert pressure to lift existing sanctions.

Has this pattern changed over the course of the first year if conflict? Drawing on quarterly data collected by Eurobarometer from Spring of 2022 to Spring of 2023, it seems that the EU's support for Ukraine and the backing of sanctions against Russia has declined on average and among majority of its members. Specifically, several important patterns have emerged. First, humanitarian support for Ukraine and the backing of financial and economic sanctions has eroded significantly (between 8 and 15 percent on average for the EU as a whole) and that pattern is detected in at least 15 or more EU allies (see figures 1, 2 and 3).[8]

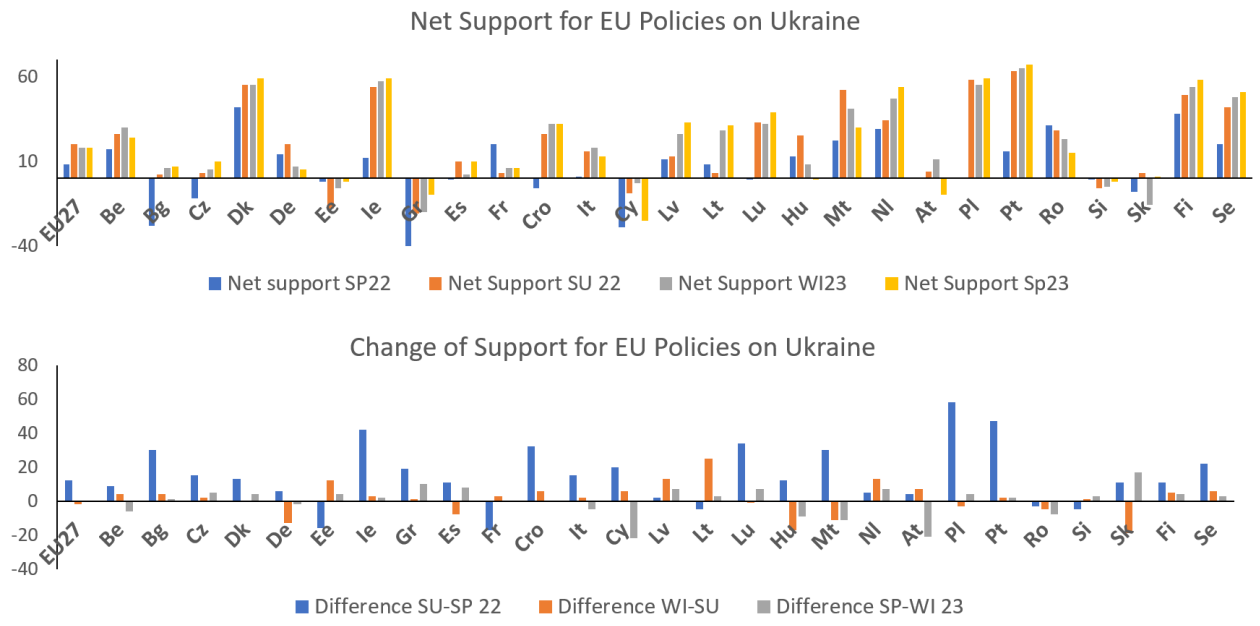

Figure 1. Support for EU Policies on Ukraine: Net Quarterly Support and Quarterly Change of Support, Spring 2022-Spring 2023

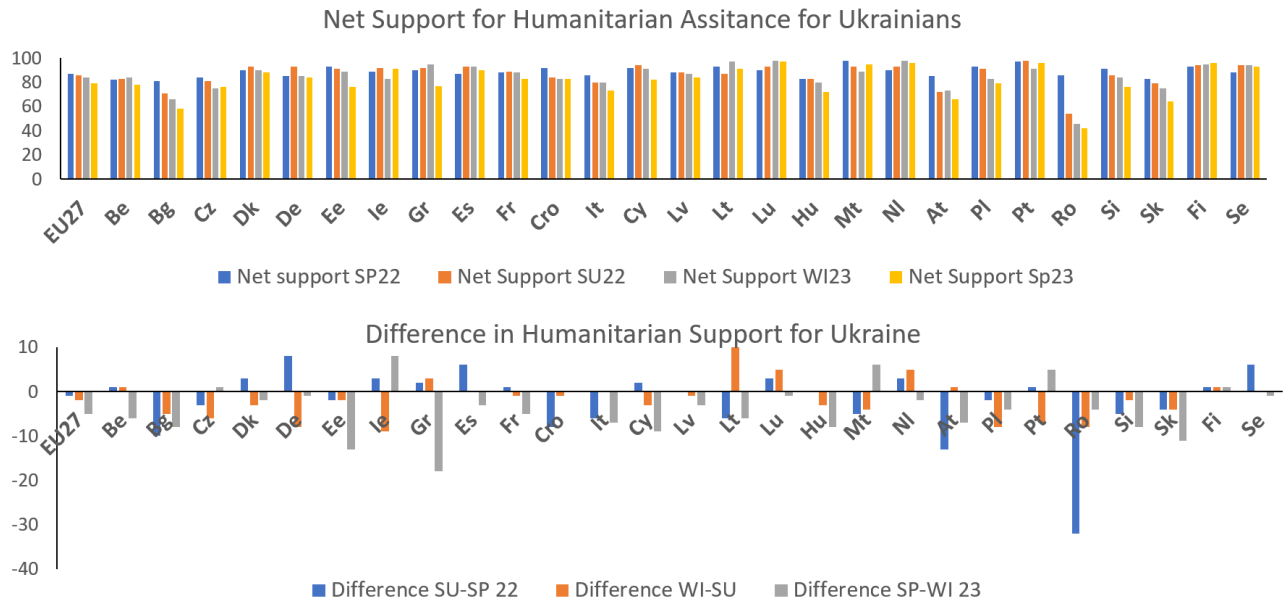

Figure 2. Humanitarian Support for Ukrainians Fleeing the War: Net Quarterly Support and Quarterly Change of Support, Spring 2022-Spring 2023

