

Russia has launched a military operation in the Ukrainian territory

After months of troops gathering, diplomatic attempts through many formats, and many contradictory opinions on how far Russia would go, Vladimir Putin has launched in the early hours of February 24th a military operation in the Ukrainian territory.

A few days earlier, he acknowledged the independence of the two separatist regions of Ukraine, Donetsk and Louhansk, in a speech where he delivered his historical perspective: Ukraine is “an inalienable part of our history, our culture and our spiritual space”, has been “entirely created by Russia” in 1917, the current government was installed after a coup during the Maidan revolution in 2014 and is conducting a “Blitzkrieg” and a “genocide” in Donbass. This justifies for him a military intervention to “denazify” the country.

European countries took new level of economic sanctions at each step

The European countries have reacted quickly to what was the day before still not considered as likely.

A first package of sanctions was adopted on February 22nd after the recognition of the independence of the Donbass. It included targeted sanctions (asset freeze and prohibition from making funds available) against 351 members of the Russian State Duma and 27 high-profile individuals and entities, import and export ban from the Donbass region, and restrictions on the Russian access to EU capital and financial market. In addition, the German chancellor, Olaf Scholz, decided to suspend the certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, aimed at delivering gas from Russia directly to Germany. It was an option the country was previously not ready to consider, as it strongly depends on Russian gas for its energy sector.

On February 24th, the day of the entry into Ukraine, a special meeting of the European Council gathering all the heads of State and governments, under the French presidency, agreed to work on a second set of sanctions. However, the details of these sanctions were not settled, especially on one blocking point: the ban of Russia from the Swift system, which allows all the bank transfers between the financial organisations of more than 200 countries.

On February 25th, the EU decided to impose sanctions as well against Vladimir Putin and Sergey Lavrov, his ministry for Foreign Affairs. It also expands the previous financial restrictions, targeting up to 70% of the Russian banking market. The energy, transport, technology sectors are also targeted, with export bans of goods and technologies for oil refining, the aviation and space industry, and with dual use (civil and military).

On February 26th, Germany dropped its opposition to banning Russia from SWIFT, paving the way to this new level of sanctions the EU was working on. The country fears the consequences on its gas deliveries if the Russian companies cannot be paid anymore. It called for a “targeted and functional limitation of SWIFT”.

The fear of a military escalation

All countries confirmed that they will not send troops to Ukraine to take part in the conflict.

However, many have prepositioned troops in the area to secure the neighbouring NATO and EU allies. NATO has activated its reaction forces, currently under the French command. France is sending 500 additional troops to Romania. The United States increased their presence with 14.000 more troops, some of them in Germany.

In parallel, was also offered military equipment. Germany has authorised on Saturday February 26th the delivery of 1000 anti-tank rockets to Ukraine, breaking with its usual interdiction to export lethal weapons in a conflict area. Sweden took the same step on Sunday 27th, as did the Netherlands. On Sunday 27th, Josep Borrel, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs of the Union, stated that an agreement was settled to deliver €450 million worth of weaponry through the EU Peace Facility and the EU intergovernmental fund, for the first time in its history.

On the other side, Vladimir Putin announced on Sunday February 27th that he was putting its deterrence forces under alert. The NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg pointed out the “irresponsible” conduct of Moscow.

What could be the next steps

Even though all Russian forces are not deployed there, Ukraine military power may not allow the country to figures' balance: 200.000 soldiers against 900.000, 2600 assault tanks against 12.400, 1800 artillery pieces against 4700, and 70 combat aircrafts against 770. However, Russia and Ukraine agreed to start negotiations in Belarus on February 28th, despite little hope this may give an issue to the conflict.

In the long term, it is feared that the same dilemma Ukraine has been facing, between the occidental flank and Russia, could extend to neighbouring countries, especially in the Western Balkans.

Industry

France and the United Kingdom launch preparation works for the FCAS/W missiles [EN](#) [FR](#) [ES](#)

On February 17th, France through the DGA and the United Kingdom through the DE&S have launched the preparation works that follow the concept phase of the FCAS/W missile programme.

This programme aims at developing the next generation of long-range cruise missiles, with two versions: a subsonic low-observable weapon to replace the SCALP/Storm Shadow, and an supersonic and manoeuvrable anti-ship weapon to replace the Exocet/Harpoon. They are due to be deployed in 2030. It will benefit from the "One MBDA" integration model, where subsidiaries in each country are specialised in specific fields to the benefit of not only national programmes, creating competitiveness with interdependency.

However, the programme has suffered some delays due to the Brexit and the AUKUS crisis, the latter having led to the cancellation of a meeting between the French and British Ministers of Defence on that topic.

A French parliamentary report expresses concerns on the FCAS and MGCS cooperation projects [FR](#)

Two French deputies delivered on February 17th to the Assemblée Nationale a report on the "preparation to high intensity" combat. While assessing the equipment France has and its development, their analyses on the SCAF and the MGCS programme were quite pessimistic.

Concerning the SCAF programme, it is qualified as "more and more hypothetical". The recent signing of a trilateral intergovernmental agreement last August 30th is described as a good sign, but the discussions between Airbus and Dassault on the governance are still blocking an industrial agreement. Once developed, two additional questions remain: first, the French industrial model is financed at 50% on exportations, while the new German coalition clearly announced they would be opposed to any sales to the Middle East, which is a significant market. Second, Germany will need to replace its Tornado in a short term to stay in the NATO nuclear plans, and could choose the Lockheed-Martin F-35.

