

## THE IDEA OF EUROPEAN UNITY: FROM WESTPHALIA TO THE CONTEMPORARY RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR

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### Summary

The article provides a retrospective analysis of the evolution of the "United Europe" idea, spanning from the Westphalian system to the realities of the russo-Ukrainian war's impact. The study examines the transformation of integration models: from the philosophical "perpetual peace" projects of I. Kant and J.-J. Rousseau to the pragmatic pan-Europeanism of R. Coudenhove-Kalergi and the contemporary supranational structure of the European Union.

Special attention is paid to the destructive factors threatening the integrity of the union at the present stage, specifically the erosion of a shared European identity and the intensification of eurosceptic discourse. The role of the full-scale russian invasion is highlighted as a catalyst for the EU's "geopolitical awakening," which necessitated a transition from the liberal paradigm of "peace through trade" toward strategic responsibility and the militarization of the idea of unity via the European Peace Facility.

The author concludes that the EU's survival as a subject of international relations depends on resolving the conflict between the need for a rapid geopolitical response and the inertia of intergovernmental mechanisms.

**Key words:** European Union, European integration, the idea of "European Unity", euroscepticism.

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### 1. Introduction

The European Union is traditionally defined as an effective model of an integration association, serving as the institutional pillar of the liberal-democratic order and the guarantor of regional stability in Europe. However, at the current stage of development, the union is affected by several systemic factors leading to internal destabilization and a correlation in the organization's international authority. This is primarily due to the stagnation of the political component of integration processes, accompanied by intensifying crisis trends.

Key destructive factors include the erosion of a shared European identity among member states, a decline in the political accountability of actors regarding the implementation of internal EU strategy, and the intensification of eurosceptic discourses concerning the feasibility of further deepening integration.

The ideological foundation of a "United Europe" has undergone a lengthy transformation: from theoretical and philosophical projects of peaceful coexistence to the formation of an extensive system of supranational institutions. Under the contemporary conditions of the full-scale war initiated by russia against Ukraine, the European security architecture and EU identity are undergoing a stage of fundamental testing. The events in Ukraine have determined a revision of the effectiveness of current international law and acted as a catalyst for both the

consolidation of European states and the strengthening of eurosceptic views within the union. Therefore, the capacity of the association to conceptualize the idea of a "United Europe" within existing realities and preserve the integrity of integration remains a crucial research and practical issue.

**The aim of the study** is to analyze the evolution of the idea of a "United Europe" from the Peace of Westphalia to the modern russo-Ukrainian war.

Methodologically, the research is based on a systems approach, utilizing retrospective and comparative-historical analysis, the typologization of ideological models, content analysis, and case studies. The proposed methodological toolkit allows not only for the reconstruction of the evolutionary path of the "United Europe Idea" but also for assessing the relevance of existing ideas to modern geopolitical challenges.

## 2. Philosophical and Theoretical Origins of European Unity (17th–18th Centuries)

Before becoming a tangible political entity, the idea of a united Europe existed as numerous competing models. Various visions clashed: from religious and imperial to liberal and socialist. Although the modern EU is built precisely on a liberal-technocratic model, the intellectual heritage of other approaches continues to influence discussions about Europe's future.

In the book *“Engineering European Unity: The Quest for the Right Solution Across Centuries,”* author E. Boka proposes an approach to understanding the process of building European unity not as linear progress, but as a complex engineering task. Each era offered its own "blueprints," and the current structure is a synthesis that is still undergoing a "stress test."

Scientific revolutions, political transformations, and the flourish of philosophical thought in the 18th century led to the emergence of several pan-European concepts. Despite ideological differences, these ideas were based on the common foundations of European modernity: a belief in continuous progress, teleology (the goal-oriented nature of historical development), and a belief in the special historical mission of the continent.

Earlier proposals for European integration can also be traced. For instance, William Penn suggested a form of cooperation where decisions were made by voting, with the number of votes for individual member states determined by established quotas (*“An Essay Towards the Present and Future Peace of Europe,”* 1693). Abbé de Saint-Pierre advocated for a complex institutional structure, including an internal dispute resolution mechanism; his activism significantly popularized the idea of a united Europe among subsequent thinkers (*“Project for Perpetual Peace in Europe,”* 1713). The central goal of guaranteeing peace and security remained paramount in the views of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who supported establishing eternal peace through the unification of all continental states (*“Abstract of the Project for Perpetual Peace,”* 1761), and Immanuel Kant, who proposed a union of equal states based on republicanism and the rule of law (*“Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch”*).

