

REVIEW

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Claudia Wiesner, Michèle Knodt (Eds.), *The War Against Ukraine and the EU. Facing New Realities*, Palgrave Macmillan 2024, 230 pp.

In science, understood as a whole, as well as in its individual components in the form of specific and specialized disciplines, we can observe certain trends. In each of these disciplines, depending on the period, new discoveries or events in the immediate environment, issues arise that are given particular attention by the researchers representing them. This is also the case in political science and security studies – here, too, we can observe periods of intensified intellectual effort dedicated to the study and analysis of a given issue. As a result of events that have been unfolding since February 2022 just beyond the eastern borders of the European Union, namely the unjust and internationally illegal full-scale aggression by Russia against Ukraine, the issue of security has become such a topic. Naturally, this term is extremely broad, covering many very distinct specific issues. Given the war in Ukraine, this term is now subject to scientific verification in areas such as political, economic, energy, and military security, etc.

As it is probably obvious, the ongoing war has had the greatest impact on Ukraine. While Kyiv is not to blame for the conflict – after all, it is difficult to view a country's desire to develop and ensure international security and stability as a wrongdoing – the war

is being waged on its territory. People are dying there, and the achievements of many generations of Ukrainian citizens are being destroyed. However, the war has not left the surrounding territories unaffected. Some serious consequences (such as Western sanctions, Russophobia, and international isolation) are also being felt by the direct aggressor (Russia), neighboring states (Moldova), the neighbors of Russia (the Baltic republics), and international organizations (e.g. the UN and WTO). This conflict has also had a profound impact on international trade, policies, and actions taken by the European Union, unquestionably the key organization for the Old Continent.

It is precisely the impact of the war in Ukraine on both Ukraine itself and the EU to which Claudia Wiesner and Michèle Knodt, along with a team of distinguished international authors, have devoted the book *The War Against Ukraine and the EU: Facing New Realities*, published by Palgrave Macmillan. While this is certainly not a very extensive study (it is only 230 pages long), it is highly relevant: published in 2024, it reflects the most up-to-date facts and deals with extremely important issues. It is also worth noting that the book addresses matters that are happening right here and now, almost before our eyes, in our immediate vicinity, and directly or indirectly affecting each of us, the citizens of Europe. For this reason alone, it is worth dedicating some time to this book.

Before delving into the core of the work, a few words should be devoted to matters of a different nature and lesser significance. First of all, the cover with its modern design and colors reminiscent of Ukraine's flag suggests the central idea of the publication. This element undoubtedly attracts the reader's attention, and the designer deserves praise. Secondly, the work has been prepared in an open-access format, which is undoubtedly an advantage. Thirdly, this is a collective work edited by scholars, and the fact that the authors of each chapter have been carefully selected is significant. They represent different countries (8) and various research institutions (14), and the creation of this international team was supported by an agency funding the creation of scientific networks. As a result, this approach has generated diverse perspectives and analytical approaches to the issues discussed, which noticeably increased the value of the work.

From an editorial standpoint, the work raises no objections. The reputation of the publisher is well-deserved, so it is no surprise that the proofreading is solid (though someone determined might find some minor flaws), and the perfect text layout is not a surprise either. The publication includes 12 graphical elements (charts, diagrams, and tables), which are aesthetically pleasing and well-integrated. This suggests that the authors did not intend to overload the work with illustrations, and their inclusion is fully justified. It is also worth noting that the reader's comfort has been taken into account in two ways. *Primo*, where notes do appear (which are quite rare), they take the form of footnotes, sparing the reader from flipping through pages to find their content. *Secundo*, a reasonable solution, typical for academic journals, has been adopted: at the end of each chapter, there are reference or literature lists (there is no lengthy bibliography at the end of the book). Finally, although the work is written in English

– the native language of only 2 out of 15 authors – it is stylistically coherent, pleasant to read, and understandable even for someone who is not an expert in international relations or security studies.

One of clear strengths of the book is the source base used in its preparation. What stands out is that the vast majority of the sources cited are very recent. References to somewhat older publications can be found only occasionally, but this is not a flaw, and these sources are still of substantive value. Almost all of the authors used texts from English-language journals and books published in the countries where they work. After all, the fact that a text has been published in a periodical of local or regional significance or by a specific publisher does not necessarily make it second-rate. Ultimately, we can speak of a significant dissemination of scholarly resources that previously had a rather limited circulation, and which are worth exploring. In other words, it is a form of internationalizing the scholarly output.