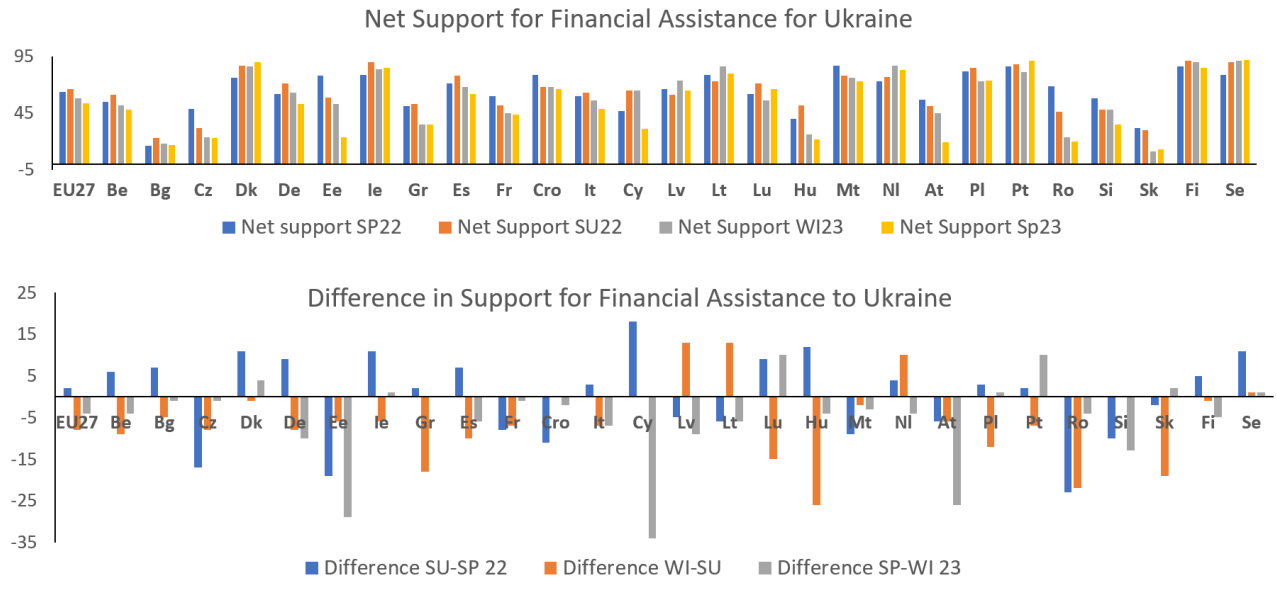

Figure 3. Financial Support for Ukraine: Net Quarterly Support and Quarterly Change of Support, Spring 2022-Spring 2023

Second, support for economic sanctions has had the sharpest decline of about 14% on average, a pattern that was recorded in 20 EU members (or 74% of all member-states).

Third, data for the first year of the war has confirmed an increased backing of EU policies on Ukraine (+10%) with an increased support in 19 EU members and decline in only 7 members (Estonia is the only case where public support has remained flat during the first 12 months of the war). A similar pattern can be noted on the question of EU humanitarian support for Ukraine with Romania being the only important deviation from it. At the same time, the backing of EU sanctions for Russian media due to their misinformation campaign has remained flat and

has declined in only 8 EU nations as shown in figures 4 and 5. This pattern departs from the previous two patterns.

UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMIC OF EU PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE WAR IN UKRAINE

The model presented in this paper argues that the dynamic of public support among EU members is a function of five key conditions: democratic rule, economic growth, distance from the conflict area, energy dependence on Russia and trust in social media. It should be noted that regime type and economic wealth are highly correlated in my model; hence, the "democratic rule" condition is used to capture both indicators. Similarly, because Russia's energy exports constitutes the largest share of the trade between Moscow and its EU members, energy dependence with Russia is also a proxy for overall trade dependence.[9] Therefore, for the purpose of the analysis, this study focuses on the following five sets of conditions:

- Democratic Rule (DEMOCR)—the overall score for each EU member's democracy index for 2022. Data have been drawn from the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) 2022 report (EIU, 2022).
- Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Growth Rate (GROWT)—measures the GDP growth in volume based on seasonally adjusted data by Eurostat (Eurostat, 2023a).
- Mean Proximity to the frontline (DISTAN)—it is an average distance (in thousand kilometers) from the geographic center point of the national capital of each EU member-state to the south-western and north-eastern tips of the frontline of the war in Ukraine.[10]
- Energy Independence (RENERG)—it measures imports from Russia in gross available energy for 2020 as measured by Eurostat (Eurostat 2020).
- Trust in social media (MEDIATR)—net distrust in social media is calculated as a difference between those who partially and fully disagree and those who partially and fully agree that they trust social media (Eurobarometer 2022).

The outcome set is average change in support for Ukraine (AVCHNG) as an average value of the difference between support for and opposition to specific policies on Ukraine from Spring/Summer 2023 to Spring 2022 for the following five indicators (Eurobarometer 2022, 2023b):

- Support for Economic Sanctions on Russia
- Support for Media Sanctions on Russia
- Support for military aid (the purchase of military equipment) for Ukraine
- Humanitarian Support for Ukraine
- Support for Refugees from Ukraine
- Funding for Ukraine