During this period, the concept of a united and peaceful continent transformed into a secular form. At the end of the century, Kant hypothesized that "perpetual peace" in Europe is possible only through a federative system of free republican states. For Kant, achieving this state was not merely an ethical guide but a teleological law—the inevitable result of the rational and moral improvement of humanity. Kant's contemporary, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, also relied on the liberal philosophy of state-building. However, their visions differed in scale: Kant proposed a universal, broader model, while Rousseau leaned toward smaller states forming a European confederation modeled after the Helvetic League (Switzerland) or the Holy Roman Empire.

Both thinkers justified European unity through the natural development of rational governance rather than Christian values.

### 3. The Interwar Period and the Birth of Pan-Europeanism

At the heart of the political component of the European integration idea lies the concept of Pan-Europeanism, which emphasizes a general European structure based on liberal-democratic values. The emergence of Pan-Europeanism is linked to Richard von Coudenhove-Kalergi, who substantiated this theory after World War I in his work "*Panuropa*." He called for continental unification to prevent future threats: a new world war, U.S. economic hegemony, and Russian expansion.

He noted that the cause of European decline was political, not "biological." Europe was not dying of old age, but because its inhabitants were destroying each other with modern technological means. The World War changed Europe's political map but not its political system. He urged Europeans to look toward the future and create a European structure instead of European anarchy. Coudenhove-Kalergi argued that Europe's global hegemony was a thing of the past and that regaining its status as a center of world politics would only be possible if European states united into a "politico-economic union." To resist external dangers, he proposed a system of pan-European institutions.

This concept envisioned a European continental union (confederation) from Portugal to Poland as a regional military-political and economic alliance. It was to be structured as a confederation of all European states (excluding Great Britain and Russia) with common institutions for trade, finance, and external security.

World War I radically shifted the balance of power, sparking a search for a new interaction model between key players. Given the active spread of unification ideas in the 1920s, it is clear that the foundation for post-war integration was laid during the interwar period. Pan-Europeanism gained particular relevance during the geopolitical crises of post-war Europe, pushing states to deepen cooperation, first in the economic and later in the political sphere. After World War II, Coudenhove-Kalergi actively promoted consolidation, characterizing WWI as a "civil war between European peoples" and calling for an end to internecine conflicts.

Until the early 20th century, ideas of a united Europe were largely abstract and utopian, often ignoring political and economic realities. However, after WWI, unification for the sake of peace became vital as the continent lost its dominant position. Western Europe needed to redefine its place in the international system and find new levers to strengthen its positions.

Regarding European identity, Coudenhove-Kalergi emphasized that Europeans must feel like a single nation. He argued that forming a European nation did not exclude multilingualism but required the elimination of nationalism. He insisted that Pan-Europe required an end to the rivalry between Germany and France; unification could only occur if these two states abandoned hegemonistic ambitions and served their "common great Fatherland." He noted that since both neighboring states had become republics, a union based on shared republican ideals became possible.

### 4. Institutionalization and Competition of Integration Models (Post-1945)

The post-war devastation led to a general realization of the need for unity among political and public circles. Initially, two concepts for integration emerged: supranationalism and intergovernmentalism. "Supranationalism" envisioned a system where national sovereignty is

significantly limited. Conversely, "intergovernmentalism" viewed integration through cooperation between national governments with minimal new structures.

Winston Churchill represented the "minimalist" view; in his 1946 Zurich speech, he argued that closer ties through trade would reduce the prospect of war. Altiero Spinelli, a "maximalist," argued that only a combination of economic and political union could ensure long-term peace, even drafting a constitution for a federal Europe. Spinelli saw integration as essential for "saving" the nation-state after two destructive wars, though his views were often perceived as the end of the nation-state.

The general theories of integration developed along two polar parallels:

- Realism – Federalism – Functionalism – Neofunctionalism
- Intergovernmentalism – Supranationalism

Confederalism involves members relinquishing some powers to a governing body for coordination while maintaining national sovereignty. Integration in a confederation develops only where the interests of all member states align.

Ultimately, the "United Europe Idea" is a model for forming an integrated political system based on liberal-democratic values, acting as a "guarantor" of three elements: (i) a stable security system; (ii) economic growth; and (iii) international positioning as a community rather than individual actors. This model, implemented in the 1950s, was a pragmatic response to the World Wars. Every major war or systemic collapse became a catalyst for rethinking the European order.

