



...the information report

WHY EUROPE'S FUTURE IS ON THE LINE IN UKRAINE

Cédric Perrin, Chair, Olivier Cigolotti, Ronan le Gleut, Jean-Marc Vayssouze-Faure

A delegation from the committee visited Warsaw on 18 and 19 December and Kiev on 20 and 21 December 2023.



Russian tanks on display in a square in Kiev, December 2023

1. UKRAINE'S LEGITIMATE, CLEAR AND BRAVE CHOICE OF EUROPE

A. THE LESSONS OF A DEEP, LASTING BREAK BETWEEN RUSSIA AND EUROPE

Those behind Russia's deliberate decision to attack Ukraine on 24 February 2022 could not have been ignorant of the long-term consequences. This aggression put an abrupt end to the economic rapprochement that had been underway for several decades between Russia and Western countries. European and international sanctions against Russia have drastically reduced trade, investment and economic activity by Western companies in Russia.

As the conflict continues to escalate, there will be no going back to the way things were. It is therefore essential to **put an end once and for all to the dependence of certain European countries on Russian energy resources**, which is being used to put pressure on Western European democracies, and to **think about the future of the continent not without Russia, but independently of Russia and its imperialist ambitions.**

Recommendation 1: learn all the lessons from Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its desire to antagonise relations with the European Union by putting an end to all forms of dependence.

Even if this was not Russia's intention, the aggression in Ukraine, with one or two exceptions, has been a powerful unifying force for EU Member States. The entry of Finland and Sweden into NATO put an end to Cold War situations that had become obsolete, while strengthening Europe's defence on its northern flank. **The reinvestment of European countries in their defence effort is the most notable long-term consequence of the conflict started by Russia.**

Yet **European governments are still struggling to establish a coordinated vision of their relationship with Russia and the degree of threat it poses to the continent.** Polish authorities of all persuasions are under no illusions about this threat and are calling for Ukraine's sovereignty to be defended and for the promised aid to be provided. The new government elected on 15 October 2023 is also calling for greater "European solidarity" through enhanced industrial cooperation in arms production. The Chair of the Polish Senate's Foreign Affairs Committee, Grzegorz Schetyna, also indicated that the level of military spending, which represents 3.9% of GDP, would indeed be increased to 5% as planned by the previous majority. **Poland's commitment should serve as inspiration for Western European countries, which are struggling to raise their own defence spending to 2% of GDP.**



Meeting with Grzegorz Schetyna, Chair of the Polish Senate Foreign Affairs Committee

In addition to the major acquisitions of military resources which, according to the Chair of the Polish Sejm's National Defence Committee, should allow the country to "*respond to an initial attack while awaiting support from NATO countries*", Poland is facing a challenging demographic situation, with a sharp fall in the birth rate that is already limiting recruitment possibilities for the armed forces and causing training efforts for all volunteers to be redirected.

A new army model will have to be implemented if the plan to set up six divisions – at least two of which have not yet been formed due to insufficient manpower – is to continue. The Polish army's transformation is also hampered by a healthy job market and difficulties in retaining existing personnel.

"French public opinion has not sufficiently understood what is at stake in Ukraine"

Cédric Perrin

Above all, the countries of Eastern Europe are determined to continue their defence efforts because they have no trust in Vladimir Putin's Russia or in the value of any commitments he might make in the event of peace negotiations. **They believe that any end to hostilities**

would only allow Russia to rebuild its forces so that it can attack its western neighbours again, starting with the Baltic States and Poland.

This is why all those we met during our trip to Poland and Ukraine believe it is necessary to anchor Ukraine firmly in the Western camp, without underestimating the difficulties of such a process. As the Chair of the Rada's Foreign Affairs Committee, Oleksandr Merezhko, pointed out, **"the current war is not about territory, and ceding territory will not guarantee lasting peace"**.

Recommendation 2: explain to the French people what is really at stake in the conflict in Ukraine, which goes beyond territorial issues and aims to challenge our European model of democratic society.

