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The European Union's Strategic Adaptations to Hybrid Conflicts and the Influence of External Actors¹

Strategiczne adaptacje Unii Europejskiej do konfliktów hybrydowych i wpływ aktorów zewnętrznych

Abstract

This article explores how the European Union has strategically adapted to the growing threat of hybrid conflicts, using the war in Ukraine as a pivotal case study. It examines institutional reforms in EU crisis governance, enhanced coordination with NATO, and evolving strategies in cyber defense, energy resilience, and disinformation countermeasures. The article also analyzes how major global actors—including Russia, the United States, and China—shape the EU's security and policy landscape. Applying institutional and network resilience theory, the article assesses the Union's ongoing transformation toward greater strategic autonomy and crisis preparedness in a destabilized international order.

Keywords: hybrid conflict; EU crisis governance; NATO coordination; cyber security; strategic autonomy; resilience; energy security; Ukraine war; Russia; China

Abstrakt

Artykuł analizuje, w jaki sposób Unia Europejska strategicznie dostosowała się do rosnącego zagrożenia konfliktami hybrydowymi, koncentrując się na wojnie na Ukrainie jako kluczowym studium przypadku. Omawia reformy instytucjonalne w zarządzaniu kryzysowym UE, zacieśnioną współpracę z NATO oraz rozwijające się strategie w zakresie obrony cybernetycznej, odporności energetycznej i przeciwdziałania dezinformacji. Autor analizuje również, jak główni globalni aktorzy – w tym Rosja, Stany Zjednoczone i Chiny – wpływają na krajobraz polityki bezpieczeństwa UE. W oparciu o teorie odporności instytucjonalnej i sieciowej, artykuł ocenia trwającą transformację Unii w kierunku większej autonomii strategicznej i gotowości kryzysowej w zdestabilizowanym porządku międzynarodowym.

Słowa kluczowe: konflikt hybrydowy; zarządzanie kryzysowe UE; współpraca z NATO; bezpieczeństwo cybernetyczne; autonomia strategiczna; odporność; bezpieczeństwo energetyczne; wojna na Ukrainie; Rosja; Chiny

¹ This article constitutes Part II of a two-part study. It completes the analysis initiated in Marsili, M., *Disinformation and Democratic Resilience in the European Union: Lessons from the Covid-19 Pandemic and Election Interference*, published as Part I in the thematic issue *Europe's Security in the Face of Crises and Challenges* of "Studia Administracji i Bezpieczeństwa" 2025, vol. 19, no. 19, .

1. Introduction

The security landscape of the European Union has undergone profound transformation in the face of increasingly complex, cross-domain threats. The concept of hybrid conflict—combining conventional military force with cyber-attacks, disinformation, economic coercion, and energy pressure—has become central to contemporary strategic thinking. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 marked a turning point in the EU's approach to security and crisis governance. It exposed vulnerabilities in institutional preparedness and reinforced the urgency of inter-institutional coordination, particularly with NATO and transatlantic partners.

This article explores how the EU has responded to hybrid threats in this context, with a particular focus on its internal governance adaptations, external diplomatic and security partnerships, and evolving strategy toward resilience. It analyzes how external actors such as Russia, China, and the United States influence the EU's security posture and policymaking. By examining the intersections between digital, economic, and geopolitical dimensions of hybrid conflict, the article sheds light on the EU's capacity to act as a cohesive and autonomous strategic actor in a destabilized international order.

2. The EU's Response to Hybrid Conflicts

2.1 Defining Hybrid Conflicts

Hybrid conflicts represent a complex amalgamation of conventional and unconventional methods employed to achieve strategic objectives without resorting to open warfare.² These conflicts are characterized by their ability to blur the lines between war and peace, making it increasingly difficult to apply traditional international laws and norms.³ Hybrid conflicts often operate below the threshold of conventional war, avoiding direct military confrontation while still causing significant disruption and instability.⁴

One of the defining features of hybrid conflicts is their reliance on a variety of tactics that extend beyond traditional military engagements. Cyber-attacks, for instance, are frequently used to disrupt critical infrastructure, steal sensitive information, and undermine trust in digital systems. These attacks can have far-reaching consequences, affecting not only the targeted state but also the global community.

Disinformation campaigns are another key component of hybrid conflicts. By spreading false or misleading information, actors can influence public opinion,

² M. Marsili, *Hybrid Warfare: Above or Below the Threshold of Armed Conflict?*, "Hungarian Defence Review" 2022, vol. 150, no. 1-2, pp. 36-48.

³ Ibidem.

⁴ Ibidem.

sow discord, and destabilize societies. These campaigns often exploit existing social and political divisions, amplifying tensions and creating an environment of uncertainty and mistrust.

Economic pressure is also a common tactic in hybrid conflicts. Through the use of sanctions, trade restrictions, and other economic tools, states can weaken their adversaries without engaging in direct military action. This form of economic warfare can have a profound impact on a nation's economy, leading to long-term instability and hardship.

Additionally, hybrid conflicts often involve the use of proxy warfare, where state actors support non-state actors or insurgent groups to achieve their strategic goals. This approach allows states to exert influence and achieve their objectives while maintaining a degree of plausible deniability.

