

Research Briefing

By Stefano Fella

22 March 2022

The EU response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine



Summary

- 1 The EU and Ukraine
- 2 EU response to invasion of Ukraine, 2022
- 3 Ukraine's application to join the EU

Image Credits

Adobe stock 89632791 – European Union and Ukraine blended flag by Denis Rozhnovsky – Adobe Stock (stock.adobe.com). Adobe Stock License. / image cropped.

Disclaimer

The Commons Library does not intend the information in our research publications and briefings to address the specific circumstances of any particular individual. We have published it to support the work of MPs. You should not rely upon it as legal or professional advice, or as a substitute for it. We do not accept any liability whatsoever for any errors, omissions or misstatements contained herein. You should consult a suitably qualified professional if you require specific advice or information. Read our briefing [‘Legal help: where to go and how to pay’](#) for further information about sources of legal advice and help. This information is provided subject to the conditions of the Open Parliament Licence.

Feedback

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Please note that authors are not always able to engage in discussions with members of the public who express opinions about the content of our research, although we will carefully consider and correct any factual errors.

You can read our feedback and complaints policy and our editorial policy at commonslibrary.parliament.uk. If you have general questions about the work of the House of Commons email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

Contents

1	The EU and Ukraine	10
1.1	The EU-Ukraine association agreement	10
	Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area	10
	Political dialogue and broader cooperation	10
	Reaction to agreement in Ukraine and Russia	11
1.2	The EU and Russia	12
	EU response to Russian annexation of Crimea, 2014	12
	EU introduces sanctions against Russia	13
1.3	EU economic support for Ukraine	14
	Macro-financial assistance	14
	Other economic support	15
2	EU response to invasion of Ukraine, 2022	17
2.1	EU response to Russian recognition of DPR and LPR	17
	First sanctions package	18
	Nord Stream 2 halted	18
2.2	Invasion of Ukraine: Response of EU leaders	19
	European Council, 24 February 2022	19
	EU leaders meeting, Versailles, 10-11 March 2022	20
2.3	International Coordination	22
	G7 Foreign Ministers meeting, 19 February 2022	22
	G7 leaders statement, 24 February 2022	23
	Joint statement by the EU, UK, USA and Canada, 26 February 2022	23
	Foreign Affairs Ministers meeting, 4 March 2022	24
	G7 statement, 11 March 2022	25
2.4	EU Sanctions following Russian invasion of Ukraine	26

Second sanctions package	26
Third sanctions package	27
Fourth sanctions package	29
Impact of sanctions	30
Sanctions against Belarus	30
2.5 Military assistance	32
Military assistance from Member States	33
2.6 Temporary protections for people fleeing conflict	33
Rights for those under temporary protection	34
Funding for temporary protection	36
Support for education	36
Support for healthcare	36
2.7 Humanitarian support	37
2.8 Ending EU reliance on Russian gas	38
RePowerEU plan	38
G7 Energy Ministers statement	39
3 Ukraine's application to join the EU	41
3.1 Submission of application	41
President Zelenskyy address to European Parliament	41
3.2 EU response to application	42
Member State attitudes to enlargement	43
3.3 EU accession process	44
Current candidates for accession	45

Summary

The EU has taken an unprecedented set of actions since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This includes several rounds of sanctions against Russia, as well as military assistance to Ukraine, and temporary protection for Ukrainians and third country nationals fleeing the conflict. The EU has also discussed plans to end the dependence of some Member States on Russian energy.

The EU-Ukraine association agreement

The EU and Ukraine have an association agreement, in force since 2016. The agreement provides a framework for the convergence of Ukraine with the EU in the political, economic and legal spheres.

In 2013, then Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, said he would not be signing the association agreement. Yanukovich, who was viewed as close to Russia, cited Russian opposition to the agreement. President Yanukovich's decision led to a wave of mass protests and a violent response from the Government. He was removed from office by the Ukrainian Parliament in February 2014 and fled to Russia. A new government then signed the agreement with the EU.

EU response to the Russian annexation of Crimea

Shortly after President Yanukovich was forced out of office, Russia moved to occupy Crimea. This was followed by protests by pro-Russian separatists in the Donbas region in Eastern Ukraine, with parts of this region coming under their control in April 2014.

The EU condemned Russian actions, [describing the action in Crimea as illegal](#) and called on Russia to withdraw. Russia's involvement in the then G8 was ended, and the EU said it was suspending further talks on a new co-operation agreement.

The EU imposed sanctions against officials involved in the actions in Ukraine. This involved travel bans and asset freezes. The EU also adopted sanctions against Russia in July 2014. These included a ban on the import and export of arms and related material and a ban on the export of dual use goods for military users. There were also restrictions on exports of energy-related

equipment and technology. These sanctions have remained in force since 2014

EU Response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine

Russia began its invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The European Council (the heads of state or government of the 27 EU Member States) statement on the same day said Russia was “grossly violating international law” and that [the EU would “impose massive and severe consequences on Russia for its action”](#).

EU Sanctions against Russia

Sanctions have been coordinated with the USA, UK and other allies. New sanctions had already been imposed on Russia on 22 February, after President Putin had signed the order recognising the self-declared independent republics in the Donbas region. Further sanctions were announced on 25 February, and these were expanded again on 28 February, 2 March and 15 March.

The list of individuals and entities subject to an asset freeze and travel ban has been progressively expanded to include President Putin, Government Ministers, all members of the Russian Parliament and various businesspeople.

Financial sanctions have included:

- denying Russian banks access to EU financial markets and banning transactions with the Russian Central Bank;
- freezing assets of some Russian banks;
- banning Russian banks from the SWIFT messaging system for financial transactions.

Other sanctions have included:

- a ban on Russian air carriers and other Russian registered or owned aircraft EU landing, taking off or flying over EU territories;
- a ban on broadcasting by the Russian state-owned media outlets Russia Today and Sputnik;
- a ban on transactions with certain state-owned companies;
- a ban on EU exports of goods relating to the oil refining sector, and the aviation and space industry (including aircraft);
- trade restrictions on iron and steel, and luxury goods.

Following an agreement among G7 countries, the EU also announced on 15 March that there would be action [to deny Russian products and services “most favoured nation treatment” in EU markets](#). Belarus' accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) would also be blocked.

Sanctions against Belarus

Sanctions have also been placed on Belarus, for its role in supporting the Russian aggression against Ukraine. This includes restrictions on the use of SWIFT services for three Belarus banks and other financial sanctions. Members of the Belarus' military are on the list of individuals subject to sanctions.

Ending EU reliance on Russian energy

On 8 March, the European Commission announced an outline for a plan to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels before 2030. The Commission also outlined measures to respond to rising energy prices in Europe and to replenish gas stocks for the next winter. The Commission said this could [reduce EU demand for Russian gas by two thirds](#) before the end of the year.

The EU imports 90% of its gas consumption, of which Russia provides around 45%. Russia also accounts for around 25% of oil imports and 45% of coal imports. Some Member States have proposed a ban on energy imports from Russia. Other States, such as Germany, are reluctant to go this far given high levels of dependency on these imports. The German government has however announced that it will not allow the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany to begin operation.

Versailles summit, 10-11 March 2022

The leaders of the EU Member States met in Versailles on 10 and 11 March. They adopted a declaration describing [Russia's "war of aggression" as constituting a "tectonic shift in European history"](#). It said that the EU had decided to "take more responsibility for our security and take further decisive steps towards building our European sovereignty". The declaration made various commitments aimed at:

- bolstering the EU's defence capabilities;
- reducing energy dependencies;
- building a more robust economic base.

Proposals would be developed further by the European Commission and Member States.

EU support for Ukraine

Military assistance

The EU announced on 28 February 2022 it would [finance the purchase and delivery of lethal military equipment](#) to Ukraine. This would be the first time the EU had provided lethal equipment to a third country. €450 million was allocated under the European Peace Facility for this. €50 million was allocated for non-lethal supplies.

On 21 March, EU foreign ministers agreed an additional €500 million would be allocated under the European Peace Facility.

Temporary Protection to people fleeing Ukraine

On 4 March, the EU adopted legislation providing for temporary protection for persons fleeing Ukraine. This applies to Ukrainian nationals, and their family members, if they resided in Ukraine on or before 24 February 2022. It will also apply to third country nationals or stateless persons benefiting from international protection in Ukraine, and their family members.

Temporary protection will be granted for up to three years. The scheme could end earlier if the Council of the EU decides it is safe to return to Ukraine. People fleeing Ukraine will have rights of residence, access to the labour market and housing, medical assistance, and access to education for children in the Member State they go to. The EU will coordinate assistance and provide funding for the host Member States.

Humanitarian and economic support

The [European Commission announced an emergency support package](#) of €500 million for those affected by the conflict in Ukraine on 1 March 2022. Supplies delivered through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism by EU Member States are estimated to be worth an additional €100 million. Humanitarian aid has gone to Ukraine and to the neighbouring countries receiving people fleeing from Ukraine.

On 1 February 2022, the European Commission announced a €1.2 billion emergency Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) loan programme to Ukraine. Half of this was expected to be delivered by March. €5 billion of MFA loans had already been provided in the period 2014-2021. Some funds had been withheld as they had been contingent on reforms being undertaken in Ukraine.

Ukraine's application to join the EU

Ukraine submitted an application to join the EU on 28 February 2022. President Zelenskyy asked for immediate Ukrainian membership of the EU, proposing this be done under “a new special procedure”.

EU leaders declared at Versailles on 10-11 March that “Ukraine belongs to our European family” and that the EU would deepen its partnership with Ukraine. The Council of the EU has asked the European Commission to submit its opinion on Ukraine's application (as well as on application made by Moldova and Georgia at the beginning of March).

Several EU Member States from the former Soviet bloc have called for the EU to begin the process of Ukraine's accession to the EU swiftly. However, other Member States have adopted a cautious tone and have pointed to the lengthy process for accession.

1 The EU and Ukraine

1.1 The EU-Ukraine association agreement

The EU and Ukraine have an association agreement, which provisionally came into force on 1 January 2016. Following ratification by all Member States of the EU it came fully into force on 1 September 2017.

Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area

Among the aims of the association agreement were to establish a framework for enhanced political dialogue, and convergence of Ukraine with the EU in the political, economic and legal spheres. This included establishing conditions for Ukraine's gradual integration in the EU Internal Market by setting up "a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area".¹

The agreement provided for tariffs between the EU and Ukraine to be gradually cut, with Ukraine's rules brought in line with the EU's in certain industrial and agricultural sectors. Ukraine would gradually align its legislation with the EU in a number of areas, including competition, technical barriers to trade (TBT), sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures,² customs and trade facilitation, and protection of intellectual property rights.³ Ukraine would establish state aid rules similar to those of the EU, and align with EU public procurement legislation. It would also align with EU employment and equality legislation.⁴

It was hoped that the agreement would help with the reform and modernisation of the Ukrainian economy. Progress by Ukraine in aligning legislation with the EU would enable greater access to the EU internal market.

Political dialogue and broader cooperation

The agreement also included a commitment to enhanced cooperation in the field of justice, freedom and security with the aim of reinforcing the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The agreement

¹ European Commission, [EU-Ukraine Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement](#) and WTO, [Trade Policy Review: Ukraine \(2016\)](#)

² [Sanitary and phytosanitary requirements](#) relate to trade in live animals, animal products, food, plants and products.

³ European Commission, [Trade: Ukraine](#)

⁴ Friedrich Ebert Stiftung [Implementation of the EU-Ukraine association agreement: labour law, gender equality and occupational safety and health](#), October 2019

placed particular emphasis on the strengthening of the judiciary, and combating corruption in Ukraine.

In addition, the agreement promoted gradual convergence on foreign affairs and security matters with the aim of Ukraine's ever-deeper involvement in the European security area. There was also a commitment to regular political dialogue, including through EU-Ukraine summits and the governance structures established by the agreement.⁵

Reaction to agreement in Ukraine and Russia

The EU-Ukraine agreement was negotiated between 2007 and 2011. Ukraine had loosened ties with Russia in the period following the so-called Orange revolution in 2004. The victory of the pro-Russian candidate, Viktor Yanukovich in the November 2004 presidential election was followed by mass protests and then annulled by Ukraine's supreme court because of "systemic and massive violations".⁶ Yanukovich was subsequently defeated in the re-run of the election in December 2004.

A Russian official described the EU-Ukraine agreement as "suicidal" for Ukraine

However, Yanukovich returned to win the 2010 presidential election and indicated in late 2013 that he would not be signing the association agreement with the EU. He cited pressure from Russia, which opposed the agreement.⁷ Earlier in 2013, Russia warned it would tighten customs procedures against Ukraine and a Russian official described the EU-Ukraine agreement as "suicidal" for Ukraine.⁸

President Yanukovich's decision led to a new wave of mass protests and a violent response from the Government. President Yanukovich was removed from office by the Ukrainian Parliament in February 2014, and fled to Russia.⁹ An interim government then signed the political part of the association agreement with the EU, in March 2014. The economic part of the agreement, the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA), was then signed by the new President, Petro Poroshenko, following his election in June 2014.¹⁰

⁵ Official Journal of the EU, [Association Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, of the one part, and Ukraine, of the other part](#) (pdf), L 161/3, 29 May 2014

⁶ New York Times, [Ukrainian Court Orders New Vote for Presidency, Citing Fraud](#), 4 December 2004

⁷ BBC News, [Ukraine protests after Yanukovich EU deal rejection](#), 30 November 2013

⁸ EU Observer, [Ukraine and Russia on path to trade war over EU pact](#), 19 August 2013

⁹ BBC News, [Ukrainian MPs vote to oust President Yanukovich](#), 22 February 2014

¹⁰ Ukraine Government portal, [Association Agreement between the European Union and Ukraine](#) (accessed 4 March 2022).

1.2

The EU and Russia

EU response to Russian annexation of Crimea, 2014

Shortly after President Yanukovich was forced out of office, Russia moved to occupy Crimea. Russian forces had occupied the whole peninsula by early March 2014. A referendum was held in Crimea on 16 March, backing union with Russia. Neither the referendum nor the Russian annexation were recognised internationally.¹¹ These developments were followed in March by protests by pro-Russian separatists in the Donbas region in Eastern Ukraine, with parts of this region coming under their control in April. The conflict in Eastern Ukraine has continued since 2014, although there have been several ceasefires.¹²

In response to these developments, the EU adopted a series of statements condemning Russian actions, and also agreed on a set of sanctions against Russia. The UK, as a member of the EU at the time, also backed these steps.

On 3 March 2014, the President of the European Commission and President of the European Council joined with G7 leaders in suspending participation in preparations for the G8 (the G7 plus Russia) summit due to be held in Russia later in 2014.¹³ The G8 meeting was later cancelled and the G8 has not convened since.¹⁴

The EU described the Russian action in Crimea as an “unprovoked violation of Ukrainian sovereignty”

The EU’s political leaders (heads of state or government), including UK Prime Minister David Cameron, held an extraordinary meeting on 6 March 2014. The EU leaders adopted a joint statement condemning Russia’s “unprovoked violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity” and calling on it to immediately withdraw its forces. They also described the decision to hold on a referendum on Crimea joining the Russian Federation as illegal.

The EU leaders also confirmed that bilateral talks with the Russian Federation on visa matters and on a new EU-Russia co-operation agreement were to be suspended.¹⁵ The new agreement with Russia was to replace the EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement that had been in force since 1997.¹⁶ Talks had in any case come to halt in 2010 because of a lack of progress on trade.¹⁷

¹¹ See House of Commons Library briefing papers RP14-16 [Ukraine, Crimea and Russia](#) and SN06978, [Ukraine: towards a frozen conflict](#)

¹² See Sabine Fischer, [The Donbas conflict](#), SWP Research Paper 2019/RP 05, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 17 April 2019

¹³ UK Government, [Joint statement on Ukraine](#), 3 March 2014

¹⁴ G8 summits had been held since 1997.

¹⁵ European Council, [Extraordinary meeting of EU Heads of State or Government on Ukraine](#), 6 March 2014

¹⁶ EUR-Lex, [EU-Russia partnership and cooperation agreement](#) (accessed 7 March 2022).

¹⁷ European External Action Service, [The European Union and the Russian Federation](#) (accessed 7 March 2022).

The European Council (EU leaders) meeting of 20-21 March then cancelled a planned EU-Russia summit.¹⁸ In parallel to the meeting, EU leaders and Ukraine's acting prime minister, Arseniy Yatsenyuk, signed the political provisions of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.

EU introduces sanctions against Russia

The EU leaders' statement of 6 March 2014 warned of sanctions if Russia did not take steps towards a negotiated solution to the crisis. On 17 March 2014, EU foreign ministers agreed a package of restrictive measures against 21 officials associated with their role in threatening the territorial integrity of Ukraine. This involved travel bans and asset freezes.¹⁹ The list of persons and entities subject to sanctions and the legal basis was doing so was progressively expanded throughout 2014.

The EU adopted sanctions against Russia in July 2014

On 29 July 2014, the EU adopted additional sanctions against the Russian Federation. These included:

- restricting Russia's access to capital markets
- an embargo on the import and export of arms and related material
- an export ban for dual use goods for military end users (goods that can be used for both a military and civil purpose)
- restrictions on exports to Russia of certain energy-related equipment and technology.²⁰

This followed the European Council meeting of 16 July, where EU leaders agreed to adopt further targeted sanctions against Russia. EU foreign ministers then asked for the adoption of measures to be accelerated following the downing of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH17 over Donetsk in Eastern Ukraine.²¹

Further trade and investment restrictions were also placed on Crimea and Sevastopol on 30 July 2014.²²

Sanctions prolonged due to Russian actions

In March 2015, EU leaders at the European Council agreed to link the duration of sanctions against Russia to the complete implementation of the Minsk ceasefire agreements.²³ The sanctions were prolonged again in December

¹⁸ European Council, [Conclusions](#), 20-21 March 2014

¹⁹ Council of EU, [Foreign Affairs Council](#), 17 March 2014

²⁰ European Council, [Statement by the President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy and the President of the European Commission in the name of the European Union on the agreed additional restrictive measures against Russia](#), 29 July 2014

²¹ Council of the EU, [Foreign Affairs Council](#), 22 July 2014

²² Council of the EU, [Adoption of agreed EU restrictive measures over Crimea and Eastern Ukraine \(pdf\)](#), 30 July 2014. See also Council of EU, Background note, [EU restrictive measures in view of the situation in Eastern Ukraine and the illegal annexation of Crimea \(pdf\)](#), 29 July 2014

²³ European Council [Conclusions](#), 19-20 March 2015

2015 given that the Minsk agreements had not been fully implemented.²⁴ They were then prolonged again several times between 2016 and 2021.²⁵ By October 2021, EU restrictive measures (asset freezes and travel bans) regarding the territorial integrity of Ukraine applied to a total of 185 persons and 48 entities.²⁶ In January 2022, the sanctions originally imposed in 2014 were extended for a further six months until the end of July 2022.²⁷

For more detailed discussion of EU sanctions in relation to Russia and Ukraine in 2014 and 2015 see Commons Library Briefing SN06951 [Sanctions over the Ukraine conflict](#).

1.3 EU economic support for Ukraine

Macro-financial assistance

In April 2014, the Council of the EU (Member State ministers) approved proposals aimed at providing economic and financial support to Ukraine.²⁸ These included a decision providing up to €1bn in macro-financial assistance (MFA) to Ukraine to support its economic stabilisation and its structural reform agenda. It also adopted a regulation granting unilateral trade preferences to Ukraine, providing for the temporary reduction or elimination of customs duties ahead of the implementation of the EU-Ukraine association agreement.²⁹

The €1 billion MFA approved by the Council of the EU in April 2014 came in the form of loans, and was on top of MFA operations previously committed by the EU. The previous MFA commitments were paid out in 2014 and early 2015 and were for €610 billion worth of loans. This was followed up by the adoption of further EU MFA operations for Ukraine in 2015 (€1.8 billion); 2018 (€1 billion); and 2020 (€1.2 billion).