## 5. Identity Crisis and the Phenomenon of Euroscepticism

Euroscepticism emerged alongside the institutionalization of Europe. Its popularity in the new millennium was fueled by the financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures, which caused public discontent.

Euroscepticism is not a monolithic concept; different movements range from demanding a full exit (Hard Euroscepticism) to advocating for reform (Soft Euroscepticism). Primarily, eurosceptics defend national sovereignty, fearing that deeper integration causes harm. Key targets of criticism include: the expansion of "Brussels bureaucracy," unfair distribution of financial aid, the perceived failure of migration and multiculturalism policies, and the deprivation of sovereign rights. They oppose a "superstate" that would make individual European nations impossible.

The end of the Cold War required a new political level of integration. The 2004 Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe aimed to introduce a President of the European Council and an EU Foreign Minister, and to limit the veto. However, its ratification failure—notably in France—indicated a lack of readiness to delegate sovereign powers. The alternative was the Lisbon Treaty, which kept the ideological core of the constitutional project but did not fundamentally limit state autonomy in political decision-making.

Subsequently, eurosceptic views were strengthened by the Eurozone crisis (2009–2015), the migration crisis (2015–2016), Brexit (2016), the COVID-19 pandemic, and the response to the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. The invasion became a new catalyst for European unity.

## 6. Re-ideologization of the EU Amidst the Russo-Ukrainian War

The full-scale Russian invasion destroyed the fundamental liberal premise of the EU: the idea that economic ties with autocracies automatically guarantee peace. After 2022, the Union recognized that economic dependence (especially energy) was used as a weapon against it. This

led to a new strategic doctrine of risk diversification, which may become a new element of the "United Europe" idea.

As Ursula von der Leyen noted, this war is not just a regional conflict but a "war of autocracy against democracy," forcing the EU to reconsider the essence of unity. The Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has undergone a fundamental transformation. The European Peace Facility (EPF) has turned the EU into an active subject of military aid. By 2025, the EU not only finances lethal weapons but also uses profits from frozen Russian assets to support the Ukrainian defense industry.

However, researchers (*Giannini, 2025*) highlight systemic weaknesses: the reliance on unanimity and the veto power as obstacles to operational efficiency, and a fragmented defense that needs to move from temporary funds to permanent supranational structures.

In her 2024–2025 speeches, Von der Leyen promotes "strategic responsibility." Amidst a potential decrease in the U.S. defense role, the idea of a united Europe transforms into a demand for full autonomy of the defense-industrial complex. In Kyiv (February 2025), she emphasized: "Ukraine's freedom and sovereignty are a fundamental interest of Europe. An investment in Ukrainian security is the prevention of a great war across the continent."

If previously EU enlargement was seen through bureaucratic procedures, today it is treated as a "geopolitical reunification." Ukraine, Moldova, and the Balkans are no longer "grey zones." Von der Leyen's 2025 rhetoric shifted from "enlargement fatigue" to "enlargement for survival," though states like Hungary do not support this position. This has created a new cycle of identity crisis: a conflict between the need for rapid geopolitical reaction and the inertia of intergovernmental mechanisms used by eurosceptics.

## 7. Conclusions

The study confirms that the idea of a united Europe did not develop linearly but transformed from abstract philosophical concepts of "perpetual peace" to pragmatic interwar projects. A systemic security collapse or major war acted as the key stimulus for each stage of integration.

Retrospective analysis reveals a permanent competition between supranational governance and intergovernmental cooperation. The current EU architecture, based on a liberal-technocratic synthesis, shows limited effectiveness during acute geopolitical crises. The 2004 Constitutional failure and CFSP challenges indicate that national interests still take priority in critical sovereign matters.

Euroscepticism has evolved from a marginal phenomenon to a systemic factor. During the Russo-Ukrainian war, it transformed into a strategy of "internal blocking," where the use of the veto (notably by Hungary) risks institutional paralysis. This underscores the erosion of shared identity and declining political accountability.

The Russo-Ukrainian war catalyzed a revision of the EU's fundamental principles. The "peace through trade" paradigm with autocracies has been proven ineffective. New mechanisms like the EPF and the concept of "geopolitical reunification" indicate a forced militarization of the "United Europe" idea and a departure from its purely civilian character.

The EU's future integrity depends on resolving the internal conflict between the need for rapid geopolitical responses and the inertia of intergovernmental decision-making. Internal reforms, such as transitioning to qualified majority voting and creating a formal Defense Union, are objective conditions for the EU's survival as an independent international actor.

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