"If we don't help Ukraine to win, we'll be next in line in 3, 5 or 10 years' time".

Andrzej Grzyb, Chair of the Polish Sejm's National Defence Committee

B. UKRAINE'S LONG, COMPLICATED BUT ESSENTIAL PATH TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Given the uncertainties surrounding US support for Ukraine in the run-up to the forthcoming presidential election, **many Polish and Ukrainian politicians are calling for greater European support for Ukraine and improved coordination.** The new political majority in Poland opens the way for a revival of the "Weimar Triangle" to align French, German and Polish positions on the current conflict and set a new European Union foreign policy for Eastern Europe. **The delegation members believe that it would be useful to capitalise on the opportunity offered by the political changes that have taken place in Poland.**

France must invest once again in its political relationship with Poland as a prerequisite for renewing economic cooperation, particularly in the field of civil nuclear energy, and developing cooperation in the arms industry.

It is interesting to note that the agreements signed with South Korean manufacturers are framework contracts and not firm orders. **The amounts announced are therefore ceilings, which may be renegotiated depending on requirements and the possibility of producing certain equipment in Poland.** There are still opportunities for European defence companies. Furthermore, the priority given by Polish authorities to ammunition production in the coming months, which is the subject of discussions with European companies such as Nexter, could also benefit Ukraine, which has a considerable need for ammunition.

It would also be a good idea for France to further open up its military training courses to Polish officers to create a shared culture, which is often a prerequisite for technological and military cooperation.

Recommendation 3: reinvest in our political and military relationship with Poland as a first step towards a new economic partnership and a renewed commitment to defending the European Union's eastern borders. Bring more Polish officers into French war schools to create a shared culture.

While the new Polish authorities support the principle of opening negotiations for Ukraine's accession to the European Union, this prospect is not without its share of fears among the public, especially in the agricultural sector, which is concerned about unfair competition in a number of areas (maize, cereals, meat, sugar, etc.). Integrating Ukraine into the Common Agricultural Policy is a real issue in Poland, where questions are being asked about the very structure of the Ukrainian agricultural sector, which is made up of a small number of very large farms that use intensive farming techniques. This example of the agricultural sector is a reminder that **it is probably easier to agree on the principle of Ukraine's accession than**

on the details of its implementation, which will require time and major changes in the organisation of Ukrainian society and economy.

So, while Ukraine's counter-offensive has not yielded the expected results, debates are underway about the future of the conflict and the possibility of Ukraine reclaiming its occupied territories. Discussions in Poland and Ukraine have shown that a return to the way things were before is not an option. Ukraine has every right to expect security guarantees with regard to its powerful neighbour, and membership of the European Union is the only prospect that offers enough hope to keep its forces mobilised. When the time comes, security guarantees will be a core issue in the undoubtedly difficult negotiations with the aggressor.



Working meeting at the Ukrainian Rada

2. THE OUTCOME OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE WILL HAVE FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES FOR EUROPE

A. THE NECESSITY TO PURSUE AND INTENSIFY WESTERN AID TO UKRAINE AT A PIVOTAL MOMENT FOR THE FUTURE OF THE CONFLICT

According to a high-level Polish correspondent, Russia remains in an offensive posture, particularly around the town of Avdiivka in the Donetsk oblast, but is unlikely to launch any major offensives before the Russian presidential election in March. The situation is likely to be different in the run-up to the US presidential election. Russia could then launch new, large-scale ground operations. According to the same correspondent, a new Russian offensive on Kiev cannot be ruled out in the medium term if Western military aid is lacking. In fact, the discussions in Poland and Ukraine showed that **Vladimir Putin had not given up any of his initial aims and that there was no reason for the conflict to end.**

The numerous meetings held by the delegation in Kiev confirmed **the feeling that the military situation was deteriorating and that Russian pressure was mounting.** The relative failure of the counter-offensive launched in the spring has also led to a debate on the outcome of the conflict, particularly in the Western media.