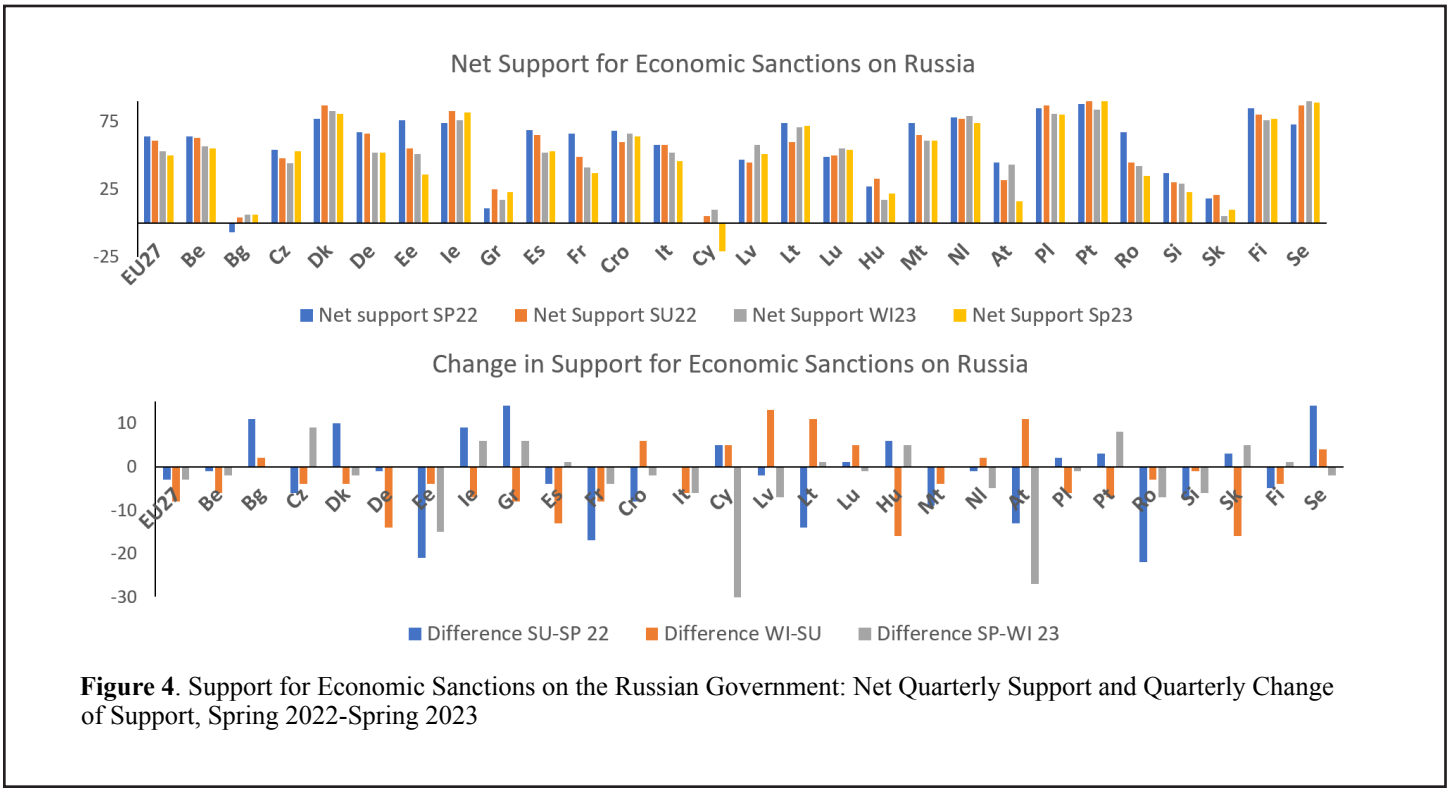

Figure 4. Support for Economic Sanctions on the Russian Government: Net Quarterly Support and Quarterly Change of Support, Spring 2022-Spring 2023

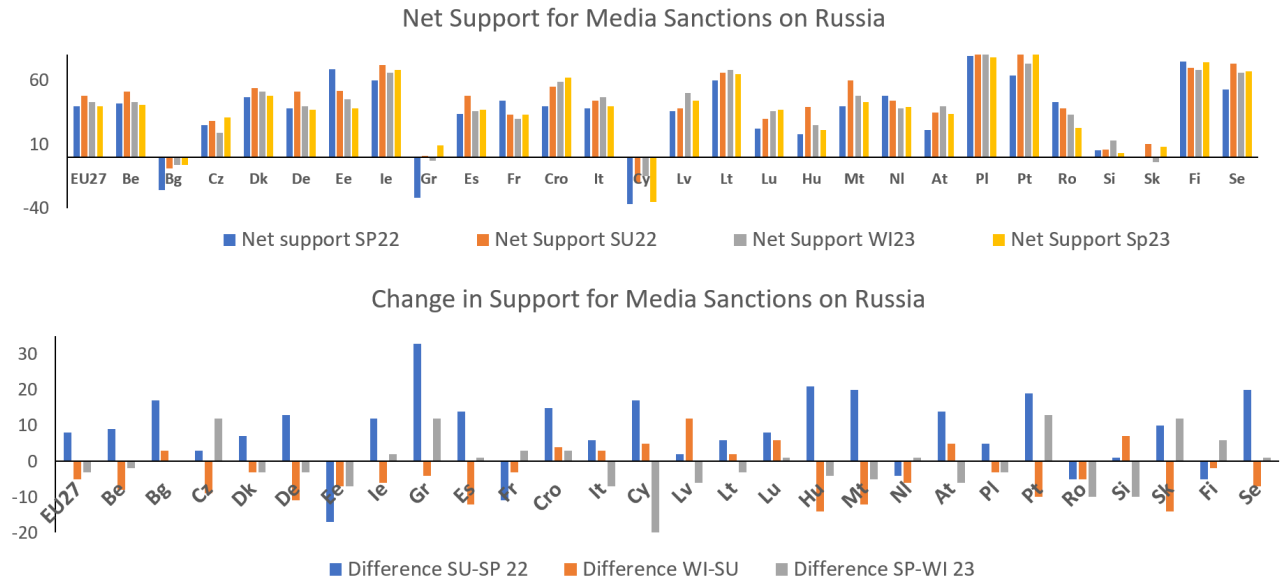

Figure 5. Support for Imposing Media Sanctions on the Russian Government: Net Quarterly Support and Quarterly Change of Support, Spring 2022-Spring 2023

The theoretical expectations of our model indicate that all five conditions impact the change of public approval for the war in Ukraine, namely, EU members located further from the frontline (i.e., ~DISTAN) with higher level of democratic rule (DEMOCR), faster economic growth (GROWT), less energy dependence (and overall trade dependence) on Russia (RENERG) and whose public has low trust in social media (RTRUST) is most likely to experience increase of public support (AVCHNG). Alternatively, EU members located near the frontline (i.e., DISTAN) with lower level of democratic rule (~democr), slower economic growth (~growt), greater energy (and overall trade) dependence on Russia (~renerg) and whose public has high trust in social media (~rtrust) is most likely to experience lack of increase (or decline) in public support (~avchng). Our directional expectations are summarized in Table 1.

THE FSQCA MODEL

The Fuzzy Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA) method allows us to focus on causal relations within a relatively small sample of 15-50 cases. Its algorithm is a tool to study different causal paths through which the interaction of varying conditions produces a certain outcome (Ragin, 2008; Makarovič and Kildi, 2017: 81). Thus, fsQCA is a method of inquiry that enables us to identify different paths by which causal conditions for all 27 cases of EU members. These paths contain a combination of several conditions that include GROWT, DISTAN DEMOCR, RENERG and RTRUST—determining the impact of the conflict on the change in public opinion among EU members (AVCHNG).

The fsQCA analysis makes three underlying assumptions: First, the assumption of equifinality, which means

Table 1. Support for Ukraine: Classification and Theoretical Expectations for Causal Condition Support for Ukraine

Growth	**De-mo-cra-cy**	**Front Prox-imity**	**Energy Indepen-dence**	**Distrust in Social Media**	**Sample EU Members**
Present (High)	Present (High)	Absent (High)	Present (Low)	Present (Low)	Ireland, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherland, Luxembourg, Scandinavian nations
Absent (Low)	Absent (Low)	Present (High)	Absent (Low)	Absent (Low)	Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Cyprus, the Baltic nations, Croatia, Slovenia, Czechia, Slovakia,

that multiple different causal paths exist that lead to the same outcome. Hence, we expect multiple combinations of conditions to explain the change in public support for the war in Ukraine. Second, the assumption of conjunctural causation, which means that case-specific factors affect the outcome. It signifies that the calibrated values of a particular case in a set determine the very composition of the causal interaction. The fsQCA method is extraordinarily sensitive whose results are susceptible to minor parametric and model specification changes (Krogslund et al, 2015: 22). To address this challenge, we have made extra efforts to make theoretically and empirically sound calibration for each of the sets to minimize possible errors (Sabatier and Mazmanian, 1980). Third, the assumption of asymmetrical causation, which implies that the causes leading to the presence of an outcome may be quite different from those leading to the absence of that outcome. Namely, the conditions for the increase in public support for Ukraine may differ from the conditions accounting for its decline.