The concept of hybrid warfare has gained prominence in recent years, particularly in the context of geopolitical tensions and the increasing use of cyber and information warfare. The evolving nature of these conflicts requires a reevaluation of existing legal frameworks and the development of new approaches to address the unique challenges they present.⁵ The traditional distinctions between war and peace, combatants and non-combatants, and military and civilian targets are becoming increasingly blurred, necessitating a more nuanced understanding of conflict in the modern era.

Defining hybrid conflicts involves recognizing the multifaceted and dynamic nature of these engagements. By understanding the various tactics and strategies employed, we can better prepare for and respond to the threats posed by hybrid warfare. As the international community continues to grapple with these challenges, it is essential to develop comprehensive and adaptive strategies that address the full spectrum of hybrid conflict.

The rise of hybrid conflicts poses significant challenges for international law. Traditional legal frameworks, such as the *Geneva Conventions* and the *Hague Conventions*, are primarily designed to regulate conventional warfare. However, the unconventional tactics employed in hybrid conflicts often fall into legal grey areas, complicating the application of existing laws.

One major implication is the difficulty in attributing responsibility for actions in hybrid conflicts. Cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns can be conducted anonymously or through proxies, making it challenging to identify the perpetrators and hold them accountable under international law.⁶ This lack of clear attribution

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ M. Marsili, *The Russian Influence Strategy in Its Contested Neighbourhood*, [in:] *The Russian Federation in Global Information Warfare: Influence Operations in Europe and Its Neighbourhood*, eds. H. Mölder, V. Sazonov, A. Chochia, T. Kerikmäe, Cham 2021, p. 160.

undermines the enforcement of legal norms and can embolden actors to engage in hybrid tactics with impunity.

Furthermore, hybrid conflicts often involve actions that fall below the threshold of armed conflict, such as economic coercion and political interference. These activities may not trigger the application of international humanitarian law (IHL), which governs the conduct of parties during armed conflicts.⁷ As a result, there is a need to develop new legal instruments or adapt existing ones to address the unique challenges posed by hybrid warfare.

The use of non-state actors and proxies in hybrid conflicts also complicates the legal landscape. International law traditionally distinguishes between state and non-state actors, with different rules applying to each.⁸ However, hybrid conflicts often blur these distinctions, as states may covertly support non-state actors to achieve their objectives.⁹ This creates challenges in determining the applicable legal framework and ensuring accountability for violations.

Additionally, the humanitarian implications of hybrid conflicts are significant. The use of cyber-attacks and disinformation can have devastating effects on civilian populations, disrupting essential services and spreading fear and confusion. International law must evolve to better protect civilians from these emerging threats and ensure that humanitarian principles are upheld in the context of hybrid warfare.

In summary, hybrid conflicts challenge the existing international legal order by exploiting gaps and ambiguities in current frameworks. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort by the international community to develop new legal norms and mechanisms that can effectively regulate hybrid warfare and hold perpetrators accountable. As hybrid conflicts continue to evolve, so too must the legal responses to ensure that international law remains relevant and effective in maintaining peace and security.

2.2 The War in Ukraine: A Case Study

The war in Ukraine, which began in 2014 and escalated dramatically with Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, serves as a poignant example of hybrid conflict.¹⁰ This case study illustrates the multifaceted nature of hybrid warfare, where conventional military operations are intertwined with cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, economic pressure, and the use of proxy forces.

⁷ M. Marsili, *Hybrid Warfare...* op. cit. ibid.p.

⁸ M. Marsili, *The War on Cyberterrorism*, "Democracy and Security" 2019, vol. 15, no. 2, pp. 172-199; M. Marsili, *Morals and Ethics in Counterterrorism*, "Conatus – Journal of Philosophy" 2023, vol. 8, no. 2, p. 352.

⁹ M. Marsili, *Hybrid Warfare...*, op. cit., ibid.

¹⁰ M. Marsili, *The Russian Influence...* op. cit., p. 160-161; M. Marsili, *Hybrid Warfare...* op. cit., p. 42.

The conflict in Ukraine initially erupted with Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, followed by the support of separatist movements in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. These actions were accompanied by a sophisticated disinformation campaign aimed at justifying Russia's actions and undermining the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government.¹¹ The use of cyber warfare was also prominent, with numerous cyber-attacks targeting Ukrainian infrastructure, government institutions, and private enterprises.¹²

The full-scale invasion in 2022 marked a significant escalation, with conventional military forces being deployed alongside continued hybrid tactics.¹³ Russia's strategy involved not only direct military engagement but also efforts to destabilize Ukraine through economic means, such as energy supply manipulation and trade restrictions. Additionally, the use of proxy forces and mercenaries allowed Russia to maintain a degree of plausible deniability while exerting influence on the ground.¹⁴

The international response to the war in Ukraine has been multifaceted, involving economic sanctions, military aid, and diplomatic efforts to isolate Russia.¹⁵ However, the conflict has highlighted significant challenges for international law and the global security framework. The difficulty in attributing cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns, the use of non-state actors, and the blending of military and non-military tactics have all complicated efforts to hold perpetrators accountable and protect civilian populations.¹⁶

The war in Ukraine underscores the need for a comprehensive approach to hybrid conflicts, one that integrates military, economic, cyber, and informational strategies. It also calls for reforms in international law to address the unique challenges posed by hybrid warfare, ensuring that legal frameworks are equipped to respond to the evolving nature of conflict. The war in Ukraine serves as a critical case study in understanding hybrid conflicts.