Macro-financial assistance (MFA) operations are part of the EU's wider engagement with neighbouring countries and are intended as an exceptional EU crisis response instrument. They are available to EU neighbourhood countries experiencing severe balance-of-payments problems.³⁰

²⁴ Council of the EU, [Russia: EU prolongs economic sanctions by six months](#), 21 December 2015

²⁵ See for example Council of the EU, [Russia: EU prolongs economic sanctions by six months](#), 28 June 2017 and [Russia: EU prolongs economic sanctions by six months](#), 19 December 2019

²⁶ Council of EU, [Ukraine: EU sanctions eight more people over territorial integrity](#), 11 October 2021

²⁷ Council of EU, [Russia: EU renews economic sanctions over the situation in Ukraine for further six months](#), 13 January 2022. See also Council of EU, [EU response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine](#) (accessed 7 March 2022).

²⁸ [Council Decision of 14 April 2014 providing macro-financial assistance to Ukraine \(2014/215/EU\)](#), OJEU L111/85

²⁹ Council of EU, [Foreign Affairs Council](#), 14-15 March 2014

³⁰ See background note in European Commission Press Release, [Commission tables proposal for €1.2 billion emergency macro-financial assistance package for Ukraine, as announced by President von der Leyen](#), 1 February 2022

Some of the funding was conditional on the implementation of certain policy measures by Ukraine. For example, the third €600 million tranche of the 2018 2015 was not paid out as Ukraine had not fulfilled four out of 17 policy commitments which were conditions for this instalment. This included two related to the fight against corruption.

Nevertheless, by 2020, the MFA funds provided by the EU to Ukraine were the largest it had provided to any single partner country.³¹ In proposing new assistance on 1 February 2022, the European Commission said the EU had so far supported Ukraine through five consecutive MFA operations totalling €5 billion of loans in the period 2014-2021.

New funds proposed, 2022

The proposal in February 2022 was for a new emergency macro-financial assistance (emergency MFA) programme for Ukraine of up to €1.2 billion. This followed a request from Ukraine and direct discussions between Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The European Commission said that the proposed 2022 funds would be made available to Ukraine in the form of long-term loans “on highly favourable terms”. It said a first tranche of €600 million would be paid to Ukraine immediately once the proposal was adopted by the Council of the EU and European Parliament. The second tranche would be paid once there had been a positive assessment of progress made by the Ukrainian authorities with the implementation of a limited number of agreed short-term policy measures.³²

Other economic support

Alongside the €1.2 billion MFA programme formally proposed on 1 February 2022, the European Commission said in January 2022 that it was also allocating an additional €120 million to Ukraine in bilateral assistance grant funding. This was on top of €160 million initially foreseen. It said this support would strengthen Ukraine’s state-building and resilience efforts.

The Commission said that in addition to this, its Economic and Investment Plan for Ukraine aimed to leverage up to €6.5 billion in investments in upcoming years.

The EU allocated over €17 billion in grants and loans to Ukraine from 2014 to 2021

A European Commission factsheet said that between 2014 and the beginning of 2022, the EU had allocated over €17 billion in grants and loans to Ukraine. As well as the MFA operations, this included:

- €1.7 billion in bilateral cooperation;
- €355 in foreign policy instruments;
- €190 million in humanitarian assistance;

³¹ European Commission, [Ukraine, Macro-financial assistance](#) (accessed 8 March 2022).

³² European Commission, [Proposal for a DECISION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL on providing macro-financial assistance to Ukraine](#), 1 February 2022

- €9.5 billion in loans from the European Investment Bank and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.³³

EU bilateral assistance for Ukraine is brought together under the framework of the eastern regional dimension of the [European Neighbourhood Policy](#).³⁴

³³ European Commission, [Factsheet - EU solidarity with Ukraine](#), January 2022

³⁴ See European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, [Ukraine](#) (accessed 8 March 2022).

2 EU response to invasion of Ukraine, 2022

By the end of 2021, the Russian troop build-up on the border with Ukraine was causing grave concern within the EU, and across the world. A US intelligence assessment in December 2021 suggested that [Russia could be planning an invasion of Ukraine in early 2022](#).³⁵

The European Council (meeting of EU heads of state or government) on 16 December 2021 stressed the urgent need for Russia to de-escalate tensions caused by the military build-up along its borders with Ukraine. It also reiterated its full support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

In the meeting conclusions, the EU leaders warned:

Any further military aggression against Ukraine will have massive consequences and severe cost in response, including restrictive measures coordinated with partners.³⁶

In his remarks following the meeting, President of the European Council Charles Michel said that the EU was in “steadfast, total and complete unity in expressing our solidarity with regard to Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity”.³⁷

2.1 EU response to Russian recognition of DPR and LPR

On 21 February 2022 [President Putin signed Executive Orders recognising the self-declared independence of the Donetsk People’s Republic \(DPR\) and the Luhansk People’s Republic \(LPR\)](#), the areas of the Donbas that are under the control of Russian-backed separatist forces. Russia also sent troops into the territories.

The President of the European Council, Charles Michel, and President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, issued a statement on 22 February denouncing this decision as “illegal and unacceptable”. They said the EU was in “full solidarity with Ukraine” and “united in support for its

³⁵ The Independent, [US intelligence finds Russia planning Ukraine offensive](#), 4 December 2021

³⁶ [European Council conclusions, 16 December 2021](#)

³⁷ European Council, [Remarks by President Charles Michel following the European Council meeting on 16 December 2021](#)

sovereignty and territorial integrity”. EU Foreign Ministers met later in the day to agree on an initial package of sanctions in response to Russia’s actions.³⁸

First sanctions package

Sanctions agreed by EU Foreign Ministers on 22 February included the following:

- [351 members of the Russia Duma](#) who voted for recognition of the DPR and LPR were added to the list of individuals subject to an asset freeze and travel ban.
- [26 individuals and entities playing a role in undermining or threatening Ukrainian territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence](#), including banks that are financing Russian decision makers, those in the defence sector that played a role in the invasion and those responsible for waging a disinformation war against Ukraine, would be subjected to targeted sanctions. This included Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Shoigu.
- Targeting trade from the DPR and LPR to and from the EU.
- Preventing the Russian state and government from accessing European capital and financial markets and services, including through limiting the access of Russian sovereign debt to EU financial markets.³⁹

These measures were taken in coordination with the USA, UK and Canada. The EU High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy, Josep Borrell, said that the EU would “raise the level of sanctions substantially, according with Russian behaviour”.⁴⁰

Nord Stream 2 halted

In addition to these measures, Germany’s Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on 22 February that Germany would be halting the certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline running from Russia to Germany.⁴¹ In his comments following the meeting of foreign ministers on 22 February, Josep Borrell indicated his appreciation to Germany for making the EU’s united message stronger by stopping the pipeline.⁴²

The pipeline had previously been opposed by the USA and some EU Member States. Calls for Germany to stop the pipeline had increased as a Russian invasion of Ukraine appeared more likely.⁴³ While initially resistant to calls to block the pipeline, the German Government appeared to shift position in the

³⁸ Council of the EU, [Statement by the Presidents of the European Council and European Commission on Russian aggression against Ukraine](#), 22 February 2022

³⁹ Council of EU, [EU adopts package of sanctions in response to Russian recognition of the non-government controlled areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine and sending of troops into the region](#), 23 February 2022

⁴⁰ EU External Action Service, [Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell](#), 22 February 2022

⁴¹ DW, [Ukraine crisis: Germany halts Nord Stream 2 approval](#), 22 February 2022

⁴² EU External Action Service, [Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell](#), 22 February 2022

⁴³ See House of Commons Library briefing paper 9462, [Geopolitical implications of Nord Stream 2](#)

weeks prior to the invasion. At the end of January 2022 it indicated that, in the event of Russian military action in Ukraine “nothing would be off the table, including Nord Stream 2”.⁴⁴

2.2

Invasion of Ukraine: Response of EU leaders

European Council, 24 February 2022

An urgent special meeting of the European Council was already due to take place on 24 February 2022. It had been called by Charles Michel after the Russian recognition of DPR and LPR.⁴⁵ On the morning of 24 February 2022 Russia launched military action across Ukraine with air strikes across the country and troops crossing the border at several points.

The members of the European Council (the heads of state or government of the 27 Member States) issued a joint statement ahead of their meeting on 24 February. The European Council condemned “in the strongest possible terms Russia’s unprecedented military aggression against Ukraine” and demanded Russia’s unconditional withdrawal. It said that Russia was “grossly violating international law and undermining European and global security and stability”. The involvement of Belarus in the aggression against Ukraine was also condemned.

The European Council said there would be massive and severe consequences for Russia for its action

The European Council said that they would be agreeing measures later in the day that would “impose massive and severe consequences on Russia for its action”. The response would be coordinated with international partners. The EU would be providing further political, financial and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine.⁴⁶

The European Council meeting held later in the day was also addressed, remotely, by the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

The conclusions of the meeting reiterated the messages set out in the earlier statement. It said that Russia would “be held accountable for its actions”, and that further sanctions against Russia were being prepared. Sanctions would target: the financial sector; energy and transport sectors; dual-use goods; export control and export financing; and visa policy. There would also be additional sanctions against Russian individuals, with new listing criteria.

The EU would also continue strong coordination with partners and allies, within the UN, [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe](#), NATO and the G7. The European Council also confirmed its solidarity with Ukraine, acknowledging “the European aspirations and the European choice of Ukraine, as stated in the Association Agreement”. In addition, the European

⁴⁴ Twitter, [German Ambassador to the United States](#), 26 January 2022

⁴⁵ European Council, [Invitation letter by President Charles Michel to the members of the European Council ahead of their special meeting of 24 February 2022](#), 23 February 2022

⁴⁶ European Council, [Joint statement by the members of the European Council](#), 24 February 2022

Council reiterated the EU's "unwavering support for, and commitment to, the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and of the Republic of Moldova".⁴⁷

Charles Michel said that the rules-based order had been shaken to its core and come under a devastating attack

In his remarks following the meeting European Council President Charles Michel said that EU leaders had had a long debate "after awakening this morning in Europe to a different world, one in which the rules-based order has been shaken to its core and has come under a devastating attack". He said the meeting was also an opportunity to affirm the unity of the EU Member States, and unity with partners and allies across the world "to defend international law and this rules-based order".