The fsQCA understands factors not as simple crisp set membership ('1' or 'present' and '0' or 'absent'), but rather as sets in which the observed cases differ in the level of its membership. The process by which cases are attributed to different level membership is called "calibration." It uses qualitative anchors to determine the stage at which the condition is deemed fully present (fuzzy value ≥ 0.95), fully absent (fuzzy value ≤ 0.05) and an indifference point at 0.5 (Hinterleitner et al, 2016: 556). The 0.5 benchmark establishes a qualitative difference, where cases are either "more members than not" (between 0.5 and 0.95) or "more not members than members" (between 0.5 and 0.05).

Following Schneider and Wagemann's recommendation, we select the degree of membership values shown on Table 2 using criteria for set membership that are external to the data (Schneider and Wagemann, 2013, 33). For example, in the case of AVCHNG, we assume that no change in public support (0.5=0), while the fully in case (0.95 would be +10% increase in public support), while fully out (0.05=-30 or a decline of 30% or more). Such an assumption for set membership is also driven by the overall expectation that average support for Ukraine is more likely to decline that increase in the 12 months after the beginning of the Russian invasion in Ukraine. Detailed discussion for the selection of qualitative anchors is provided in Table 2.

Regarding the calibration of model's conditions, we expect the average growth rate (GROWT1) for EU members in 2022 as a crossover point (0.5=3.4%), and a higher than average fully in growth rate of 7% (0.95=7) due to NextGen Funds (or the EU stimulus package). Alternatively, slow economic recovery at a rate of 1% or less growth would mark fully out members (0.05=1).[11] When it comes to the ranking of democratic rule (DEMOCR1), we accept the minimum score for full democracy (8.0 or higher) as a crossover point (0.5=8), while 9.0 as fully in value (0.95=9.0) according to the Economist Intelligence Unit. Similarly, the crossover point for average distance from the conflict area (DISTAN1) is at 1.5 thousand kms,

Table 2. Conditions and Outcome: Measurement and Calibration

Type	**Set**	**Measurement**	**Calibration (set membership)**		
			Fully out 0.05	Neither in nor out 0.5	Fully in 0.95
Outcome	Average Change in Support for Ukr (AVCHNG)	Expected year-to-year change in net % of support for aid for Ukr and sanctions on Russia.	-30	0	10
	Economic Growth (GROWT)	GDP growth rates based on IMF and Eurostat predictions. EU stimulus factored in.	1	3.5	7
	Democratic Rule (DEMOCR)	Distinction between flawed vs. full democracies factored in.	6	8	9
Con-dit-ions	Distance from conflict (DISTAN)	An average distance of 1.5 thousand km assumed as an anchor point.	1	1.5	3
	Energy Independence from Russia (RENERG)	Standard qualitative anchors for (in)dependence of energy reliance.	0.95	0.5	0.05
	No Trust in Social Media (RTRUST)	Anchors based on 1:2 and 1:1.5 ratios of trust and mistrust in social media.	0	-30	-50

while fully in value (0.95=3 thousand kms) and the fully out value (0.05=1) is one thousand kms. The energy independence (RENERG1) score (in terms of percentage of energy consumption originating from Russia) uses standard qualitative anchors (95% fully out; 50% crossover point and 5% fully in). Lastly, the lack of trust in social media (RMEDIATR1) also assumes standard quantitative anchors (0% fully out when the number of respondents who have and do not have trust in social media is about the same; -30% crossover point fully in when those who have trust in social media is lower by about 30% than those who do not have trust and, finally, fully in if those who have trust in social media is lower by about 50% than those who don't. The correlation between the calibration and raw scores distributions are shown in figures A1-A6 in the Appendix.

The fsQCA method selects different combinations of sets to create causal paths that lead to an outcome. These causal combinations are shown in a "truth table" (see Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix). The results are evaluated in a range from 0-1 using two indicators – consistency and coverage. Consistency "signals whether an empirical connection merits the close connection of an investigator" (Ragin, 2008: 46). By and large, this indicator should be as close to 1 as possible. We used the widely accepted 0.8 benchmark for sufficient conditions' consistency. The coverage indicator shows how much of the variation in an outcome can be explained by causal conditions (Veri, 2018: 133−158). Further information about our expectations for these conditions is shown on Table 1.

THE EU SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE: RESULTS

The fcQCA algorithms identify three solutions—a parsimonious, an intermediate and a complex solution. In our case, the intermediate and complex solutions are identical. They have identified four distinct paths characterizing the relationship between democratic governance, economic growth, geographic location, energy dependence and trust in social media when it comes to increased EU support for Ukraine. Additional descriptive statistics for these sets are shown on Table 3.

The results for increased support (AVCHNG1) are summarized in Table 4 while the results for the lack of support (~avchng1) are shown in Table 5. The model with AVCHNG1 outcome shows 84% coverage and 71% consistency, while the model with the declining support (~avchng1) outcome shows 82% coverage and 82% consistency. Each of these individual paths contains a unique solution that lists a combination of specific conditions whose presence (listed in CAPS) or absence (listed in ~lower cases) is shown on the second row. Additionally, the consistency and coverage scores are shown in separate rows whereby each path has over 84% consistency and 23-57% raw coverage. The latter indicates which share of the outcome is explained by each alternative path.[12] Finally, separate rows show cases with membership in the path higher than 0.5 as single case coverages and which EU members these cases represent.

The first two paths in the AVCHNG1 model depict "invulnerable" cases of EU members where increased support for Ukraine remains strong among core EU members who are energy independent from Russia and have a combination of one of the following characteristics—either robust economic growth and are far from the conflict area, or strong democratic governance and a healthy distrust in social media. This pattern is consistent with our expectation that members with strong democratic rule, geography away from the conflict area and societies which are less trustful in media and share healthy skepticism about misinformation are most likely to support the EU policies on the war in Ukraine. Each path contains eight such allies.[13] The other two paths—Paths 3 and 4—represent a group of outlier cases, namely nations where EU support for Ukraine could increase despite low scores on democratic rule, proximity to the conflict area and greater energy dependence. The third path includes two cases with sluggish economic growth (Latvia and Slovakia), while the fourth path includes two cases whose societies share distrust in social media, such as Slovakia and Hungary. Also, it should be noted that path 4 has a very low unique coverage.