It demonstrates the complexity and multifaceted nature of modern warfare, highlighting the need for adaptive strategies and robust legal frameworks to address the challenges posed by hybrid tactics. As the international community

¹¹ M. Marsili, *The Russian Influence ...* op. cit., p. 163-164.

¹² E.A. Cohen, P. O'Brien, *The Russia-Ukraine War: A Study in Analytic Failure*, Washington 2024.

¹³ M. Marsili, *Hybrid Warfare ...* op. cit., p. 43-44.

¹⁴ A.C. Fox, *The Russo-Ukrainian War: A Strategic Assessment Two Years into the Conflict*, "Land Warfare Paper" 2024, no. 158, <https://www.ansa.org/publications/russo-ukrainian-war-strategic-assessment-two-years-conflict>.

¹⁵ M. Marsili, *Inside and beyond the Russo-Ukrainian War: The Pitfalls of the European Union*, [in:] *Newsletter Annual of the Academy of Yuste: Reflections on Europe and Ibero-America*, vol. 3, year 2022, 1st ed., Cuacos de Yuste 2023, p. 429. Book, isn't it? YES, BOOK.

¹⁶ T. K. Fitzgerald, L. Tuschling, *Controlling Ukraine: The EU and Russia in Ukraine. A Case Study. Case Study no. 0517-02*, "PKSOI TRENDS Global Case Study Series" 2020, https://pksoi.armywarcollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Ukraine_Case_Study_Final.pdf [date of access: 13.07.2025].

continues to respond to the conflict, the lessons learned from Ukraine will be essential in shaping future approaches to hybrid warfare.

2.3 Military and Non-Military Responses

In addressing hybrid conflicts, it is essential to consider both military and non-military responses to effectively counter the multifaceted nature of these threats. Hybrid conflicts, by their very nature, blend conventional and unconventional tactics, requiring a comprehensive approach that integrates various strategies and tools.

Military responses to hybrid conflicts involve adapting traditional defense mechanisms to address the unconventional tactics employed by adversaries. This includes enhancing capabilities in cyber defense, intelligence gathering, and special operations. Modern military strategies must be flexible and adaptive, capable of responding to threats across multiple domains, including land, sea, air, space, and cyberspace.

One critical aspect of military responses is the development of cyber capabilities. Given the prominence of cyber-attacks in hybrid conflicts, it is imperative for military forces to invest in robust cyber defense systems. This includes not only protecting critical infrastructure but also developing offensive cyber capabilities to deter and respond to cyber threats.

Intelligence gathering and analysis play a crucial role in identifying and countering hybrid threats. Effective intelligence operations can help detect early signs of hybrid activities, such as disinformation campaigns or proxy warfare, allowing for timely and targeted responses. Special operations forces, with their expertise in unconventional warfare, are also vital in addressing hybrid threats, particularly in scenarios involving non-state actors and insurgent groups.

Non-military responses are equally important in addressing the broader spectrum of hybrid conflicts.¹⁷ These responses encompass diplomatic, economic, and informational strategies aimed at countering the non-military tactics employed by adversaries.¹⁸

Diplomatic efforts are essential in building international coalitions and fostering cooperation to address hybrid threats. By working together, nations can share intelligence, coordinate responses, and develop joint strategies to counter hybrid activities. Diplomatic initiatives can also involve engaging with international organizations to establish norms and frameworks for addressing hybrid conflicts.

Economic measures, such as sanctions and trade restrictions, can be used to exert pressure on adversaries and disrupt their hybrid activities. These measures

¹⁷ M. Marsili, *Hybrid Warfare...*, op. cit., p. 41.

¹⁸ M. Marsili, *The Russian Influence ...*, op. cit., pp. 151-154.

can target individuals, organizations, or entire sectors, aiming to weaken the economic foundations that support hybrid operations. Additionally, economic resilience initiatives can help protect national economies from the destabilizing effects of hybrid conflicts.

Informational strategies are crucial in countering disinformation campaigns and maintaining public trust. This involves not only debunking false information but also promoting accurate and reliable information to the public. Governments and organizations must invest in media literacy programs to help citizens recognize and resist disinformation. Furthermore, strategic communication efforts can be used to highlight the actions of adversaries and build international support for counter-hybrid measures.

In conclusion, addressing hybrid conflicts requires a comprehensive approach that integrates both military and non-military responses. By enhancing military capabilities, fostering international cooperation, implementing economic measures, and countering disinformation, nations can effectively respond to the complex and evolving nature of hybrid threats. As hybrid conflicts continue to challenge traditional notions of warfare, it is essential to develop adaptive and multifaceted strategies to protect national security and maintain global stability.

2.4 Coordination with NATO and Other Allies

Effective coordination with NATO and other allies is crucial in addressing the complex challenges posed by hybrid conflicts. These conflicts, characterized by their blend of conventional and unconventional tactics, require a unified and comprehensive response that leverages the strengths and capabilities of multiple nations.

NATO has recognized the significance of hybrid threats and has developed strategies to counter them. The Alliance's approach involves enhancing national resilience, improving situational awareness, and fostering cooperation among member states.¹⁹ NATO's *Joint Intelligence and Security Division*, for instance, has established a hybrid analysis branch to better understand and respond to these threats.²⁰

One of the key aspects of NATO's strategy is the establishment of counter-hybrid support teams. These teams provide tailored assistance to member states upon request, helping them prepare for and respond to hybrid activities. This initiative underscores the importance of collective defense and the need for coordinated efforts to address hybrid threats effectively.