Michel also referred to discussions about developing the EU's strategic autonomy. He gave two examples: the need to reduce EU energy dependency; and the need to strengthen EU security and defence capabilities, while recognising that NATO remains the "cornerstone" of European security.⁴⁸

EU leaders meeting, Versailles, 10-11 March 2022

EU leaders held an informal meeting of heads of state or government at Versailles on 10 and 11 March 2022. This was hosted by France, which holds the rotating Council Presidency for the first half of 2022.⁴⁹

Versailles declaration

The EU and its Member States would "continue to provide coordinated political, financial, material and humanitarian support"

The leaders adopted the Versailles declaration. This repeated earlier condemnation of Russia's actions and support for Ukraine. It said that the EU and its Member States would "continue to provide coordinated political, financial, material and humanitarian support" for Ukraine and would "provide support for the reconstruction of a democratic Ukraine once the Russian onslaught has ceased". At the same time, the leaders said they were determined to increase pressure on Russia and Belarus even further.

The declaration made reference to Ukraine's application to join the EU on 28 February 2022, noting that Ukraine had exercised the right to choose its own destiny. It said the European Commission would be delivering opinions on the EU Membership applications of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia (see section 3).

Russia's "war of aggression" constitutes a "tectonic shift in European history"

The declaration described Russia's "war of aggression" as constituting a "tectonic shift in European history". Given the repercussions of this, the EU leaders had decided to "take more responsibility for our security and take further decisive steps towards building our European sovereignty".

⁴⁷ European Council, [Special meeting of the European Council](#) and [European Council conclusions](#), 24 February 2022

⁴⁸ European Council, [Remarks by President Charles Michel following the Special European Council on Ukraine](#), 24 February 2022

⁴⁹ European Council, [Informal meeting of heads of state or government, Versailles, 10-11 March 2022](#)

In this respect, the declaration focussed on three key dimensions: a) bolstering the EU's defence capabilities; b) Reducing energy dependencies; and c) building a more robust economic base.

Initial proposals were set out in relation to these dimensions, which the EU and individual Member States would take forward. These included the following:

Bolstering defence capabilities

While acknowledging the “specific character” of the security and defence policy of certain Member States, the EU leaders agreed on the need to invest more and better in defence capabilities and innovative technologies. This included the following:

- substantially increasing defence expenditures, focusing on identified strategic shortfalls, and with capabilities developed in a collaborative way within the EU;
- incentivising collaboration in joint projects and joint procurement of defence capabilities;
- taking measures to strengthen the defence industry;
- preparing for fast-emerging challenges such as hybrid warfare, fighting disinformation and increasing cyber security.

EU leaders asked the European Commission, in coordination with the European Defence Agency, to bring forward an analysis of defence investment gaps by mid-May and to propose any further initiatives necessary to strengthen the European defence industrial and technological base.

Reducing energy dependency

According to the declaration, the current situation required a thorough reassessment of how the EU ensured the security of its energy supplies. In this respect EU leaders agreed to phase out dependency on Russian gas, oil and coal imports as soon as possible. This would involve accelerating the reduction of overall reliance on fossil fuels “taking into account national circumstances and Member States’ choices of their energy mix”. Amongst other things, the development of renewables would be speeded up, and further work on improving energy efficiency and the management of energy consumption would be undertaken.

The Commission was invited to propose plan to end energy dependency on Russia by the end of May 2022 to deliver on these objectives. It was also invited to put forward its plan to ensure security of supply and affordable energy prices during the next winter season by the end of March. The EU would also urgently consider concrete options for dealing with the impact of increased energy prices on our citizens and businesses, at the next meeting of the European Council on 24-25 March 2022.

EU Member States will substantially increase defence spending and work collaboratively

EU leaders agreed to phase out dependency on Russian gas, oil and coal imports as soon as possible

Building a robust economic base

The declaration stressed the need to reduce strategic dependencies in other critical sectors. Sectors identified were:

- critical raw materials;
- semi-conductors;
- health and medicines, requiring support for research and innovation;
- digital technologies;
- food, requiring action to improve food security by reducing dependencies on key imported agricultural products.

The declaration identified measures to foster investment that would strengthen the EU's economic base. These included reforming procedures to authorise investment projects in the EU and creating a simple and predictable regulatory environment, particularly for small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs). This also involved promoting skills and job creation, meeting green and digital objectives, and creating more integrated, attractive and competitive European financial markets.⁵⁰

2.3

International Coordination

Sanctions and other measures taken by the EU in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine have been co-ordinated with the UK, USA, Canada and other allies.

The international response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine has also been co-ordinated through the G7 format. Some statements have been coordinated alongside European Council meetings. Although the EU as a whole is not part of the G7, three EU Member States (Germany, France and Italy) are G7 members (alongside the USA, UK, Canada and Japan) and the Presidents of the European Commission and of the European Council take part in G7 leaders' summits. EU representatives also participate in other meetings of the G7.

G7 Foreign Ministers meeting, 19 February 2022

The EU High Representative on Foreign and Security Policy, Josep Borrell joined a meeting of G7 Foreign Ministers on 19 February 2022 which expressed grave concern about Russia's threatening military build-up around Ukraine, and called on Russia to deescalate tensions and engage diplomatically. This also warned of "massive consequences" including financial and economic sanctions on a wide array of sectoral and individual targets "that would

⁵⁰ [Informal meeting of the Heads of State or Government, Versailles Declaration, 10 and 11 March 2022 \(pdf\)](#)

impose severe and unprecedented costs on the Russian economy” which would be coordinated by the EU and G7 members.⁵¹

G7 leaders statement, 24 February 2022

G7 statement: By re-introducing war to the European continent, President Putin had “put himself on the wrong side of history”.

Following the invasion on 24 February, the G7 leaders (including the EU Presidents) issued a joint statement condemning the Russian action, which had been preceded by “fabricated claims and unfounded allegations”. It described the action as “a serious violation of international law” and “a grave breach of the United Nations Charter” and of previous commitments given by Russia. It said that “we as the G7 are bringing forward severe and coordinated economic and financial sanctions”. It called all members of the international community to condemn the attack in the strongest possible terms and “stand shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine”. By re-introducing war to the European continent, President Putin had “put himself on the wrong side of history”, it said.

The G7 are bringing forward severe and coordinated economic and financial sanctions

The statement affirmed the G7’s unity with partners, including NATO, the EU and their Member States as well as Ukraine, in preserving the integrity of the international-rules base order. The G7 would also closely monitor global oil and gas market conditions, and support “consistent and constructive engagement and coordination among major energy producers and consumers” in maintaining the stability of global energy supplies and address potential disruptions.⁵²

Joint statement by the EU, UK, USA and Canada, 26 February 2022

On 26 February, the President of the European Commission, along with the leaders of France, Germany, Italy, the UK, Canada, and the USA issued a joint statement condemning “Putin’s war of choice and attacks on the sovereign nation and people of Ukraine”. They described the invasion as “an assault on fundamental international rules and norms that have prevailed since the Second World War”. They pledged to hold Russia to account and “collectively ensure that this war is a strategic failure for Putin”.

The leaders said they would implement a set of measures within the coming days, including the following:

- Removing selected Russian banks from the SWIFT messaging system.⁵³ This would ensure that they were “disconnected from the international financial system and harm their ability to operate globally”.

⁵¹ European External Action Service, [G7 Foreign Ministers’ Statement on Russia and Ukraine](#), 19 February 2022.

⁵² European Council, [G7 Leaders’ Statement on the invasion of Ukraine by armed forces of the Russian Federation](#), 24 February 2022

⁵³ SWIFT is the acronym for the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication. SWIFT is a system that facilitates secure messaging between banks and other financial institutions, enabling

- Restrictive measures to prevent the Russian Central Bank from deploying its international reserves in ways that undermine the impact of sanctions.
- Measures against people and entities facilitating the war in Ukraine and the harmful activities of the Russian government. This would involve limiting “the sale of citizenship—so called golden passports—that let wealthy Russians connected to the Russian government become citizens of our countries and gain access to our financial systems”.
- Establishing a transatlantic task force that will ensure the effective implementation of financial sanctions by identifying and freezing the assets of sanctioned individuals and companies. Additional Russian officials and elites close to the Russian government, their families, and “their enablers” would also be subject to these sanctions. Work with other governments would also be undertaken “to detect and disrupt the movement of ill-gotten gains”, and to prevent these individuals from hiding their assets across the world.
- Coordination against disinformation and other forms of hybrid warfare would be stepped up.

Further measures would be considered beyond those already identified.⁵⁴

Foreign Affairs Ministers meeting, 4 March 2022

The EU has continued to co-ordinate its response to the Russian action closely with the USA, UK and Canada, as well as NATO.

On 4 March, the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU held an extraordinary meeting. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, Canada’s Minister for Foreign Affairs Mélanie Joly and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, joined the meeting in Brussels alongside the EU foreign ministers and the EU High Representative Josep Borrell.

The foreign ministers called for a humanitarian corridor from Ukraine and discussed further support for the neighbouring EU Member States hosting the majority of those fleeing the war. The need to reduce energy dependency on Russia was also discussed.

The meeting also involved an informal exchange with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, who joined via video conference and provided an overview of the latest developments on the ground, and the needs of Ukraine.⁵⁵

them to perform transactions such as payments and settling trades between themselves. It is used by more than 11,000 institutions in more than 200 countries and territories around the world. It is a cooperative society, based in Belgium. For further information see House of Lords Library, [Ukraine sanctions and the Swift system](#), 1 March 2022, and section 3.3 of Commons Library Briefing 9481, [Sanctions against Russia](#).

⁵⁴ European Commission, [Joint Statement on further restrictive economic measures](#), 26 February 2022

⁵⁵ Council of EU, [Extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council](#), 4 March 2022

G7 statement, 11 March 2022

G7 leaders, including the Presidents of the European Commission and European Council, issued a joint statement on 11 March 2022, announcing further measures against Russia. The statement referred to existing internationally coordinated measures that had “severely compromised Russia’s economy and financial system, as evidenced by the massive market reactions” and targeted the architects of the war, namely President Putin and his accomplices, as well as the Lukashenko regime in Belarus.