Similarly important are the observations about the five different paths identified in the model describing

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Raw Sets for Average Change in Support for Ukraine Outcome, and fsQCA Model Conditions

Set	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Median	Standard deviation	Skew
AVCHNG	-37.2	15.2	-5.04	-6.7	11.73	-1.08
GROWT	-1.025	12.15	4.17	3.8	2.43	0.98
DEMOCR	6.45	9.39	7.89	7.75	0.87	0.12
DISTAN	0.78	3.65	1.74	1.49	0.66	1.27
RENERG	0.02	0.97	0.26	0.21	0.21	1.57
RMEDIATR	-50	12	-30.67	-37	16.08	1.08

Table 4. Conditions for Presence of Average Change in Support for Ukraine (AVCHNG1)

	Path 1	Path 2	Path 3	Path 4
Complex Solution	GROWT1*DISTAN1 *RENERG1	DEMOCR1*RENERG1* RMEDIATR1	~growt1*~democr1* ~distan1*~RENERG1	~democr1*~distan1* ~renerg1*RMEDIATR1
Single case coverage	Pt, Ie, Es, Mt, It, Dk, Nl, Si	Se, Lu, Ie, De, At, Fi, Es, Fr	Lt, Sk	Sk, Hu
Consistency	0.79	0.79	0.82	0.78
Raw Coverage	0.63	0.65	0.23	0.21
Unique Coverage	0.09	0.12	0.05	0.002

Solution coverage: 0.84

Solution consistency: 0.71

the absence of positive change (~avchng1). The first two paths in the model focus on "vulnerable" democracies from Central and Eastern Europe sharing lower levels of democratic rule as a common characteristic within the EU. Path 1 includes a cluster of EU members with stronger growth and greater energy independence from Russia—Croatia, Poland, Romania, Malta, Slovenia, Italy, Bulgaria and Greece. The second path includes the three Baltic nations—Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania—that are close to the conflict area and whose public has greater trust in social media.

The third and fourth paths include two groups of EU members with similar geographic location not far from the war in Ukraine whose public displays strong distrust in social media but vary in terms of democratic rule and level of energy dependence from Russia. Path 3 includes Slovakia and Hungary both of whom share lower levels of democratic rule attributable partly to their post-communist legacies and democratic backsliding, but also to greater energy dependence due to their landlocked geographic location and insufficient efforts to diversify their sources of energy. Path 4 includes the cases of Austria and Finland where public support has declined despite strong democratic rule and strong energy independence from Russia. Finally, the fifth path has the smallest unique coverage (0.02), and it includes a diverse group of EU members who are further from the conflict, have greater energy independence, but have experienced lower levels of democratic rule and healthy public distrust in social media, such Belgium, Italy, and Slovenia.

The results of the fsQCA analysis point to several important patterns about the change of the EU's public support for Ukraine. First, the fsQCA model confirmed that key criteria, such as democratic rule, geopolitics operationalized as a proximity to the conflict area and energy dependence on Russia, along with more general patterns of economic growth impact significantly the change of public support on Ukraine over time. Namely, nations that experience lower or declining democratic rule, have greater dependence on energy imports from Russia (and overall trade with Russia), which s are closer to the conflict areas are more likely to experience decline in public support for Ukraine.

Table 5. Conditions for Absence of Average Change in Support for Ukraine (~avchng1)

	Path 1	Path 2	Path 3	Path 4	Path 5
Complex Solution	GROWT1* ~democr1* RENERG1	~growt1* ~democr1* ~distan1* ~rmediatr1	~democr1* ~distan1* ~renerg1* RMEDIATR1	DEMOCR1* ~distan1* RENERG1* RMEDIATR1	~democr1* DISTAN1* RENERG1* RMEDIATR1
Single case coverage	Cro, Pl, Ro, Mt, Si, It, Bg, Gr	Lt, Lv, Ee	Sk, Hu	At, Fi	Be, It, Si
Consistency	0.87	0.84	0.93	0.84	0.91
Raw Coverage	0.57	0.27	0.23	0.37	0.40
Unique Coverage	0.13	0.06	0.04	0.10	0.02

Solution coverage: 0.82

Solution consistency: 0.82

Second, the results showed inconclusive patterns about the trust (or mistrust) in social media, as different paths of EU members displaying low or high level of trust in these types of media have been identified for both models studying the presence of change (AVCHNG1) and absence of change (~avchng1) in the public's approval. The lack of trust in social media is sometimes linked to strong tradition in democratic rule (in cases like Sweden, Luxembourg, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Finland, Spain, and France), but also in cases with weak traditions (e.g., Slovakia and Hungary). Hence, it cannot be concluded definitely that the spread of misinformation through social media can be such a factor across board driving EU's declining support for Ukraine.

Third, the two models (AVCHNG1 and ~avchng1) attest to the clear bifurcation among the EU members into "vulnerable" (i.e., those that are likely to experience decline in public support for Ukraine) and "invulnerable" states (i.e., members who are unlikely to do so). Furthermore, the group of vulnerable allies expands beyond the obvious cases (such as Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Hungary, and Slovakia) to also include the Baltic nations, Austria, and even Finland.

Fourth, the cases of Austria and Finland attest to the fact that a decline of public support for Ukraine during the first year of the conflict does not solely occur in Central and Eastern Europe, but also in wealthy European societies with consolidated democratic rule. Such an observation poses additional long-term challenges for sustaining the EU consensus to back Ukraine.

Fifth, the cases of Hungary and Slovakia are especially worthy of a detailed discussion because of their proximality to the conflict—they are two of the four EU nations that share a common border with Ukraine. Hence, their influence is important not only from political and strategic, but also from diplomatic point of view, given the fact that Hungary has had the Presidency of the EU Council in the Fall of 2024.

THE EU'S DECLINING SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE: THE CASES OF HUNGARY AND SLOVAKIA

Hungary and Slovakia represent two different cases of EU members whose eroding support could undermine the future EU capacity to deliver aid for Ukraine. In the case of Hungary, skepticism about the EU and its institutions has been detected for many years prior to February 23, 2022 and is partially attributable to the overall decline of democracy combined with greater reliance on trade with Russia to secure affordable energy resources during Victor Orban's rule. In this case, the Hungarian public aligned with their government to oppose to many EU policies, including the one on supporting Ukraine and sanctioning Russia. In the case of Slovakia, the public and elite in power had diverging perspectives to the war in Ukraine and the government in Bratislava chose to align with EU policies despite public disapproval.