¹⁹ NATO, *Countering hybrid threats*, last update 7 May 2024, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_156338.htm [date of access: 13.07.2025].

²⁰ Ibidem.

In addition to NATO, coordination with other international organizations, such as the European Union, is essential. The EU and NATO have strengthened their collaboration to counter hybrid threats, recognizing that a unified approach is necessary to address the multifaceted nature of these conflicts.²¹ Joint exercises and strategic communication efforts are examples of how these organizations work together to enhance their collective capabilities.²²

Military exercises play a vital role in preparing for hybrid conflicts. NATO regularly conducts exercises that simulate hybrid warfare scenarios, allowing member states to test their responses and improve their interoperability. These exercises help build trust and cooperation among allies, ensuring that they can effectively respond to hybrid threats in a coordinated manner.

Furthermore, sharing intelligence and best practices is critical in countering hybrid threats. By pooling resources and information, NATO and its allies can develop a more comprehensive understanding of the threat landscape and devise effective strategies to mitigate risks. This collaborative approach enhances the overall resilience of the Alliance and its member states.

Coordination with NATO and other allies is a cornerstone of the response to hybrid conflicts. Through joint exercises, intelligence sharing, and strategic cooperation, NATO and its partners can effectively address the complex and evolving nature of hybrid threats. As these conflicts continue to challenge traditional notions of warfare, it is essential to maintain and strengthen these collaborative efforts to ensure global security and stability.

Hybrid conflicts represent a significant and evolving challenge to international security. By blending conventional and unconventional tactics, these conflicts blur the lines between war and peace, complicating the application of traditional international laws and norms. Addressing hybrid conflicts requires a comprehensive approach that integrates military and non-military responses, including enhanced cyber capabilities, intelligence operations, diplomatic efforts, economic measures, and strategic communication.

The implications for international law are profound, necessitating reforms to better address the unique challenges posed by hybrid warfare. Enhanced attribution mechanisms, expanded legal frameworks, and strengthened protections for civilians are essential steps in this process. Furthermore, effective coordination with NATO and other allies is crucial in developing a unified and robust response

²¹ Ibidem.

²² G. Colom Piella, *NATO's Strategies for Responding to Hybrid Conflicts*, CIDOB Report no. 08 – 2022, Barcelona, September 2022, <https://www.cidob.org/en/publications/natos-strategies-responding-hybrid-conflicts> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

to hybrid threats. Through joint exercises, intelligence sharing, and strategic cooperation, the international community can enhance its resilience and maintain global stability in the face of these complex and dynamic conflicts.

3. Intersecting Crises: Energy Security and Economic Stability

3.1 Energy Security in the Context of Hybrid Conflicts

Energy security has become a critical concern in the context of hybrid conflicts, where adversaries employ a combination of conventional and unconventional tactics to achieve their strategic objectives. Hybrid warfare, which includes cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, and economic pressure, poses significant threats to the stability and security of energy supplies.

One of the primary ways hybrid conflicts impact energy security is through cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure. These attacks can disrupt the production, distribution, and supply of energy, leading to widespread power outages and economic instability. For instance, the December 2015 cyber-attack on Ukraine's power grid, attributed to Russian actors, resulted in a temporary blackout affecting nearly a quarter of a million residents.²³ Such incidents highlight the vulnerability of energy infrastructure to cyber threats and the potential for significant disruption.

Disinformation campaigns also play a role in undermining energy security. By spreading false information about energy policies, projects, or incidents, adversaries can create confusion and mistrust among the public and policymakers. This can lead to delays in energy projects, reduced investment, and increased political instability. The manipulation of information can also exacerbate existing tensions and contribute to the destabilization of energy markets.²⁴

Economic pressure is another tactic used in hybrid conflicts to affect energy security. Adversaries may impose sanctions, manipulate energy prices, or disrupt supply chains to weaken their opponents. For example, Russia has used its control over natural gas supplies to exert political pressure on European countries, leveraging energy dependence to influence political decisions.²⁵ Such actions can have far-reaching consequences for the stability and security of energy supplies in affected regions.

The transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources presents both opportunities and challenges for energy security in the context of hybrid conflicts.

²³ A.C. Dupuy et al., *Energy security in the era of hybrid warfare*, "NATO Review" 13 January 2021, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2021/01/13/energy-security-in-the-era-of-hybrid-warfare/index.html> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

²⁴ A.C. Dupuy, *Energy security in the era of hybrid warfare*, 12 August 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/energysource/energy-security-in-the-era-of-hybrid-warfare/> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

²⁵ B. Shaffer, *Energy in Conflict: The Case of the 2020 Armenia-Azerbaijan War*, "Combating Terrorism Exchange (CTX)" 2022, vol. 12, no. 1 pp. 34-41.