With no decisive breakthrough, **the conflict has become a war of attrition in which two armies are now pitted against each other with opposing strengths and weaknesses.** Russia has a mass of soldiers that it can send out every month without consideration — 30,000 soldiers arrive at the front every month to replace casualties that can number up to a thousand on certain days. Russian artillery continues to pound Ukrainian lines relentlessly and with little precision and, after virtually ceasing in the autumn, attacks resumed at the end of December across the whole of Ukraine using hundreds of missiles and drones.

On the other hand, Ukrainian forces are successfully continuing their targeted operations in the Black Sea to drive out the Russian fleet. **Ukrainian anti-aircraft defences are producing convincing results, including against hypersonic Russian missiles which were supposed to be impossible to intercept.** Ukrainian artillery and missiles from the West regularly hit targets with high added value, and Ukrainian troops are holding the line at the cost of losses which remain classified but which we imagine to be high.

What is the situation on the front line at the start of 2024?

Taking into account the information gathered, it appears that:

- The front has stabilised, with a few exceptions that have not led to any exploitable breakthroughs,
- In 2024, Russia will no doubt seek to conquer the whole of the oblasts it already occupies (Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporijjia, etc.) in order to "consolidate" its gains,
- A Russian offensive before the spring is unlikely, as it would require further mobilisation and an increase in equipment production,
- In the Black Sea, the Russians are continuing to lay mines on trade routes, while their assault ships have left the Sebastopol base for Novorossiysk.
- the Russians have committed all their reserves and are struggling to replenish them. However, their demographic reserves should not be underestimated, even without mass mobilisation: they are said to be sending **30,000 new soldiers to the front every month, which exceeds their losses.** From this point of view, time is on Russia's side,
- Between May and December 2023, the number of Russian soldiers on the front line is estimated to have increased by 20%, while the number of tanks and artillery is said to have increased by 60% each, illustrating the extent to which **the numbers remain on Russia's side.** These figures contrast sharply with the slowdown in Western supplies to Ukraine.

Given this tragic situation, **the Senate delegation's members paid tribute to the courage of Ukrainian soldiers and their families.** They also listened to the pressing demands of the Ukrainian authorities that Western aid should not be reduced, but rather increased in both quantity and quality.

During the many meetings held in Kiev, the quality of the equipment supplied by France was praised. Oleksandr Zavitnevych, Chair of the Rada's Committee on National Security, Defence and Intelligence, thanked the French authorities for the various deliveries of ground-air defence systems, Caesar artillery systems and AMX10 armoured vehicles, which have shown excellent performance. He also emphasised the role of sanctions against Russia, which remain essential if not sufficient.

How effective are French weapons in Ukraine?

The members of the Senate delegation questioned Defence Minister Rustem Umierov about France's military aid.

The Ukrainian authorities very much appreciate this aid, as shown by the 54 Caesar cannons now active on the front line. The Ukrainians have learned to use these resources to the best of their ability. They are introducing innovations such as coupling the Caesar gun to a firing system based on artificial intelligence, which should help to optimise ammunition consumption.

It is worth noting that the Ukrainian officials interviewed denied the criticisms levelled in December 2023 in a French press article about the use of Caesars and said they would like to receive more of them, with spare ammunition and tubes.

The defence minister stressed the vital need for ammunition, which is currently in short supply. He would also like France to provide more ground-to-air defence resources, in particular SAMP-T batteries, but also Crotales and Mistrals.

The Ukrainian authorities are also calling on France to step up its training of fighter pilots, particularly in tactics. They also have needs in flight control and air operations. Other requests include the continued delivery of SCALP missiles, Hammer bombs and electronic warfare systems.