Aside from their geopolitical location, a major commonality between the Hungarian and the Slovak case is that both nations are landlocked and, as a result, asked for an exception when the sixth package of sanctions on Russia was introduced. This package introduced an embargo on Russian crude oil imports that took full effect on the end of 2022 and whose goal was to halt 90% of Russia's crude imports into the 27-nation bloc. Because the Druzhba pipeline is the only way for these two nations and for Czechia to have low-cost crude oil deliveries, they were granted such an exception from the sanctions regime. However, this situation once again shows how geographic vulnerabilities and geopolitics could shape public opinion in undermining EU policies (Abnett, Strupczewski, & Melander2022).

In the case of Hungary, its illiberal turn has been going on for over a decade resulting in patronal autocracy. The regime there has sought to consolidate its position by breaking down institutions and centers of power that could potentially threaten its control such as the autonomous media, the nongovernmental sector, as well as the autonomy of citizens and entrepreneurs. Nonetheless, Budapest has preserved or curtailed basic individual freedoms without jeopardizing the country's membership into the EU yet" (Madlovics and Magyar, 2023: 257).

Additionally, Prime-Minister Viktor Orban has developed a patron-client relationship with Putin's Russia since 2010. This relationship is based not only on economic transactions and geopolitical interests, but also ideological and interest-based compatibility between Budapest and Moscow. Both Putin and Orban have shared support for illiberal conservatism and its values based on nationalism, nativism and special economic, political, and other interests.

Hungary's skepticism about the sanctions regime against Russia is based on a disagreement between its government and the rest of the EU whether Russia poses a threat to European security. Mr. Orban argued in front of European leaders that "his objection to sanctioning Russia and committing more aid for Ukraine is about principles, not cash" (Higgins 2023). In response, the EU leadership has stepped up the pressure on the regime in Budapest and the carefully coordinated, behind-the-scenes pressure, which forced Mr. Orban in January 2024 to step out of the European Council's meeting and fold to ensure consensus. Thus, after standing in the way as the only holdout among 27 leaders for weeks, he "finally agreed to a landmark fund for Ukraine worth 50 billion euros, or $54 billion" (Stevis-Gridneff, Pronczuk, and Horowitz 2024). Giving up to the pressure by EU leaders could become much harder if Mr. Orban was to be joined at the Council by other heads of government.

Another such instance of declining support for Ukraine is the case of Slovakia. As discussed earlier, this case is quite different from Hungary—while the Slovak elite was a strong proponent of the EU's policy on Ukraine in 2022, the public in the country was quite skeptical about these policies from the very onset of the war—only 22% supported the effort with 68% opposing or a difference of about 46% (Eurobarometer, 2022). This gap between the ruling elite and the masses was exploited by the Slovakia's former Prime-Minister Robert Fico in the 2023, when he ran and got elected on a populist, pro-Russian and antiWestsern agenda in which he opposed EU sanctions on Russia, questioned whether Ukraine can force the Russian troops out of its territory and offered that "instead of sending arms to Kyiv, the EU and the US should use their influence to force Russia and Ukraine to strike a compromise peace deal" (PBS Newshour, 2024). Fico's leadership has caused major polarization in the country that has resulted in a politically motivated assassination attempt on May 16, 2024 (Bubola, 2024). This instance once again attests how the polarization of CEE societies can result in their destabilization in the future, which could have major long-term implications for the EU, its foreign policy and influence around the globe.

CONCLUSIONS

The paper confirmed the initial hypothesis that nations experiencing low levels of democratic governance are most vulnerable, at least in comparison to full democracies, to experience decline in public support for Ukraine's right to defend itself from the Russian aggression, thus highlighting the broader implications of the war in Ukraine for the state of EU democracy. Furthermore, it showed that the support for Ukraine (that includes aid for Kiev and sanctions on Moscow) are directly related to EU's fundamental values and its *raison d'etre*. Using fsQCA analysis, this paper showed that changing support for Ukraine among the EU members has led to an emergence of several groups of allies, the most important of which are the so-called 'vulnerable' allies. Our analysis showed that vulnerability expands beyond just CEE nations or those that are energy dependent on Russia to include stable democracies located near the conflict area. Additionally, the condition for democratic rule matters in combination with other characteristics such as energy independence from Russia and the conflict's geopolitics, whereby greater energy dependence and closer proximity mark greater likelihood for a decline of public support. Lastly, sluggish economic growth can be adding to EU's overall vulnerability vis-à-vis the conflict in Ukraine.

These patterns have several important policy implications: First, continued war in Ukraine can further strengthen the divisions in Europe on issues related to supporting Kiev and could make consensus less and less likely. It should be noted that Europe has successfully addressed some challenges related to energy dependence thanks to EU's NextGen stimulus funding for renewable sources, which allowed for many businesses and households to install solar panels, heat pumps, and other renewable technologies thus reducing the EU's dependence on Russian energy imports. Furthermore, the war in Ukraine helped in an obscure way expedite EU's energy transition toward green and suitable energy—one of the few positive externalities of the conflict in Ukraine. To sum up, the combination of an ongoing war (that implies eroding public support over time), along with an increased cost of the war effort and a lasting pattern of declining democratic rule in Europe and around the globe, is a recipe for mounting challenges for the EU, its institutions, and its allies across the Atlantic and around the globe.

ENDNOTES

1 See "European Council Conclusions," 21 and 22 March 2024, Brussels, Belgium. Also available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/70880/euco-conclusions-2122032024.pdf (5/29/2024). "Statement by the North Atlantic Council on Russia's attack on Ukraine," 24 February 2022, Brussels, Belgium. Also available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_192404.htm?selectedLocale=en (5/29/2024). "Vilnius Summit Communiqué" issued by NATO Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council, Vilnius, Lithuania, 11 July 2023. Also available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_217320.htm (5/29/2024).

2 Other EU allies who introduced sanctions on Russia included, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, Switzerland, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore.

3 "EU response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine," Council of the European Union, Brussels, Belgium. Also available at: https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-response-ukraine-invasion/#invasion.

4 Pro-Russian support has been most notable in Hungary and Slovakia as shown by their leaders Victor Orban and Robert Fico, but latent support for Moscow has been strong in Bulgaria, Greece, Cyprus, Czechia and other places. See Andrew Higgins, "Orban Endangers Hungary's Status as an Ally, U.S. Diplomat Says," The New York Times, 14 March 2024, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/14/world/europe/orban-hungary-nato-us.html (3/29/2024). Also, Andrew Higgins, "What Does a Russia-Leaning Party Win in an E.U. Nation Mean for Ukraine?" The New York Times, 30 September 2023, available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/30/world/europe/slovakia-election-ukraine.html (3/29/2024).