While renewable energy can reduce dependence on imported fossil fuels and enhance energy resilience, it also introduces new vulnerabilities. The increasing electrification of energy systems makes them more susceptible to cyber-attacks, as digital technologies play a crucial role in the operation and management of renewable energy infrastructure.²⁶

To address these challenges, it is essential to enhance the resilience of energy infrastructure and develop comprehensive strategies to protect against hybrid threats. This includes investing in robust cyber defense systems, improving intelligence and information sharing, and fostering international cooperation. NATO and the European Union have recognized the importance of energy security in the context of hybrid warfare and have taken steps to strengthen their collective capabilities.²⁷

Energy security is a critical component of national and international security in the era of hybrid conflicts. By understanding the unique challenges posed by hybrid warfare and developing adaptive strategies to address them, nations can better protect their energy infrastructure and ensure the stability and security of energy supplies.

3.2 Economic Implications of Disinformation and Hybrid Conflicts

Disinformation and hybrid conflicts have profound economic implications, affecting both national economies and the global financial system. These conflicts, characterized by the use of cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, and economic coercion, can destabilize markets, undermine investor confidence, and disrupt economic activities.

One of the primary economic impacts of disinformation is the erosion of trust in financial institutions and markets. Disinformation campaigns can spread false information about companies, financial products, or economic policies, leading to market volatility and loss of investor confidence. For example, false rumors about a company's financial health can cause its stock price to plummet, resulting in significant financial losses for investors and the company itself.²⁸ This erosion of trust can have long-term consequences, making it more difficult for businesses to raise capital and for markets to function efficiently.

Hybrid conflicts also involve cyber-attacks that target critical economic infrastructure, such as banking systems, stock exchanges, and payment networks. These attacks can disrupt financial transactions, steal sensitive information, and cause widespread economic damage. The 2017 NotPetya cyber-attack, attributed to Russian

²⁶ A. C. Dupuy et al., *Energy security...*, op. cit.

²⁷ A. C. Dupuy, *Energy security...*, op. cit.

²⁸ M. Elsner, G. Atkinson, S. Zahidi, *Global Risks Report 2025 (20th Edition): Conflict, Environment and Disinformation Top Threats*, Cologne 15 January 2025, <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-risks-report-2025/> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

actors, targeted companies in Ukraine and quickly spread globally, causing billions of dollars in damages.²⁹ Such incidents highlight the vulnerability of the global financial system to cyber threats and the potential for significant economic disruption.

Economic coercion is another tactic used in hybrid conflicts to exert pressure on adversaries. This can include the imposition of sanctions, trade restrictions, and other economic measures designed to weaken an opponent's economy. For instance, Russia's use of energy supplies as a tool of economic coercion has had significant implications for European countries, affecting energy prices and economic stability.³⁰ These actions can lead to economic uncertainty, reduced investment, and slower economic growth.

The economic implications of hybrid conflicts are further compounded by the interconnected nature of the global economy. Disruptions in one region can quickly spread to others, affecting global supply chains, trade flows, and financial markets. This interconnectedness makes it essential for countries to develop coordinated responses to hybrid threats, enhancing their resilience and protecting their economic interests.

To mitigate the economic impacts of disinformation and hybrid conflicts, it is crucial to invest in robust cybersecurity measures, improve information sharing and intelligence cooperation, and develop strategies to counter disinformation. Governments and businesses must work together to enhance the resilience of critical economic infrastructure and build public trust in financial institutions and markets.³¹

The economic implications of disinformation and hybrid conflicts are significant and far-reaching. By understanding these impacts and developing comprehensive strategies to address them, nations can better protect their economies and ensure long-term stability and growth.

3.3 Policy Responses and Strategic Adaptations

In the face of hybrid conflicts, effective policy responses and strategic adaptations are essential to mitigate the multifaceted threats posed by these conflicts.³² Governments and international organizations must develop comprehensive strategies that integrate military, economic, cyber, and informational measures to enhance resilience and deter adversaries.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ B. Torossian, L. Fagliano, T. Görder, *Hybrid Conflict: Neither war, nor peace*, "Strategic Monitor 2019-2020", <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2019/strategic-monitor-2019-2020/hybrid-conflict> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

³¹ M. Elsner, G. Atkinson, S. Zahidi, *Global Risks...* op. cit.

³² M. Bertolini, R. Minicozzi, T. Sweijts, *Ten Guidelines for Dealing with Hybrid Threats. A Policy Response Framework*, The Hague April 2023, <https://hcss.nl/report/ten-guidelines-for-dealing-with-hybrid-threats/>.

One of the key policy responses to hybrid conflicts is the development of robust cyber defense capabilities. This involves investing in advanced cybersecurity technologies, enhancing threat detection and response mechanisms, and fostering public-private partnerships to protect critical infrastructure.³³ Governments must also establish clear protocols for responding to cyber incidents, including mechanisms for attribution and retaliation.

Another important policy response is the implementation of measures to counter disinformation. This includes promoting media literacy among the public, supporting independent journalism, and developing rapid response teams to debunk false information.³⁴ Governments can also work with social media platforms to identify and remove disinformation campaigns, ensuring that accurate information is disseminated to the public.

Economic resilience is also crucial in the context of hybrid conflicts. Policymakers should develop strategies to diversify energy sources, strengthen supply chains, and reduce economic dependencies that adversaries could exploit.³⁵ This can involve investing in renewable energy, enhancing domestic production capabilities, and establishing strategic reserves of critical resources.