Russia will be denied WTO most-favoured nation status

New measures would include the following:

- Action to deny [Most-Favoured-Nation status](#)⁵⁶ to products of Russian companies. This will revoke important benefits of Russia’s membership of the World Trade Organization (WTO).
- Work to prevent Russia from obtaining financing from the leading multilateral financial institutions, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
- Continuing work to pressure Russian elites, proxies and oligarchs close to President Putin and other architects of the war as well as their families and their enablers. The task force previously announced on 26 February will work to target the assets of Russian elites close to President Putin and the architects of his war.
- Cracking down on evasion and closing loop-holes to maintain the effectiveness of restrictive measures. More specifically, this will include work to ensure sanctioned individuals cannot leverage digital assets as a means of evading or offsetting the impact of international sanctions.
- Efforts to fight off the Russian regime’s attempts to spread disinformation.
- Working together to ensure that Russian entities directly or indirectly supporting the war do not have access to new debt and equity investments and other forms of international capital. The statement said that EU citizens should not see their savings and investments fund the companies that underpin Russia’s economy. The G7 would also continue working together to develop and implement measures that will further limit Russia’s ability to raise money internationally.

The G7 leaders said they stood ready to impose further restrictions on exports and imports of key goods and technologies on Russia. They noted that international companies are already withdrawing from the Russian market, and said they would ensure that the elites, proxies and oligarchs that support “President Putin’s war” are deprived of their access to luxury goods and assets.

In addition to the announced plans, the statement referred to further international efforts to reduce reliance on Russian energy. This would be done

⁵⁶ Under this principal in the WTO agreements, countries cannot normally discriminate between their trading partners, unless there is a free trade agreement with the partner (in which case, trade can be undertaken on more favourable terms).

“in an orderly fashion” to provide time for the world to secure alternative and sustainable supplies. The G7 leaders said they would work together to preserve stability of energy markets as well as food security globally, given that the invasion threatened Ukraine’s capacity to grow crops this year.⁵⁷

2.4 EU Sanctions following Russian invasion of Ukraine

Following on from the first package of EU sanctions adopted on 22 February, a second package was agreed by EU foreign ministers on 25 February 2022 in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. A third package followed on 28 February, and fourth on 15 March.

Sanctions are designed to impose clear economic and political costs

According to the European Commission, the sanctions are designed to:

- Cripple Kremlin’s ability to finance Russia’s military action
- Impose clear economic and political costs on Russia’s political elite responsible for invasion
- Diminish Russia’s economic base.⁵⁸

Second sanctions package

The following sanctions were announced on 25 February 2022:

Sanctions on individuals

President Putin and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov were placed on the sanctions list, along with the members of Russia’s National Security Council and the members of the Russian Parliament not previously designated (see above) for their role in supporting Russia’s recognition of the LPR and DPR.

The EU also amended the criteria for designation to include individuals and companies supporting and benefitting from the Russian Government, providing a substantial source of revenue to it, and family members of listed individuals. Furthermore, the EU would also target those individuals, who facilitated the Russian military aggression from Belarus.

Financial sanctions

Existing sanctions, restricting Russian access to EU financial markets, were also expanded. Russian banks, including the Russian Central Bank, were

⁵⁷ UK Government, [G7 Leaders’ Statement on Ukraine: 11 March 2022](#)

⁵⁸ European Commission, [EU sanctions against Russia: factsheet](#), updated 15 March 2022 (accessed 23 March 2022).

prohibited from any form of lending and buying of securities. These sanctions target 70% of the Russian banking market.

A full asset freeze was imposed on three leading Russian banks and the list of state-owned companies subject to sanctions was extended into the defence sector. Russian individuals would also be restricted from depositing money in EU banks over a certain value.

Technology for certain sectors

The EU also introduced an export ban on specific goods and technologies related to the oil refining sector, and the aviation and space industry, including a ban on the sale of all aircrafts and equipment to Russian airlines.

Further restrictions were imposed on dual-use goods and technologies related to the defence and security sector, including semi-conductors and cutting-edge technologies such as drones and associated software, and encryption software.⁵⁹

Visas

The EU put an end to visa free travel for Russia diplomats. Russian officials and businesspeople will no longer benefit from visa facilitation provisions, allowing privileged access to the EU. The EU said that this decision would not affect ordinary Russian citizens.⁶⁰

Third sanctions package

The EU sanctions against Russia were subsequently expanded on 28 February and again in early March.

On 28 February, the Council of the EU adopted additional measures related to aviation and finance.

Aviation

EU member states would deny permission to land in, take off from or fly over their territories to any aircraft operated by Russian air carriers, any Russian registered aircraft, and other aircraft owned, chartered, or otherwise controlled by a Russian legal or natural person.

Russian aircraft
cannot land in or fly
over the EU

⁵⁹ European Commission, [EU sanctions against Russia: factsheet](#), 26 February 2022

⁶⁰ Council of the EU, [Russia's military aggression against Ukraine: EU imposes sanctions against President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov and adopts wide ranging individual and economic sanctions](#), 25 February 2022

Finance

Transactions with the Russian Central Bank or any person, entity or body acting on behalf or at the direction of the Russian Central Bank would also be prohibited.⁶¹

Russian banks are banned from using the SWIFT system

On 2 March, the Council of the EU adopted further measures. This included banning seven Russian banks from using the SWIFT system. This would come into force ten days later and would also apply to any legal person, entity or body established in Russia who have proprietary rights more than 50% directly or indirectly owned by these banks.

There would also be a prohibition on the following:

- investment or contributions to future projects co-financed by the Russian Direct Investment Fund.
- the sale, supply, transfer or export of euro denominated banknotes to Russia or any person, entity or body in Russia, including the government and the Central Bank of Russia, or for use in Russia.⁶²

Russian Media

Also on 2 March, the Council of the EU adopted sanctions on Russian state-owned media outlets Russia Today and Sputnik.

Russia Today and Sputnik are banned in the EU

The Council approved the suspension of broadcasting activities in the EU of both Sputnik and Russia Today. It said this would be:

until the aggression against Ukraine is brought to an end and until the Russian Federation and its associated outlets cease conducting disinformation and information manipulation actions against the EU and its member states.

The suspension came into force on 2 March.

The Council press release commented that Sputnik and Russia Today are under “the permanent direct or indirect control of the authorities of the Russian Federation” and instrumental in supporting the military aggression against Ukraine and destabilisation of its neighbouring countries. It said that Russia had “engaged in a systematic, international campaign of disinformation, information manipulation and distortion of facts in order to enhance its strategy of destabilisation of its neighbouring countries” and of the EU and its member states. It said this had targeted European political parties and civil society and the functioning of democratic institutions in the EU and its member states.⁶³

⁶¹ Council of the EU, [EU adopts new set of measures to respond to Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine](#), 28 February 2022.

⁶² Council of the EU, [Russia’s military aggression against Ukraine: EU bans certain Russian banks from SWIFT system and introduces further restrictions](#),

⁶³ Council of EU, [EU imposes sanctions on state-owned outlets RT/Russia Today and Sputnik’s broadcasting in the EU](#), 2 March 2022

Maritime navigation goods and radio communications technology

On 9 March, the Council of the EU introduced further restrictive measures with regard to the export of maritime navigation goods and radio communication technology to Russia.⁶⁴

Sanctions against individuals extended

On 10 March, a Council decision extended the duration of these sanctions until 15 September 2022.⁶⁵ On 11 March, the EU expanded the list of individuals sanctioned. Among those added to the list were Roman Abramovich and German Khan as well as other prominent businesspeople involved in key economic sectors, such as iron and steel, energy, banking, media, military and dual use products and services. Several prominent businessmen and oligarchs were already on the list from previous rounds of sanctions.⁶⁶ The extended list also included those pushing the Kremlin's narrative on the situation in Ukraine, including Konstantin Ernst (CEO of Channel One Russia).

As of 15 March, a total of 877 individuals and 62 entities were subject to an asset freeze, and travel ban by the EU.⁶⁷ This also included members of the Belarusian military (see below).

Fourth sanctions package

Following on from the G7 statement on 11 March, the Council of the EU gave the go ahead to the European Commission to support actions at the WTO to deny Russian products and services most favoured nation treatment in EU markets.⁶⁸ The EU also considered Belarus' accession to the WTO to be suspended.

This was announced on 15 March, alongside a new sanctions package against Russia adopted by the Council. These involved the following:

- prohibiting all transactions with certain state-owned enterprises;
- prohibiting the provision of any credit rating services, as well as access to any subscription services in relation to credit rating activities, to any Russian person or entity;
- expanding the list of persons connected to Russia's defence and industrial base, on whom tighter export restrictions were imposed regarding dual-use goods and goods and technology which might

⁶⁴ Council of EU, [Russia's military aggression against Ukraine: EU agrees new sectoral measures targeting Belarus and Russia](#), 9 March 2022

⁶⁵ [Council Decision \(CFSP\) 2022/411 of 10 March 2022 amending Decision 2014/145/CFSP concerning restrictive measures in respect of actions undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine](#).

⁶⁶ Council of EU, [EU imposes restrictive measures on 160 individuals as a consequence of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine](#), 9 March 2022.

⁶⁷ Council of EU, [Fourth package of sanctions in view of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine: 15 additional individuals and 9 entities subject to EU restrictive measures](#), 15 March 2022.

⁶⁸ European Commission, [Ukraine: EU agrees fourth package of restrictive measures](#), 15 March 2022

contribute to Russia's technological enhancement of its defence and security sector;

- prohibiting new investments in the Russian energy sector, as well as a to introduce a comprehensive export restriction on equipment, technology and services for the energy industry,
- further trade restrictions concerning iron and steel, as well as luxury goods.