In the *Introduction*, the editors state that the primary aim of the publication is to deepen the discussion about the effects of the war in Ukraine on the European Union as an organization (its procedures and policies) and on European Studies (p. 3). Consequently, although this is not explicitly stated in the table of contents, the publication consists of three sections besides the *Introduction* (Chapter 1): 1) *Theories, Approaches, and Concepts in EU Studies and International Relations* (Chapters 2 and 3); 2) *The EU as a Polity and Its Policies* (chapters 4–7); 3) *Ukraine: EU Accession, Narratives, and Perceptions* (Chapters 8–10). Importantly, reading the entire work leads to the conclusion that the authors made a serious attempt to answer the cognitive questions they set out and did so in a highly interesting and exhaustive manner.

The structure of the chapters and the analytical approaches chosen are also appropriate. The first two substantive chapters (numbered 2 and 3) serve as a theoretical introduction to the subsequent discussions and also allow for a confrontation of the current reality in Ukraine with key theories in international relations, and a consideration of the validity of the claim about a new era in European Studies, which supposedly began in February 2022. The next four chapters (4–7) analyze the impact of the ongoing war on what is happening in the EU, both internally and externally. What the reviewer finds particularly compelling due to his personal academic interests, the chapter on broadly defined EU energy policy and the changes occurring in it, greatly accelerated by the ongoing war. In other chapters of this section, the authors examine issues such as the EU's role in the changing international order and the challenges it faces, the clash between democracy and authoritarianism, and the changing dynamics of the Common Security and Defence Policy¹. The three concluding chapters (8–10) address Ukraine's chances of

¹ The mention of Hungary in the title of Chapter 6 is somewhat puzzling: why Hungary specifically? And why only Hungary? After all, the reviewed publication is not focused on Hungary, and such a title is inconsistent both with the main title and the overall substance of the work. It is further down the chapter that the authors justify this decision and the unusual title, yet

joining the EU, the EU's normative power in Ukraine, and trends in media narratives about Ukraine and the ongoing war.

Having discussed what is positive and of good quality in the reviewed book, it is worth pointing out some nuances that raise doubts. One might start with the title, *The War Against Ukraine and the EU*, particularly the second part of it. Russia's aggression against Ukraine is beyond dispute (although the authorities in the Kremlin refer to it as a "special military operation", not a war, for internal propaganda purposes), but a "war against the EU" seems like an overstatement. Yes, Europe is facing hybrid actions targeting its security, but the scale and impact are far from the events taking place in Ukraine. This move was likely intended to attract attention, perhaps to shake public opinion and urge politicians to act more swiftly and decisively, but it seems somewhat exaggerated. The title also raises the question of whether it is possible, in one relatively short publication, to comprehensively and thoroughly analyse the many different issues related to two international legal entities – Ukraine and the EU – and the impact of the war on them. The answer is probably no, but that does not mean that the analysis presented lacks value. Quite the opposite, such a form can also be a starting point and an invitation for further research on the subject in a larger and more international context, which is, after all, signaled in the introduction.

The opening chapter (Introduction) is not the strongest part of the publication, for at least two reasons. First, linguistically and stylistically it differs from the rest of the book, as the authors often use simple sentences, which makes the text seem somewhat choppy and artificial. Secondly, the section titled *From Old to New Challenges*, currently at the end of the chapter, should probably be placed at the beginning as a substantive introduction to the discourse. This change would also allow for a smooth transition to the next chapter of the book, which is not possible as things currently stand.

A few more words about what could be a valuable addition to the reviewed publication, or perhaps its planned second part. At the forefront would be considerations on the impact of the ongoing war on military security, defense, and the arms industry of EU member states and the EU itself. An interesting thread could be the analysis of the help (political, humanitarian, energy) provided to Ukraine and Ukrainians, and how these actions are perceived in Ukraine itself. The war also has had an impact on financial markets, public finances of states, the perception of the war in Western societies, and migration processes. These are just a few possible topics worth considering.

As the review nears its conclusion, it must be stated that despite some minor debatable points, this publication is definitely worth reading. It is not tedious; the language sounds professional but in such a way that even a layperson can understand the narrative. The issues addressed are highly topical, unfolding almost before our eyes, and they

it still remains difficult to shake the impression that the emphasis here has not been properly distributed (there is too much focus on the internal situation in Hungary and Budapest's actions towards the EU or NATO).

are crucial for every European, whether they are trying to survive in Ukraine, live on the eastern border of the EU, or enjoy life thousands of kilometers away from the ongoing war. The authors have undoubtedly succeeded in answering the general questions posed in the *Introduction* and the detailed ones at the beginning of each subsequent chapter. The analysis is indeed thorough, the argumentation flawless, and the conclusions clear and correct. Perhaps it was a deliberate editorial choice to leave the reader with a slight sense of informational deficiency, encouraging them to delve deeper into the topic on their own. If that was the goal, the team deserves praise for achieving it. Therefore, it must be stated that *The War Against Ukraine and the EU: Facing New Realities* should be an essential reading not only for social sciences students (especially of political science or security studies) but also for all kinds of experts, journalists, and politicians. In other words, for everyone even remotely interested in the topic.