Concerning the MGCS, the industrial cooperation is also struggling to find a settlement between Rheinmetall and KNDS, the joint venture between the German KMW and the French Nexter. 2040, the due date, being already a late term for the French Army, the rapporteurs conclude that "it is not excluded that France will be obliged to finance this project alone".

The German Navy chooses the Thales Flash Sonics sonar for its NH90 Sea Tiger fleet [EN](#)

In June 2020, the German Navy purchased 31 NH90 Multi Role Frigate Helicopters to NH Industries, which will be delivered progressively. On February 22nd 2022, Thales, a French equipment company, announced it had been chosen, with its Flash Sonics sonar and its all-new SonoFlash sonobuoys, to equip the aircrafts for submarine underwater detection. It is the first time the German Navy chooses the French company for this kind of equipment. The system is already operated in 18 navies, including the US Navy.

International relations

The European Union - Africa summit gathered European and African leaders in Brussels [FR](#) [EN](#) [FR](#)

After being postponed for 2 years in a row, the EU-Africa summit finally took place in Brussels on February 17th and 18th 2022. The aim of the summit was to address the issues of solidarity, security, peace and sustainable economic development. 53 leaders of the African Union countries as well as the 27 European leaders agreed on a renewed partnership. The EU wishes to remain Africa's leading economic partner on these issues.

On the European side, the challenges raised were: the access to the vaccine against COVID, the special drawing rights issued by the IMF linked to the COVID crisis, and European investments in the framework of the Global Gateway.

Regarding African challenges, the following issues were raised: the ecological and digital transition, sustainable growth, the creation of decent jobs as well as the strengthening of health systems and the improvement of education and training.

In terms of peace and security, the AU and the EU wished to consolidate and strengthen their cooperation, within the framework of the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), enshrined in the 2018 AU-EU Memorandum of Understanding on Peace, Security and Governance. The themes highlighted are the fight against instability, radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism. In concrete terms, the EU will provide support for training, capacity building and adequate equipment, supporting African-led peace support operations, including in the area of cyber security.

European Union military cooperation and external operations

The European partners of Takuba announce the withdrawal of their troops from Mali [FR](#) [FR](#) [DE](#)

On February 16th, the French president Emmanuel Macron gathered the Heads of State of countries involved in the Sahel region (Sahelian countries and European partners) to discuss the future of the military deployment in this area. In the public declaration they delivered, they announced that given the “multiple obstructions by the Malian transitional authorities”, the European States and Canada “deem that the political, operational and legal conditions are no longer met to effectively continue their current military engagement”, and will therefore start the “coordinated withdrawal” of their forces. They however want to remain committed in the region, and have begun consultations with their African partners that should end in June 2022. Tensions have been rising between Mali and its European and African partners in the last months after the junta refused to organise quickly regular elections and after the arrival of Wagner mercenaries, a Russian private security company related to the Kremlin.

After this expected announcement, France will withdraw a substantial part of their 5.000 troops deployed in Mali, in 4 to 6 months. The spokesperson for the Malian transitional government replied on February 18th that this was a clear violation of the past agreements and requested France leave “without delay”. The French authorities replied that they would not jeopardise the security of their troops. The European special forces gathered in the Takuba Task Force will be redeployed in Niger.

In Germany, this raises more accurately the debate on whether the Bundeswehr should stay in the region by extending the EUTM Mali and the MINUSMA missions. Germany had no troops in the Takuba Task Force.

Dynamic Manta: a major NATO anti-submarine warfare exercise in the Mediterranean Sea [EN](#) [DE](#) [EN](#) [EN](#)

“Submarines from France, Greece, and Italy under NATO Submarine Command are joining surface ships from Canada, France, Greece, Italy, Spain, Turkey, and the US for a total of 3 submarines, 12 ships, 8 maritime patrol aircrafts, and 8 ASW helicopters”

This is how Rear Admiral Mauro Panebianco, Commanding Officer of Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG 2), lists the participants of one of NATO's most important annual exercises. The "Dynamic Manta 2022" is an anti-submarine warfare (ASW) and anti-surface warfare (ASuW) training, which takes place in the Mediterranean Sea.

"This exercise is a force multiplier that provides a collectively trained and interoperable force, ready to work together as the maritime portion of the VJTF (Very High Joint Readiness Task Force)", says Rear Admiral Stephen Mack, Commander Submarines NATO. Enhancing interoperability, as well as performance in a high stress environment is the main goal of the exercise.

The exercise started on February 21st off the coast of Sicily and will end on March 3rd. It has no connection with the current events in Ukraine.

European policies

Informal meeting of the European Ministers responsible for Space in Toulouse, France [EN](#) [FR](#) [FR](#)

Meeting in Toulouse (FR) on 16 February to discuss the desired direction of European space policy, the European ministers responsible for space outlined an ambitious strategy. In a space environment increasingly contested, Europe wants to give itself the means to defend its interests and freedom to operate in space.

On the initiative of the European Commissioner for the Internal Market, Thierry Breton, several projects marking continuity as well as innovation, all responding to questions of sovereignty, were submitted to the ministers. Among them are space exploration, new reusable launchers, and above all, satellite constellations.

Indeed, if this summit was a success, it is mainly because first, all the ministers validated the conditions for the renewal and deployment of the Galileo GPS constellation, which constitutes a significant advance for the EU's flagship constellation. Besides, an agreement was reached to equip Europe with a space-based connectivity infrastructure. This future sovereign constellation shall provide high-speed internet access for all Europeans, putting an end to dead zones. Its quantum encryption will allow Europe to remain connected whatever happens on terrestrial networks, limiting the risk of exposure to cyberattacks. Finally, such a constellation is a true geopolitical infrastructure as it will reduce European dependency on non-European commercial initiatives under development.