There were also further additions to the list of individuals and entities subject to restrictive measures. The individuals added were described by the Council as “key oligarchs, lobbyist and propagandists pushing the Kremlin’s narrative on the situation in Ukraine”. Companies in the aviation, military and dual use, shipbuilding and machine building sectors were added to the list of entities.⁶⁹

Impact of sanctions

Ahead of the adoption of the fourth sanctions package, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that the sanctions so far had hit Russia's economy hard, with the ruble plummeting, many key Russian banks cut-off from the international banking system, and companies “leaving the country, one after the other, not wanting to have their brands associated with a murderous regime”. She said the fourth round of sanctions, working in lockstep with other G7 measures would “ramp up the economic pressure against the Kremlin”.⁷⁰

Leading up to the European Council meeting on 24-25 March, some Member States called for further sanctions to be imposed on Russia, including on energy imports. Poland and the Baltic states were calling for an oil embargo. Some states, notably Germany, were reluctant to go this far given their own high usage of Russian energy imports. Poland had called for a total ban on trade with Russia, while some Member States supported a ban on Russian ships docking in EU ports and others wanted to focus on closing loopholes in existing sanctions.⁷¹

Sanctions against Belarus

On 24 February, 20 members of Belarusian military personnel were added to the list of individuals sanctioned for undermining or threatening the territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of Ukraine. On 9 March 2022, the Council of the EU said it had added 22 high ranked members of Belarusian military personnel to this list, and was adopting additional sanctions against Belarus. This included further restrictions in the trade of goods, on the export

⁶⁹ Council of EU, [Russia's military aggression against Ukraine: fourth EU package of sectoral and individual measures](#), 15 March 2022

⁷⁰ European Commission, [Statement by President von der Leyen on the fourth package of restrictive measures against Russia](#), 11 March 2022

⁷¹ The Guardian, [EU ministers meet to discuss further Russian sanctions as cracks emerge](#), 21 March 2022

of dual-use goods and technology, and other goods and technology which might contribute to Belarus' military, technological, defence and security development, and restrictions on the provision of related services.

EU High Representative Josep Borrell said Belarus' involvement in the aggression against Ukraine would "come at a high price" and the EU was targeting those in Belarus who were collaborating in the Russian action. The Council press release said that:

Belarus is supporting the Russian military aggression against Ukraine - inter alia - by allowing Russia to fire ballistic missiles from the Belarusian territory, enabling transportation of Russian military personnel and heavy weapons, tanks, and military transporters, allowing Russian military aircraft to fly over Belarusian airspace into Ukraine, providing refuelling points, and storing Russian weapons and military equipment in Belarus.⁷²

The Council announced further measures targeting the Belarusian financial sector on 9 March. These included the following:

- restrictions on the use of SWIFT services for three Belarus banks;
- prohibiting transactions with the Central Bank of Belarus related to the management of reserves or assets, and the provision of public financing for trade with and investment in Belarus;
- prohibiting the listing and provision of services in relation to shares of Belarus state-owned entities on EU trading venues as of 12 April 2022;
- prohibiting the acceptance of deposits exceeding €100,000 from Belarusian nationals or residents, the holding of accounts of Belarusian clients by the EU central securities depositories, and the selling of euro-denominated securities to Belarusian clients;
- prohibiting the provision of euro denominated banknotes to Belarus.⁷³

1 Further reading on EU sanctions

For further discussion of sanctions against Russia and Belarus in response to the invasion of Ukraine, including coordination between the EU, UK, USA and other allies see Commons Library Briefing 9481, [Sanctions against Russia](#).

See also the timeline of EU sanctions relating to the crisis in Ukraine since 2014: [EU restrictive measures in response to the crisis in Ukraine](#)

⁷² Council of the EU, [Belarus' role in the Russian military aggression of Ukraine: Council imposes sanctions on an additional 22 individuals and further restrictions on trade](#), 2 March 2022

⁷³ Council of EU, [Russia's military aggression against Ukraine: EU agrees new sectoral measures targeting Belarus and Russia](#), 9 March 2022

The Peterson Institute for International Economics has also produced a [comprehensive timeline of international sanctions](#) imposed in relation to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

2.5 Military assistance

The EU will for the first time finance the purchase of lethal military equipment by a third country

The EU announced on 28 February 2022 that it would [finance the purchase and delivery of lethal military equipment](#) to Ukraine.

The Council of the EU adopted two measures under the [European Peace Facility](#) (EPF)⁷⁴ to contribute to the strengthening of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. This includes a €450 million support package for the provision of lethal assistance for defensive purpose and a €50 million support package for the provision of non-lethal supplies.⁷⁵

The EU High Representative, Josep Borrell said this followed a request by Foreign Affairs Minister of Ukraine. He said that this was the first time in its history that the EU would be providing lethal equipment to a third country, and that the EU was “doing everything we can to support Ukraine, we stand by the Ukrainian people”.⁷⁶

At the request of Ukraine, the EU would also be providing geospatial intelligence through the EU satellite centre.⁷⁷

Previously, in December 2021, the EU had announced a package of measures to help strengthen the capacity of the Ukrainian armed forces. This package is worth €31 million over three years and will finance military medical units, including field hospitals, engineering, mobility and logistics units and support on cyber.⁷⁸

In January 2022, Josep Borrell said that EU foreign ministers were discussing the establishment of an EU military training assistance mission to Ukraine, which will focus on military education reform.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ The [European Peace Facility \(EPF\)](#) was established in March 2021 as an “off budget” instrument that allows the EU to finance operational actions under the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) that have military or defence implications. It replaces the previous Athena Mechanism through which the common costs of EU military operations were financed.

⁷⁵ Council of EU, [Informal video conference of foreign affairs \(defence\) ministers](#), 28 February 2022

⁷⁶ Council of the EU, [EU adopts new set of measures to respond to Russia's military aggression against Ukraine](#), 28 February 2022.

⁷⁷ Council of EU, [Informal video conference of foreign affairs \(defence\) ministers](#), 28 February 2022

⁷⁸ Council of the EU, [European Peace Facility: Council adopts assistance measures for Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and the Republic of Mali](#), 2 December 2021

⁷⁹ EU External Action Service, [Foreign Affairs Council: Press remarks by High Representative Josep Borrell](#), 24 January 2022

At a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council on 21 March, ministers agreed that an additional €500 million would be allocated under the European Peace Facility.⁸⁰

Military assistance from Member States

Several individual EU Member States have provided arms and military equipment to Ukraine, or said that they intend to. These include Belgium, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Sweden.

The announcement by Germany to send lethal weapons to Ukraine on 26 February 2022 was viewed as a historic shift from its post-WWII policy of not sending weapons to conflict zones. Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz said the Russian invasion of Ukraine marked "a turning point" that "threatens our entire post-war order", and it was therefore "our duty to do our utmost to support Ukraine". In addition to the anti-tank weapons and anti-aircraft defence systems Germany would be sending to Ukraine, the German government also said it was giving permission to other EU countries to send German-made arms to Ukraine.⁸¹

2 Further reading

For greater detail on the provision of military assistance to Ukraine by the EU and EU Member States, see House of Commons Library, [Military assistance to Ukraine since the Russian invasion](#)

2.6

Temporary protections for people fleeing conflict

Ukrainians will be granted temporary protection in EU Member States

On 4 March, the Council of the EU unanimously adopted a decision allowing temporary protection for persons fleeing Ukraine.⁸²

The Council decision was adopted on the basis of mechanisms set out in a Council directive adopted in 2001, on EU minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons who

⁸⁰ Council of the EU, [Foreign Affairs Council and Foreign Affairs Council \(Defence\)](#), 21 March 2022

⁸¹ Politico, [Germany to send Ukraine weapons in historic shift on military aid](#), 26 February 2022

⁸² Council Implementing Decision (EU) 2022/382 of 4 March 2022 [establishing the existence of a mass influx of displaced persons from Ukraine within the meaning of Article 5 of Directive 2001/55/EC, and having the effect of introducing temporary protection](#) (pdf)

are unable to return to their country of origin. The 2001 directive had not been previously used but had been adopted on the basis of the EU's experience relating to persons displaced by the conflict in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.⁸³

The protection will apply to Ukrainian nationals, and their family members, if they resided in Ukraine before or on 24 February 2022. It will also apply to third country nationals or stateless persons benefiting from international protection in Ukraine, and their family members.

Family members are defined in the decision as including spouses or partners, children under 18 and other close relatives that lived with them as part of the family unit.

The EU temporary protection or equivalent protection under the national law of the Member States should also be applied to third country nationals residing in Ukraine before or on 24 February with a permanent residence permit and who cannot safely return to their country.

Member states may also apply this decision to other persons, including any third country nationals residing legally in Ukraine and who are unable to safely return to their country of origin, as well as Ukrainians who fled not long before 24 February or who found themselves in EU territory just before that date, for example for holiday or work purposes.

The decision will provide temporary protection for a period of one year. This will be extended automatically by six monthly periods for a maximum of one year, unless terminated by another Council decision. The Commission can then propose to the Council to extend the temporary protection for an additional year. It may also at any point propose to end the temporary protection if the situation in Ukraine is such as to permit safe and durable return.

As part of this decision, the Commission will coordinate cooperation and exchange of information among Member States, in particular in relation to monitoring reception capacities and identifying any need for additional support. EU agencies, including Frontex (the EU border agency), the EU asylum agency and Europol can provide further operational support if requested by the Member States.

Rights for those under temporary protection

A Council press release explained that the objective of the decision was “to alleviate pressure on national asylum systems and to allow displaced persons to enjoy harmonised rights across the EU”. These include rights of residence,

⁸³ Council Directive 2001/55/EC of 20 July 2001 [on minimum standards for giving temporary protection in the event of a mass influx of displaced persons and on measures promoting a balance of efforts between Member States in receiving such persons and bearing the consequences thereof](#) (pdf).

access to the labour market and housing, medical assistance, and access to education for children.⁸⁴

The Council decision on temporary protection makes reference to the rules for travel to the Schengen area for short stays (up to 90 days in any 180-day period).⁸⁵ These will apply under the decision in that Ukrainian nationals will be able to enter and move freely within the EU for up to 90 days. In this time they will need to decide where they wish to claim temporary protection. They cannot subsequently transfer that status to a different EU Member State, although another Member State may then decide to offer them temporary protection.

Ireland does not apply EU visa policy (because of its Common Travel Area with the UK) but has decided to waive short-term visa requirements for Ukrainian nationals unilaterally.

Some non-Ukrainian nationals who are eligible for protection under the EU scheme do need visas to enter the EU. However, the Decision says that these nationals should be admitted on humanitarian grounds, without the need to produce a valid visa or travel documents or to prove they have sufficient means of subsistence, so that they are ensured safe passage to their home country.