Strategic adaptations to hybrid conflicts require a holistic approach that integrates military and non-military measures. One key adaptation is the enhancement of intelligence and information sharing among allies. By pooling resources and expertise, countries can develop a more comprehensive understanding of hybrid threats and coordinate their responses effectively.³⁶

Military adaptations include the development of specialized units trained to operate in hybrid conflict environments. These units should be equipped with advanced cyber capabilities, intelligence gathering tools, and expertise in unconventional warfare.³⁷ Additionally, regular joint exercises with allies can help improve interoperability and readiness to respond to hybrid threats.

Another strategic adaptation is the establishment of counter-hybrid support teams, as seen in NATO's approach. These teams provide tailored assistance to member states, helping them prepare for and respond to hybrid activities.³⁸ This initiative underscores the importance of collective defense and the need for coordinated efforts to address hybrid threats effectively.

³³ Ibidem.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ NATO, *Countering hybrid threats...*, op. cit.

³⁶ Ibidem.

³⁷ G. Colom Piella, *NATO's Strategies...*, op. cit., p.

³⁸ A.C. Dupuy et al., *Energy security...*, op. cit., p.

Furthermore, fostering international cooperation is essential for addressing hybrid conflicts. This includes strengthening partnerships with organizations such as NATO and the European Union, as well as engaging with other international bodies to develop norms and frameworks for countering hybrid threats.³⁹ Collaborative efforts can enhance resilience, improve situational awareness, and ensure a unified response to hybrid activities.

In conclusion, policy responses and strategic adaptations are critical in addressing the complex challenges posed by hybrid conflicts. By developing robust cyber defenses, countering disinformation, enhancing economic resilience, and fostering international cooperation, nations can effectively mitigate the threats posed by hybrid warfare and ensure long-term security and stability.

4. The Role of External Actors

4.1 Influence of External Actors on EU Policies

The influence of external actors on EU policies is a multifaceted and dynamic process, shaped by various geopolitical, economic, and social factors. External actors, including states, international organizations, and non-state entities, play significant roles in shaping the European Union's policy landscape. This subsection explores the mechanisms through which these actors exert influence and the implications for EU policymaking.

External actors often influence EU policies through diplomatic engagement and strategic partnerships. Countries such as the United States, China, and Russia engage with the EU to advance their interests and shape EU policies in areas such as trade, security, and environmental regulation. For instance, the United States has historically influenced EU policies through transatlantic cooperation on security and defense, as well as through economic agreements and trade negotiations.⁴⁰

International organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, also play a crucial role in shaping EU policies. The EU's commitment to multilateralism and international cooperation means that it often aligns its policies with the norms and standards set by these organizations. This alignment can be seen in the EU's approach to issues such as climate change, human rights, and international trade.⁴¹

³⁹ Total Military Insight, *Development of Hybrid Warfare Strategies: Evolving Tactics and Implications*, 21 July 2021, <https://totalmilitaryinsight.com/development-of-hybrid-warfare-strategies/> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

⁴⁰ I.D. Serban, *Exploring the European Union external actorness moving from norms to policy practices*, "European Political Science" 2023, vol. 22, pp. 459–475.

⁴¹ A.V. Busch, *Role Spillover: Roles' Impacts across Contexts and the EU's Struggle for Arctic Council Observer Status*, "Foreign Policy Analysis" 2023, vol. 19, no. 4.

Non-state actors, including multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and advocacy groups, exert significant influence on EU policies as well. These actors engage in lobbying, advocacy, and public campaigns to shape policy outcomes in their favor. For example, multinational corporations may lobby for regulatory changes that benefit their business operations, while NGOs may advocate for stronger environmental protections or human rights standards.⁴²

The influence of external actors on EU policies is not without challenges. The EU must navigate complex geopolitical dynamics and balance competing interests to maintain its strategic autonomy and uphold its values. The involvement of external actors can sometimes lead to tensions and conflicts, particularly when their interests diverge from those of the EU. For instance, the EU's relationship with Russia has been strained by geopolitical conflicts and differing approaches to issues such as energy security and human rights.

Moreover, the influence of external actors can have both positive and negative implications for EU policymaking. On the one hand, engagement with external actors can enhance the EU's global influence and contribute to the development of comprehensive and effective policies. On the other hand, excessive external influence can undermine the EU's policy coherence and compromise its ability to act independently.

The influence of external actors on EU policies is a complex and dynamic process that involves a wide range of stakeholders and mechanisms. Understanding this influence is crucial for developing effective and coherent EU policies that can navigate the challenges of an interconnected and interdependent world.

4.2 Case Studies: US, Russia, and China

The influence of external actors on EU policies can be illustrated through detailed case studies of the United States, Russia, and China. Each of these actors employs distinct strategies and mechanisms to shape EU policies in ways that align with their respective interests and objectives.

The United States has historically maintained a significant influence on EU policies, particularly through transatlantic cooperation on security, trade, and technology. The establishment of the *U.S.-EU Trade and Technology Council* (TTC) in 2021 exemplifies this cooperation, aiming to promote shared prosperity and competitiveness through collaboration in areas such as artificial intelligence, clean energy, and digital trade.⁴³ The TTC has also focused on coordinating responses

⁴² A. Niemann, C. Bretherton, *EU external policy at the crossroads: The challenge of actorness and effectiveness*, "International Relations" 2013, vol. 27, no. 3, pp. 261-275.

⁴³ S. I. Akhtar, *U.S.-EU Trade and Economic Relations*, IF10931, v. 11, Washington 9 June 2023, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10931> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

to global challenges, such as Russia's war in Ukraine, highlighting the strategic alignment between the U.S. and the EU.