Finally, Defence Minister Rustem Umierov insists **decisions on the battlefield will also be made based on the quality of the technology**. Whether it be highly manoeuvrable artillery systems, systems for controlling swarms of drones or the radars that will equip the F16s, **Ukraine needs the latest technologies to help it stand up to the Russians.**

The most urgent thing right now is to make progress on arms production in Ukraine in conjunction with French companies. The Ukrainian authorities have made ammunition production a priority. Although local ammunition production has increased twenty-fold since 2022, this is still not enough. The delegation's attention was also drawn to the importance of spare parts, particularly artillery tubes, which ideally should be produced directly in Ukraine. These pressing demands from the Ukrainian authorities, which simply reflect the operational needs on the front line, **raise the question of France's commitment**. Although our country took action in response to the aggression suffered by Ukraine, we have to admit that **the shift to a war economy, which was widely proclaimed, has not occurred** and that our aid has not been sustained over the long term and in sufficient volumes.

When will we finally get ammunition production back on track?

In their recent report¹ on Programme 146 relating to capability resources in the 2024 budget, our colleagues Hugues Saury and H  l  ne Conway-Mouret explained, *"the Ministry of Defence's stated ambitions in terms of munitions are still woefully insufficient given the demands of high-intensity combat. Deliveries of 155 mm shells, for example, are expected to reach 20,000 units by 2024, or the equivalent of four days' consumption by the Ukrainian armed forces. (...)"*

*"However, despite the Government's statements, **the volume of ammunition purchased in the coming years will remain similar to the averages seen in previous years for artillery ammunition. This puts France dangerously out of step with its partners.** The US government has decided to increase its production of artillery ammunition sixfold, while the UK has awarded several major contracts to its manufacturers and Germany has ordered 150,000 rounds of artillery ammunition from Rheinmetall. Nexter believes that the purchase of 15,000 shells should be guaranteed to ensure the long-term viability of the industry and enable production to ramp up rapidly to 40,000 to 45,000 shells. In the longer term, the KNDS/Nexter group is aiming for a production capacity of 100,000 shells and is still looking forward to more government orders."*

¹ <https://www.senat.fr/rap/a23-130-8/a23-130-8-syn.pdf>

Recommendation 4: the government must urgently arrange and finance an increase in the number of ammunition production lines to prepare for a high-intensity conflict and increase deliveries to Ukraine. There is a major effort to be made in this area, since the 2024-2030 military planning act did not address this issue adequately. We urgently need to be able to produce several hundred thousand shells a year and a sufficient number of bombs and missiles. This is woefully far from being the case. We must take action without delay.

The Ukrainian authorities also regret that Russia still manages to obtain Western electronic components which they find in missile debris. We need tighter controls on the export of these strategic components.

More generally, the various people we spoke to felt that the sanctions imposed on Russia had played an important role in limiting Russian capabilities, but that the country had gradually managed to loosen the stranglehold by strengthening its relations with countries that did not apply the sanctions. Russia has developed close cooperation with Iran and China on UAVs. The Ukrainian command also believes that deliveries of ammunition from North Korea benefit from Chinese support.

Under these conditions, we must certainly uphold the existing sanctions, but we must also consider ways of strengthening them and extending them to countries that fail to apply them.

Recommendation 5: maintain existing sanctions and adopt new ones to limit the capabilities of the Russian military-industrial complex to the greatest extent possible.

"All European countries have to do their bit, but not everyone is playing their part."

Cédric Perrin

B. THE NEED TO BUILD A LONG-TERM ALLIANCE WITH UKRAINE AND CONTAIN RUSSIAN IMPERIALISM

The issues facing Ukrainian society today are what the struggle means and what sacrifices must be made to preserve a model of society that is increasingly resembling that of other Europeans. Since 2014, the majority of Ukrainians have made the difficult choice of breaking with Russia to escape its authoritarian rule and imperialist demands. **There is no turning back from this choice, and it must eventually lead to integration with the rest of Europe.**

Ukraine must do its part by continuing to fight corruption, but also by safeguarding diversity and pluralism in public debate, especially in the media. Adopting European economic standards will also involve reorganising its agricultural and industrial sectors. This transformation is already underway in the defence sector, where a network of innovative SMEs has been created within the Brave 1 complex, which the delegation was able to visit. Several hundred projects were examined and pre-selected, and around a hundred are being financed and developed. These innovations include jamming and counter-jamming devices. **This "start-up" spirit illustrates how far Ukrainians have come, many of them being committed to entrepreneurial initiative and innovation.**