The 2001 Council directive sets out the various obligations of Member States where people are granted temporary protection. Beneficiaries of temporary protection will be provided with a residence permit in the Member State where they are granted temporary protection. They will also have rights to the following, during the period of temporary protection:

- access to “suitable accommodation” or to the means necessary to obtain housing;
- to take up employment or self-employment
- to social welfare payments if lacking in sufficient resources;
- to necessary medical care
- to free education for children under 18
- in the case of unaccompanied minors, a right to be placed with adult relatives, a foster family, a reception centre or with the person who looked after the child when fleeing.

There are various grounds for excluding specific individuals from temporary protection, for example if there are reasonable grounds for considering that they present a security risk to the host community.

⁸⁴ Council of EU, [Ukraine: Council unanimously introduces temporary protection for persons fleeing the war](#), 4 March 2022

⁸⁵ 22 of the 27 EU Member States are part of the Schengen area. Non-Schengen EU countries, apart from Ireland, have also applied the same list of countries nationals requiring or visa or having a visa waiver for short stays.

Funding for temporary protection

On 16 March 2022, the Council endorsed a legislative proposal on Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe (CARE). This will allow cohesion policy funding to be released swiftly to help EU countries and regions providing emergency protection to people fleeing Ukraine.

Member States will also be able to use €10 billion under the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU) package, one of the EU's post-pandemic EU public investment programmes.

The legislation was expected to be adopted in early April. The European Parliament would also need to approve the proposal, but was expected to use an urgent procedure to do so.⁸⁶

Also on 16 March, the Council agreed on a proposal to release a further €420 million of unspent home affairs funds to support Member States providing temporary protection for those fleeing Ukraine.⁸⁷

Support for education

EU education ministers, together with the European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya Gabriel, held a video conference on 16 March 2022 to discuss ways of supporting the education of those who had fled Ukraine. Around half of the three million Ukrainians who had fled the country since the invasion began are estimated to be children.

Closer cooperation in the following areas was discussed:

- the sharing and pooling of digital educational content to facilitate continuity of education in Ukraine and within the EU;
- having common arrangements in place for welcoming Ukrainian pupils to ensure pupils' wellbeing at school and support teachers taking responsibility for them;
- using the experience of remote learning gained during the pandemic.⁸⁸

Support for healthcare

EU health ministers also had a video conference call on 16 March to discuss the EU response to the health consequences of the conflict in Ukraine.

Ministers discussed medical treatment of refugees suffering from chronic and acute illnesses, medical evacuation arrangements and care for the war-

⁸⁶ Council of EU, [Ukraine: Council approves swift release of cohesion resources for Ukrainian refugees](#), 16 March 2022

⁸⁷ Council of EU, [Ukraine: Council adopts negotiating mandate to unlock additional support under the home affairs funds](#), 16 March 2022

⁸⁸ Council of EU, [Informal video conference of education ministers](#), 16 March 2022

wounded. Ministers discussed coordination of action and mutual support to ensure health systems could cope with these challenges.

A medical evacuation mechanism for those fleeing the war in Ukraine has been established under the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. On 13 March, the first operation under this mechanism transferred chronically ill paediatric patients from Poland to Italy.⁸⁹

2.7 Humanitarian support

On 15 February 2022, Ukraine sought assistance from the EU under the [EU Civil Protection Mechanism](#). Under the mechanism, the EU coordinates offers of assistance from Member States (and participating non-Member States). Following the request on 15 February, Member States provided various essential supplies, including disposal masks, medical supplies and equipment, and tents.⁹⁰ Support was expanded following the Russian invasion, with all 27 EU Member States, together with Norway and Turkey, offering assistance. This included provision of medical supplies and shelter items, specialised equipment, vehicles and fuel.

Moldova also activated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism to support Ukrainians arriving there at the end of February. By 18 March, 16 EU countries had offered various assistance to Moldova, including shelter and hygiene kits. Poland and Slovakia also requested assistance via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, to deal with the Ukrainian refugee influx. The Czech Republic also activated the mechanism on 11 March.

The European Commission announced €500 million in humanitarian aid

On 28 February 2022, the European Commission announced an additional €90 million for humanitarian aid programmes to help civilians affected by the war in Ukraine. This included €85 million for Ukraine and €5 million for Moldova. Further humanitarian funding of €3 million was allocated to Moldova on 10 March to support the Ukrainians forced to flee there.

This funding is part of the European Commission's emergency support package of €500 million for those affected by the conflict in Ukraine announced on 1 March 2022. Supplies delivered through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism by EU Member States are estimated to be worth an additional €100 million.⁹¹ In addition, a substantial contribution from the [rescEU medical stockpile](#), worth over €10 million, was sent to Ukraine.⁹²

On 11 March, the Commission said it had on that day paid €300 million in emergency Macro-Financial Assistance (MFA) to Ukraine. This is the initial

⁸⁹ European Commission, [Ukraine: EU's first medical evacuation operation transfers Ukrainian children from Poland to Italy](#), 14 March 2022

⁹⁰ European Commission, [Ukraine: EU delivers emergency civil protection assistance](#), 19 March 2022

⁹¹ European Commission, [EU solidarity with Ukraine](#) (accessed 18 March 2022).

⁹² European Commission, European civil protection and humanitarian aid operations, [Ukraine](#) (accessed 18 March 2022)

part of a first €600 million instalment under Ukraine's new €1.2 billion emergency MFA programme, already announced on 1 February 2022 (see section 1.3). The next €300 million was expected to be delivered the following week. The Commission said it was preparing an additional MFA programme to further support Ukraine in the longer term.⁹³

2.8 Ending EU reliance on Russian gas

Initial EU and international statements following the invasion referred to potential disruption to energy supplies and the need to reduce dependency on Russian supply of energy.⁹⁴ The European Council statement of 24 February 2022 asked the European Commission to bring forward contingency measures on energy.⁹⁵

EU energy ministers met on 28 February, and discussed energy supply and stocks. They agreed that the EU was not immediately at risk in terms of supplies of gas or fuel, even in the event of a disruption in the supply of Russian gas. However, contingency measures were discussed, along with actions aimed at increasing energy imports from regions other than Russia.

The ministers also discussed proposals for providing further assistance to the Ukrainian Government, in particular in consolidating the operation of its electricity network, ensuring that Ukraine's network is synchronised with that of the EU and providing assistance and energy resources.⁹⁶

RePowerEU plan

On 8 March, the European Commission announced an outline for a plan, [REPowerEU](#), to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels before 2030, beginning with gas. The Commission also outlined measures to respond to rising energy prices in Europe and to replenish gas stocks for the next winter. The plan would seek to diversify gas supplies, speed up the roll-out of renewable gases and replace gas in heating and power generation. The Commission said that this could reduce EU demand for Russian gas by two thirds before the end of the year.

The Commission said it would also present, by April, a legislative proposal requiring underground gas storage across the EU to be filled up to at least 90% of its capacity by 1 October each year. The Commission was also continuing its investigation into the gas market in response to concerns about

A plan to make Europe independent from Russian fossil fuels by 2030

⁹³ European Commission, [EU disburses €300 million in emergency Macro-Financial Assistance to Ukraine](#), 11 March 2022

⁹⁴ Council of EU, [Extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council](#), 4 March 2022

⁹⁵ European Council, [Conclusions, 24 February 2022](#)

⁹⁶ Council of EU, [Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council](#), 28 February 2022

potential distortions of competition by operators, notably the Russian majority-state owned Gazprom.

The Commission would also look into all possible options for emergency measures to limit the contagion effect of gas prices in electricity prices, such as temporary price limits.

The Commission said that following the invasion of Ukraine, the case for a rapid clean energy transition had never been stronger and clearer. The EU imports 90% of its gas consumption, with Russia providing around 45% of those imports, in varying levels across Member States. Russia also accounts for around 25% of oil imports and 45% of coal imports.

The Commission said it was also working with neighbours and partners which share the EU's fossil fuel dependencies and exposure to price hikes, including in the Western Balkans. Support would also be provided for Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, to ensure reliable and sustainable energy.

In setting out the plan, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said: “We must become independent from Russian oil, coal and gas. We simply cannot rely on a supplier who explicitly threatens us”.⁹⁷

In response to Western sanctions, Russia has threatened to cut off gas supplies to Europe via the Nord Stream 1 gas pipeline, although Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Alexander Novak, said on 7 March that “so far, we are not taking such a decision”.⁹⁸

G7 Energy Ministers statement

G7 energy ministers, together with the European Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson, issued a joint statement on 10 March 2022.

Among other things, the statement referred to the impact on international energy markets of recent developments, and the need to control prices. Oil and gas producing countries were called upon to act in a responsible manner and examine their ability to increase deliveries to international markets. The important role of OPEC was noted in this regard.

According to the statement, the G7 would be committed to working together to mitigate the impact on energy supply and security. This also involved working together to ensure diversification of energy sources and supply routes. The urgent measures being taken by some G7 members to quickly reduce dependency on Russian energy supplies, or to ban use of Russian oil

⁹⁷ European Commission, [REPowerEU: Joint European action for more affordable, secure and sustainable energy](#), 8 March 2022

⁹⁸ OilPrice.com, [“Russia threatens to cut off flow of Nord Stream 1 pipeline”](#), 7 March 2022

and gas⁹⁹ altogether was noted. The EU's RePowerEU plan was highlighted in this context.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ President Biden [signed an executive order banning the import of Russian gas and oil](#) on 8 March 2022. Canada has also announced a [ban on Russian oil imports](#).

¹⁰⁰ [G7 Energy Ministers' Joint Statement 10 March 2022](#)

3

Ukraine's application to join the EU

3.1

Submission of application

On 28 February 2022, President Zelenskyy signed an official request for Ukraine to join the EU.¹⁰¹ This was [submitted to the EU the same day](#). Two other former Soviet states, Georgia and Moldova, submitted applications to join the EU later in the same week.