5 Other notable examples of nations that have successfully adapted and sustained sanctions over time are Rhodesia and Cuba (Hasse, 1978; Griffin, 1993).

6 By and large, it should be noted that EU members in the southern and eastern part of the content tend to be less wealthy than their western and northern counterparts. Similarly, most former Soviet satellites in the eastern part of content tend to have higher dependence on Russian energy exports that the rest of the EU. For more information (Engelbrekt et al, 2024).

7 The Russians have used "propaganda" and "disinformation" via social and mass media on the conflict in Ukraine for a long time

since 2014 to sway public opinion and destabilize these societies (Szostek, 2017: 116–135). Also, Marinov and Popova (2021: 222–236) offer a detailed discussion on the spread of misinformation that enables private interests in CEE.

[8] See "Eurobarometer Surveys." the European Commission: Directorate-General for Communication, Brussels, Belgium, 2022-2023. Also available at: https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys (6/3/2024).

[9] The correlation coefficient between regime type and wealth is 0.63, while the correlation coefficient between Energy dependence and trade dependence is 0.64.

[10] We have accepted that the western tip of the frontline is Kinburns′ka Kosa National Park (Geographic Coordinates: 46°34'37"N 31°30'44"E) and the eastern tip of the frontline is at the village of Topoli in Kharkiv Oblast (Geographic Coordinates: 49°57'52″N, 37°54′31″E).

[11] The EU Commission noted in 2022 that approximately about 1% of the GDP rate between 2022 and 2026 would be attributable to the EU recovery fund, i.e., for an economy recovering by about 0.4% in previous years, it is expected that it would grow by at least 1.4%. For details on EU economic recovery see Jan Strupczewski, "EU's Unprecedented Recovery Fund Has Spurred Growth," Reuters, 21 February 2024. Also available at: https://www.reuters.com/markets/europe/eu-recovery-fund-boosted-growth-investment-jobs-commission-2024-02-21/ (6/1/2024).

[12] "Raw coverage" denotes how much of the outcome can be explained by each alternative path, whereas "unique coverage" signifies what share of the outcome can be explained by only a specific path (Schneider and Wagemann, 2013: 133).

[13] The cases identified in Path 1 include: Portugal, Ireland, Spain, Malta, Italy, Demark, the Netherlands, Slovenia. The cases identified in Path 2 include: Sweden, Luxembourg, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Finland, Spain France.

[14] Note that the straight lines denote crossover points (0.5 values).

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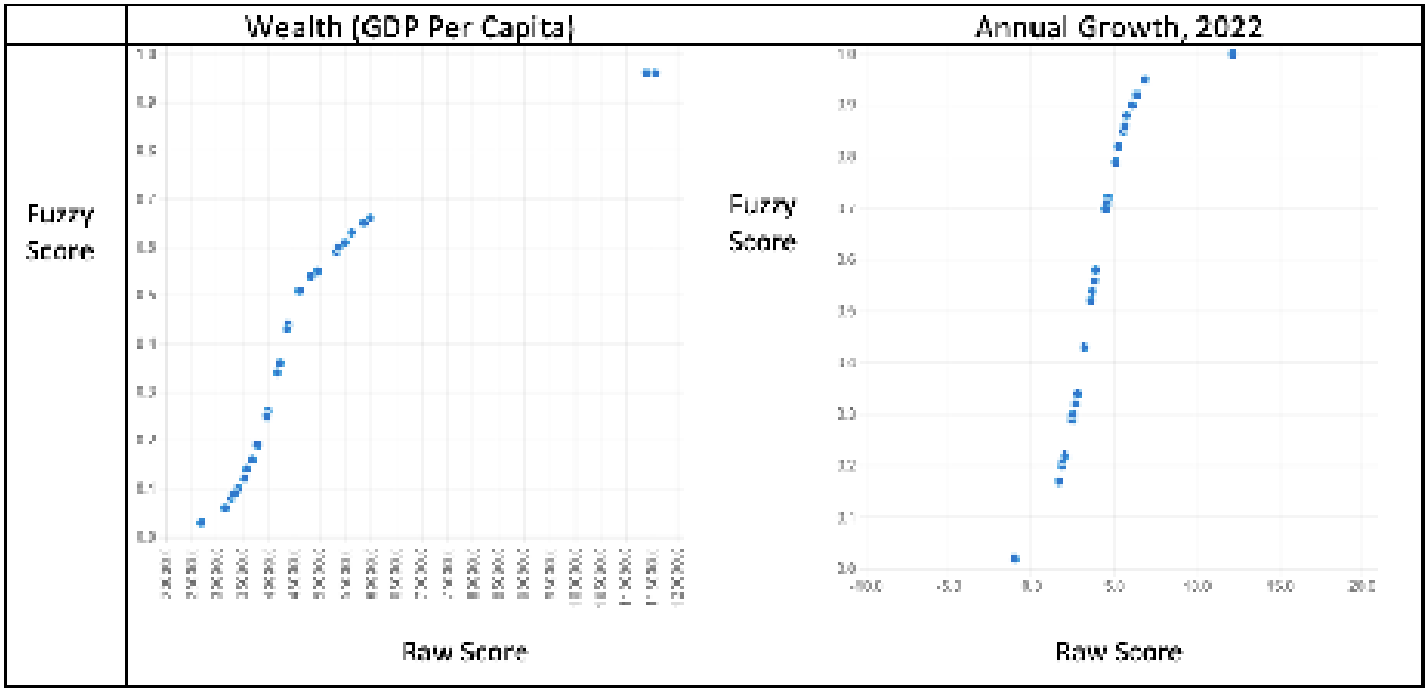
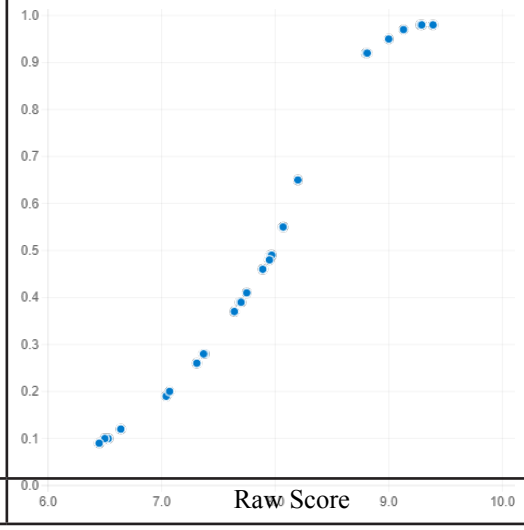
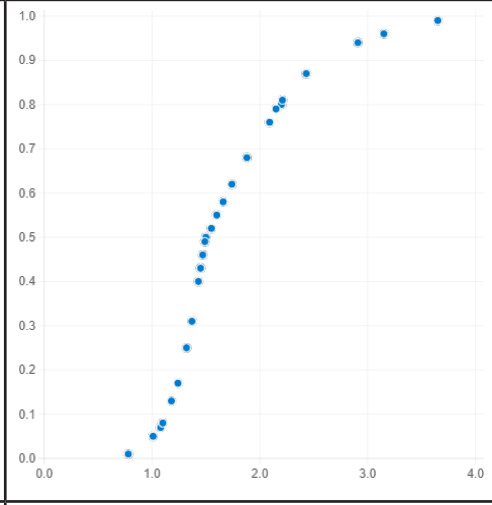
APPENDIX