Beyond what Ukraine itself must do, the support of Ukraine's allies will remain crucial in 2024 in deciding the fate of the conflict. The Minister for Strategic Industries, Oleksandr Zavitnevych, stressed Ukraine's immediate need for certain types of supplies required to produce explosives. However, he also emphasised the advantage for French companies of being able to work with Ukrainian players who have combat experience and whose innovations are being tested directly on the battlefield. **The war in Ukraine has challenged many of the certainties**

about how modern conflicts unfold, and it is now a matter of "building the arsenal of the modern world" by increasingly relying on cybersecurity and artificial intelligence.

Demining the country will also require extensive international cooperation. The Russians have mined Ukrainian territory to an extent that is hard to imagine. The Ukrainian authorities have just completed a map of the areas affected and in which 1,600 types of landmines were identified. The demining programme, which was designed with the help of the UNDP, will aim to clear agricultural land, make people safer and preserve critical infrastructure, such as electricity, water and roads.

Demining must be carried out before Ukraine can be rebuilt by its allies, including France. The interviews conducted in Kiev showed that some ministries were already working on the steps that would follow the end of the war to rebuild the country on new foundations. While this may seem a long way off today, we cannot ignore the fact that Ukraine is already devoting a great deal of energy to dealing with the stigma of the conflict and strengthen its society's resilience. It is vital that French companies in the construction and public works sector, and in the major water, electricity and transport networks, give thought to how they might help to rebuild the country.

Recommendation 6: expand French companies' presence in Ukraine beyond the military sector to pave the way for the reconstruction phase, which will require significant resources in all sectors.

While sectoral cooperation is valuable for Ukraine, the Ukrainian authorities are looking for a much more comprehensive partnership. The Ukrainian president's diplomatic adviser, Igor Jovkva, reiterated **the importance his country placed on the European Council's decision to open accession negotiations with Ukraine.**

The Ukrainians want to go fast. They point out that they submitted their application on the fifth day of the invasion, that they responded within a month to the questionnaire sent by the European Commission and that it took them only a year to obtain a positive recommendation from the Commission.

The Ukrainian government will now launch the process of "screening" all its legislation. For Igor Zhovkva, "*Ukraine wants to be judged on its own merits*", which, from the Ukrainian point of view, could justify their country advancing more quickly through the stages than some of the other candidate countries.

Ukraine is devoting the same energy to fulfilling the conditions for joining NATO. The Ukrainian armed forces have improved their interoperability by relying on equipment supplied by NATO countries. The Ukrainian president's diplomatic adviser reiterated his country's hopes for the forthcoming summit in Washington, while understanding the fears that membership could raise so long as a solution to the current conflict has not been found.

In the meantime, **Ukraine is waiting for credible, legally binding security guarantees from its allies.** Discussions in Kiev suggested that talks were underway on the form and scope that these security guarantees could take, even if these deliberations have not yet reached a conclusion.

Recommendation 7: reaffirm that Ukraine's sovereignty cannot be challenged in future peace negotiations, especially its ability to join the international organisations of its choice, and insist on Ukraine's legitimacy in asking its allies for "security guarantees" with regard to its biggest neighbour.

"The war is still on, and we need France."

Ruslan Stefanchuk, President of the Ukrainian Rada



Working meeting with Igor Zhovkva, diplomatic adviser to the Ukrainian president, with Gaël Veyssière, the French ambassador in Kiev, attending.

TO LEARN MORE



Cédric Perrin

Chair of the Committee
Senator for the Territory
of Belfort
(LR)

The Foreign Affairs, Defence and Armed Forces Committee

<http://www.senat.fr/commission/etr/index.html>



Olivier Cigolotti

Senator for Haute-Loire (UC)



Ronan le Gleut

Senator for the French
residing outside France
(LR)



Jean-Marc Vayssouze-Faure

Senator for Lot
(SER)