President Zelenskyy asked for immediate Ukrainian membership of the EU

President Zelenskyy asked for immediate Ukrainian membership of the EU, proposing this be done under “a new special procedure”. He said, “Our goal is to be together with all Europeans and, most importantly, to be on an equal footing”.¹⁰²

President Zelenskyy address to European Parliament

On 1 March, the European Parliament held an extraordinary plenary session. This was addressed remotely by President Zelenskyy of Ukraine, and the Speaker of Ukraine's Parliament, Ruslan Stefanchuk.

After updating on developments on the ground, President Zelenskyy said:

Our nation is extremely motivated. We are fighting for our rights, for our freedoms and for our lives. Now we're fighting for our survival, and this is our highest motivation, but we're also fighting to be equal members of Europe. Today, I believe that we are all showing the world exactly what we're made of. The European Union will be much stronger with us – that's for sure. Without you, Ukraine will be alone.¹⁰³

Ruslan Stefanchuk also called upon the EU and its Member States to support candidate status for Ukraine, and said this was now supported by the whole of Ukraine. He said:

The best support for the people of Ukraine in their darkest hours would be the immediate recognition of our membership of the European Union. Membership of the European Union – even before these events that started on 24 February – was supported by the majority of Ukrainians. Our mandate is to have a relationship with you, with the European Union, because the Ukrainian people have made their choice.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Reuters, [Ukrainian president signs formal request to join the European Union](#), 28 February 2022

¹⁰² Politico, [Ukraine's Zelenskyy ups pressure on EU with plea for immediate membership](#), 28 February 2022

¹⁰³ European Parliament, [Debates: Russian aggression against Ukraine, 1 March 2022](#)

¹⁰⁴ European Parliament, [Debates: Russian aggression against Ukraine, 1 March 2022](#)

3.2

EU response to application

Speaking in the European Parliament in response to President Zelenskyy and Speaker Stefanchuk on 1 March, the President of the European Council Charles Michel said it would be up to Europeans to rise to the occasion, but that enlargement was a difficult subject given the “different opinions” in the EU. He said it would be up to the European Commission to issue an opinion “from which the Council will not escape its responsibilities”. He said the Council would have to analyse seriously the “symbolic” but legitimate request that has been expressed and would then make “the right choice”.¹⁰⁵

The Commission President Ursula von der Leyen also responded following these speeches. She said that the EU and Ukraine were “already closer than ever before” and that “we should talk about the next steps” but that there was “a long path ahead”. The day before, the Commission President had said that Ukraine is “one of us and we want them in the European Union”. But she also said that this would be “over time” and referred to the process of integrating the Ukrainian market into the EU single market.¹⁰⁶

In the same session, the European Parliament adopted a resolution, calling on the EU institutions to work towards granting EU candidate status to Ukraine, in line with Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (the treaty article providing for accession of new Member States) and “on the basis of merit”. It said that in the meantime, it said that the EU should continue to work towards Ukraine’s integration into the EU single market along the lines of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.¹⁰⁷

The European Commission will submit an opinion on Ukraine’s application

The Versailles declaration adopted by EU heads of state or government on 10-11 March 2022 noted that Ukraine had exercised the right to choose its own destiny, and that “Ukraine belongs to our European family”. It said the Council of the EU had responded swiftly by inviting the Commission to submit its opinion on Ukraine’s application in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Treaties. In the meantime, the EU would deepen its partnership with Ukraine and support it in pursuing its European path.

The Council has also invited the Commission to submit its opinions on the applications of the Moldova and Georgia.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ European Parliament, [Debates: Russian aggression against Ukraine, 1 March 2022](#)

¹⁰⁶ Euronews, [Ukraine is one of us and we want them in EU, Ursula von der Leyen](#), 28 February 2022

¹⁰⁷ See European Parliament press release, [Invasion of Ukraine: MEPs call for tougher response to Russia](#), 1 March 2022; and [European Parliament resolution of 1 March 2022 on the Russian aggression against Ukraine](#).

¹⁰⁸ [Informal meeting of the Heads of State or Government, Versailles Declaration, 10 and 11 March 2022](#) (pdf)

Member State attitudes to enlargement

Just prior to the Russian invasion in February, the Presidents of Lithuania and Poland, along with Ukraine's President Zelenskyy signed a joint declaration stating that Ukraine deserved EU candidate status and that Lithuania and Poland would support Ukraine on its way to achieving that goal. It also referred to "significant progress" in the implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and internal reforms in Ukraine. Slovenia and Poland's Prime Ministers also separately signed a joint letter to the President of the European Council expressing support for Ukraine's EU membership by 2030. The letter said, "if the EU doesn't expand, someone else will".¹⁰⁹

11 Member States call for Ukrainian membership

Following the Russian invasion, the Presidents of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia issued a joint statement calling on the EU Member States to enable the EU institutions to conduct steps to immediately grant Ukraine a EU candidate country status and open the process of negotiations. Croatia, Hungary and Romania have also added their support for moves to launch an accession process for Ukraine.¹¹⁰

Following the announcement that Ukraine was submitting its membership application on 28 February, the German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock adopted a more cautious tone. While noting that "Ukraine is part of this European house" she said that "everyone is aware (...) that joining the EU is not something that can be done in a few months, but that it involves an intensive and far-reaching transformation process".¹¹¹

Some Member States are reluctant to support further enlargement

Other Member States, notably France and the Netherlands, have been reluctant to support further enlargement of the EU. At the EU leaders summit in Versailles on 10 and 11 March, President Macron of France said he wanted to send a message of solidarity to Ukraine but that it was not possible to "open an accession procedure with a country at war". However, he said we it would be unfair to "close the door and say never". The Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte said there could be no "fast-track procedure" and that countries in the Western part of Europe were agreed on this. There are reported concerns in some Member States about corruption in Ukraine, instability of its institutions and the state of its economy.¹¹² More broadly, Member States are concerned about what they view as a drift towards undemocratic practices in some Member States (notably Hungary and Poland) and do not want further enlargement without reformed EU decision-making. This might include removing the need for unanimity in some sensitive areas.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Euractiv, [Poland, Slovenia, Lithuania say Ukraine deserves EU candidate status](#), 24 September 2022

¹¹⁰ Euractiv, [EU promises to 'seriously' look into Ukraine's membership appeal](#), 1 March 2022

¹¹¹ Euractiv, [Ukraine requests EU membership under fast-track procedure](#), 1 March 2022

¹¹² The Guardian, [Western Europe leaders rebuff Ukraine fast-track EU membership appeal](#), 10 March 2022

¹¹³ UK in a Changing Europe, [The Ukraine-EU Relationship](#), 3 March 2022

3 A mutual defence clause?

Once a country has joined the EU, it is bound by the EU treaties. One treaty article of particular relevance to Ukraine is [Article 42.7 of the Treaty on European Union](#). This states that “If a Member State is the victim of armed aggression on its territory, the other Member States shall have towards it an obligation of aid and assistance by all the means in their power”. This has been interpreted as a “mutual defence” clause similar to Article 5 of the NATO treaty. However, unlike the NATO treaty it does not include an explicit reference to the use of force to assist the party being attacked. Article 42.7 also states that this commitment “shall not prejudice the specific character of the security and defence policy of certain Member States”. Some Member States are not members of NATO, and some retain a policy of neutrality.¹¹⁴

3.3 EU accession process

The process by which the EU agrees to applicant states joining the EU is set out briefly in [Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union](#). An assessment of suitability to join is made by the European Commission, which also conducts accession negotiations. However, the decision of whether or not to launch negotiations and to agree to membership is taken by the Member States in the Council of the EU.

Candidate countries are expected to have stable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law and human right, as well as a functioning market economy. Applicant Member States also need, over time, to implement all of the EU’s standards and rules. These are divided into [35 different policy chapters](#).¹¹⁵ New Member States are also expected to commit to economic and monetary union, including adoption of the euro (although in practice, this can be avoided if countries do not meet certain convergence criteria).¹¹⁶

The accession process is lengthy

The accession process is lengthy, with applicant Member States required to meet [certain political and economic standards](#). Accession negotiations for most of the countries that have joined the EU since 2004 took six to eight years.¹¹⁷ However, this was the period of time following the opening of negotiations rather than the lengthy periods prior to this when applications were assessed, and decisions were taken as to whether the candidates were

¹¹⁴ European Council on Foreign Relations, [Ambiguous alliance: Neutrality, opt-outs, and European defence](#), 28 June 2021

¹¹⁵ See European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, [Conditions for membership](#)

¹¹⁶ Council of EU, [Conditions for joining the euro area: convergence criteria](#)

¹¹⁷ UK in a Changing Europe, [How new member states join the EU: all you need to know](#), 31 March 2020

ready to being the process. For recent Member States such as Poland, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia, ten to twelve years elapsed between submitting applications to the EU and actually becoming Member States.

Current candidates for accession

Albania, the Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey are all [candidate countries](#) to join the EU. These are all countries that have applied to join the EU, and with whom the EU has approved the beginning of accession negotiations. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are recognised as potential candidates, and have stabilisation and association agreements with the EU.¹¹⁸

Accession negotiations were [begun with Turkey in 2005](#), but they [made little progress before stalling completely](#) and seem unlikely to be revived in the near future. Accession negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia have also made little headway. Negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia have yet to start.

Some commentators have warned that the reluctance of certain EU leaders to move forward with EU accession for the Western Balkan countries [is fuelling instability in the region](#), and making some countries more prone to Russian influence.¹¹⁹ These concerns have been echoed by the leaders of some Member States, including Slovenia and Poland.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ European Commission, European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, [Negotiations status](#) (accessed 22 March 2022).

¹¹⁹ Centre for European Reform, [Reviving European policy towards the Western Balkans | Centre for European Reform](#), 15 December 2021

¹²⁰ See Euronews, [EU enlargement, migration and rule of law - Janez Janša gives his take](#), 10 August 2021; and Poland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, [Western Balkans](#) (accessed 21 March 2022).

The House of Commons Library is a research and information service based in the UK Parliament. Our impartial analysis, statistical research and resources help MPs and their staff scrutinise legislation, develop policy, and support constituents.

Our published material is available to everyone on commonslibrary.parliament.uk.

Get our latest research delivered straight to your inbox. Subscribe at commonslibrary.parliament.uk/subscribe or scan the code below:



 commonslibrary.parliament.uk

 [@commonslibrary](https://twitter.com/commonslibrary)