Figures A1-A4. Calibration and raw scores distribution[14]



	Level of Democracy		Distance from Conflict
Fuzzy Score		Fuzzy Score	
	Raw Score		Raw Score

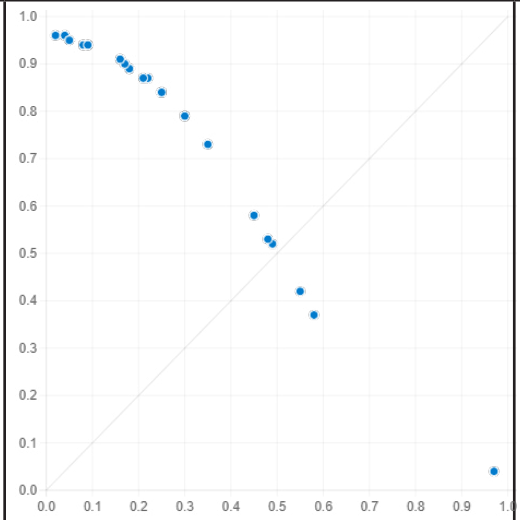
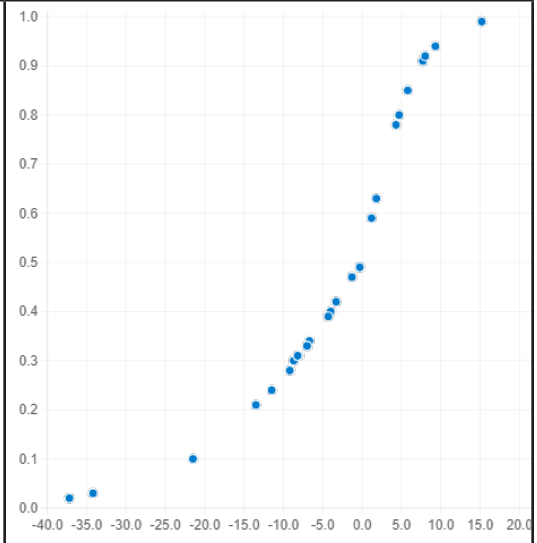
	Energy Dependence on Russia		Average Change Support for Ukraine
Fuzzy Score		Fuzzy Score	
	Raw Score		Raw Score

***Table A1**. Truth Table for Outcome "AVCHNG1"*

#	GROWT1	DEMOCR1	DISTAN1	RENERG1	RMEDIATR1	AVCHNG1	Consistency	PRI	Cases
1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0.98	0.93	Dk
2	1	0	1	1	0	1	0.91	0.66	Mt, Pt
3	1	1	1	1	1	1	0.90	0.75	Es, Ie
4	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.88	0.36	Lt
5	1	0	0	0	1	1	0.88	0.38	Hu
6	0	1	0	1	1	1	0.87	0.57	Fi
7	1	1	0	1	1	1	0.85	0.53	At
8	0	1	1	1	1	1	0.83	0.59	De, Fr, Lu, Se
9	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.82	0.02	Sk
10	1	0	1	1	1	1	0.81	0.33	It, Se
11	1	0	0	1	1	0	0.78	0.18	Cy
12	0	0	0	1	0	0	0.77	0.25	Ee, Lv
13	0	0	1	1	1	0	0.76	0.03	Be
14	1	0	0	1	0	0	0.74	0.20	Bg, Cro, Gr, Pl, Ro

Intermediate and Complex Solutions: GROWT1*DISTAN1*RENERG1 + DEMOCR1*RENERG1*RMEDIATR1 + ~growt1*~democr1*~distan1*~renerg1 + ~democr1*~distan1*~renerg1*RMEDIATR1

Solution Consistency: 0.84

Solution Coverage: 0.71

Parsimonious Solution: ~renerg1 + DEMOCR1 + GROWT1*DISTAN1

Solution Consistency: 0.91

Solution Coverage: 0.67

***Table A2**. Truth Table for Outcome "~avchng1"*

#	GROWT1	DEMOCR1	DISTAN1	RENERG1	RMEDIATR1	AVCHNG1	Consistency	PRI	Cases
1	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.99	0.98	Sk
2	0	0	1	1	1	1	0.99	0.97	Be
3	1	0	0	1	1	1	0.95	0.82	Cy
4	1	0	0	0	1	1	0.92	0.62	Hu
5	1	0	0	1	0	1	0.91	0.74	Bg, Cro, Gr, Pl, Ro
6	1	0	1	1	1	1	0.90	0.67	It, Si
7	0	0	0	1	0	1	0.90	0.68	Ee, Lv
8	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.88	0.36	Lt
9	0	1	0	1	1	1	0.84	0.44	Fi
10	1	0	1	1	0	1	0.83	0.34	Mt, Pt
11	1	1	0	1	1	1	0.83	0.47	At
12	0	1	1	1	1	0	0.76	0.41	De, Fr, Lu, Se
13	1	1	1	1	1	0	0.69	0.25	Es, Ie
14	1	1	1	1	0	0	0.69	0.07	Dk

Intermediate and Complex Solutions: GROWT1*~democr1*RENERG1 + ~growt1*~democr1*~distan1*~rmediatr1 + ~democr1*~distan1*~renerg1*RMEDIATR1 + DEMOCR1*~distan1*RENERG1*RMEDIATR1 + ~democr1*DISTAN1*RENERG1*RMEDIATR1

Solution Consistency: 0.82

Solution Coverage: 0.82

Parsimonious Solution: ~distan1 + ~democr1

Solution Consistency: 0.86

Solution Coverage: 0.75