Moreover, the U.S. exerts influence through its economic and security partnerships with EU member states. The transatlantic relationship is underpinned by a shared commitment to democratic values and market economies, which facilitates cooperation on a wide range of policy issues.⁴⁴ However, tensions occasionally arise, particularly in areas where U.S. and EU interests diverge, such as trade policies and regulatory standards.

Russia's influence on EU policies is often characterized by geopolitical tensions and strategic rivalry. The EU's approach to Russia has been shaped significantly by Russia's actions in Ukraine, including the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion in 2022. In response, the EU has implemented a series of sanctions targeting Russian individuals, entities, and sectors, aiming to pressure Russia to change its behavior.⁴⁵

Russia also employs energy as a tool of influence, leveraging its control over natural gas supplies to exert political pressure on EU member states. This strategy has led to significant debates within the EU regarding energy security and the need to diversify energy sources.⁴⁶ Additionally, Russia engages in disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks to destabilize EU societies and undermine trust in democratic institutions.⁴⁷

China's influence on EU policies is multifaceted, encompassing economic, political, and strategic dimensions. The economic relationship between the EU and China is substantial, with China being one of the EU's largest trading partners.⁴⁸ This economic interdependence provides China with leverage to influence EU policies, particularly in areas such as trade, investment, and technology.⁴⁹

China also engages in strategic partnerships and diplomatic initiatives to shape EU policies. For instance, the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI) has led to increased Chinese investment in European infrastructure, creating both opportunities and

⁴⁴ R. Dominguez, J. Weissman LaFrance, *The United States and the European Union*, [in:] *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 28 February 2020, <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-1125> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

⁴⁵ L.A. Pertiwi, *The EU's Approach to Sanctions on Russia: A Critical Analysis of the Existing Literature*, "Central European Journal of International and Security Studies" 2024, vol. 18, no. 3, pp. 61-86.

⁴⁶ E. Ademmer, L. Delcour, K. Wolczuk, *Beyond geopolitics: exploring the impact of the EU and Russia in the "contested neighborhood"*, "Eurasian Geography and Economics" 2016, vol. 57, no. 1, pp. 1-18.

⁴⁷ M. Marsili, *Hybrid Warfare...*, op. cit.

⁴⁸ Idem, *The Polar Silk Road: A Euro-Sino Economic, Political and Geo-strategic Challenge*, [in:] *La Unión Europea y el Principio de Solidaridad/The European Union and the Principle of Solidarity*, "Series Cuadernos de Yuste" 2025, vol. 13, eds. T. Freixes Sanjuán, J.C. Moreno Piñero, pp. 301-329.

⁴⁹ F. Gaenssmantel, *China-EU economic relations—new perspectives on decision-making, mutual understanding and effects—introduction to the special issue*, "Asia Europe Journal" 2023, vol. 21, pp. 401-412.

challenges for the EU.⁵⁰ While the BRI can enhance connectivity and economic growth, it also raises concerns about dependency and strategic vulnerabilities.⁵¹

Furthermore, China employs soft power and public diplomacy to influence EU perceptions and policies. This includes cultural exchanges, educational programs, and media outreach aimed at promoting a positive image of China and fostering closer ties with European societies.⁵² However, the EU remains cautious about China's growing influence, particularly in light of concerns about human rights, cybersecurity, and geopolitical competition.⁵³

The case studies of the United States, Russia, and China illustrate the diverse strategies and mechanisms through which external actors influence EU policies. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for the EU to navigate its complex relationships with these major powers and to develop coherent and effective policies that safeguard its interests and values.

4.3 Implications for EU's Global Role

The influence of external actors on EU policies has significant implications for the EU's role on the global stage. As the EU navigates its relationships with major powers such as the United States, Russia, and China, it must adapt its strategies to maintain its influence and uphold its values in an increasingly complex and competitive international environment.

One of the key implications for the EU's global role is the need to strengthen its strategic autonomy. The EU must develop the capacity to act independently and assertively in international affairs, reducing its reliance on external actors. This involves enhancing its defense capabilities, investing in critical technologies, and diversifying energy sources to reduce dependency on external suppliers.⁵⁴ Strengthening strategic autonomy will enable the EU to better protect its interests and respond to global challenges.

The EU's interactions with external actors also highlight the importance of enhancing its global leadership. The EU has traditionally positioned itself as a champion of multilateralism, human rights, and sustainable development. To maintain this role, the EU must continue to engage proactively in international

⁵⁰ B. Zhang, Q. Li, *China's perception of the European Union during Brexit: the case of Chinese scholars*, "Comparative European Politics" 2023, vol. 21, pp. 631–648.

⁵¹ M. Marsili, *The Polar Silk Road...* op. cit.

⁵² R. McMahon, Y. Zhang, *Geopolitical triangle: how China's European studies scholars represent the EU*, "Comparative European Politics" 2023, vol. 21, pp. 702–724.

⁵³ M. Marsili, *The Polar Silk Road...* op. cit.

⁵⁴ A. Michalski, C.F. Parker, *The EU's evolving leadership role in an age of geopolitics: Beyond normative and market power in the Indo-Pacific*, "European Journal of International Security" 2024, vol. 9, no. 2, pp. 263–280.

organizations and forums, promoting global governance and the rules-based international order.⁵⁵ By leading on issues such as climate change, digital governance, and trade, the EU can reinforce its position as a global leader.

The EU's relationships with the United States, Russia, and China require careful balancing to navigate competing interests and avoid being drawn into geopolitical conflicts. With the United States, the EU must continue to strengthen transatlantic ties while addressing areas of divergence, such as trade policies and regulatory standards.⁵⁶ In dealing with Russia, the EU must maintain a firm stance on issues such as territorial integrity and human rights, while exploring avenues for dialogue and cooperation where possible. Regarding China, the EU must balance economic engagement with strategic caution, addressing concerns about market access, intellectual property, and human rights.

The influence of external actors underscores the need for the EU to promote resilience and adaptability in its policies and institutions. This involves building robust mechanisms to counter hybrid threats, such as cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns, and enhancing the resilience of critical infrastructure. The EU must also be adaptable in its policymaking, responding swiftly to emerging challenges and seizing opportunities to advance its strategic interests.

Finally, the EU's global role is contingent on its ability to foster unity and cohesion among its member states. External actors often seek to exploit divisions within the EU to advance their own interests. To counter this, the EU must strengthen internal solidarity, ensuring that member states are aligned on key policy issues and that decision-making processes are inclusive and transparent. A united and cohesive EU will be better positioned to project its influence globally and uphold its values in the face of external pressures.

In conclusion, the influence of external actors on EU policies has profound implications for the EU's global role. By strengthening strategic autonomy, enhancing global leadership, balancing relationships with major powers, promoting resilience and adaptability, and fostering unity and cohesion, the EU can navigate the complexities of the international environment and maintain its position as a key global actor.

5. Internal Transformations within the EU

5.1 Institutional Changes and Reforms

In response to the evolving geopolitical landscape and the multifaceted crises it faces, the European Union has undertaken significant institutional changes and

⁵⁵ I. Hadjiyianni, *The European Union as a Global Regulatory Power*, "Oxford Journal of Legal Studies" 2021, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 243–264.

⁵⁶ R. Bengtsson, O. Elgström, *Conflicting Role Conceptions? The European Union in Global Politics*, "Foreign Policy Analysis" 2012, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 93–108.

reforms. These transformations are aimed at enhancing the EU's resilience, strategic coherence, and capacity to act effectively both internally and on the global stage.

5.1.1 Motivations for Institutional Reforms

The EU's institutional reforms are driven by several key factors:

- geopolitical shifts: the changing security environment, particularly in light of the war in Ukraine, has necessitated a reevaluation of the EU's strategic priorities and defense capabilities,⁵⁷
- internal challenges: the need to boost economic competitiveness, ensure the benefits of green and digital transitions, and prepare for potential enlargements,⁵⁸
- external pressures: the influence of external actors such as Russia and China, and the need to maintain a unified stance in international relations.⁵⁹

5.1.2 Key Areas of Reform

The EU's institutional reforms focus on several critical areas:

- governance: enhancing decision-making processes to be more efficient and responsive. This includes potential changes to the voting system in the Council of the EU and the allocation of seats in the European Parliament,⁶⁰
- policy adaptations: reviewing and updating policies to ensure long-term competitiveness and strategic autonomy. This encompasses areas such as the single market, digital economy, and energy security,⁶¹
- rule of law: strengthening mechanisms to uphold the rule of law and human rights across member states and candidate countries. This includes optimizing the EU rule of law toolbox and exploring mandatory membership in the European Public Prosecutor's Office,⁶²
- budgetary reforms: adjusting the EU budget to better align with new priorities and challenges, including those posed by potential enlargements.⁶³

⁵⁷ European Council/Council of the European Union, *Internal reforms of the EU*, last review 30 January 2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/internal-reforms-of-the-eu/> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ B. Stanicek, J. Przetacznik with A. Albaladejo Roman, *Enlargement policy: Reforms and challenges ahead*, "EPRS Briefing" PE 757.575, December 2023, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/757575/EPRS_BRI%282023%29757575_EN.pdf [date of access: 13.07.2025].

⁶⁰ O. Costa, D. Schwarzer (Rapporteurs), P. Berès, G. Gressani, G. Marti, F. Mayer, T. Nguyen, N. von Onda-rza, S. Russack, F. Tekin, S. Vallée, C. Verger, *Sailing on High Seas: Reforming and Enlarging the EU for the 21st Century*, Report of the Franco-German Working Group on EU Institutional Reform, Paris-Berlin 18 September 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/19/Paper-EU-reform.pdf> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

⁶¹ European Council/Council of the European Union, *Internal reforms...*, op. cit.

⁶² Ibidem.

⁶³ B. Stanicek, J. Przetacznik with A. Albaladejo Roman, *Enlargement policy...*, op. cit.

5.1.3 Implementation and Impact

The implementation of these reforms involves a collaborative effort among EU institutions and member states. Key steps include:

- consultations and consensus-building: engaging in extensive discussions and negotiations to build consensus on reform priorities and strategies,⁶⁴
- phased implementation: rolling out reforms in phases to ensure smooth transitions and allow for adjustments based on feedback and evolving circumstances,⁶⁵
- monitoring and evaluation: establishing mechanisms to monitor the progress and impact of reforms, ensuring they achieve the desired outcomes and contribute to the EU's strategic goals.⁶⁶

These institutional changes and reforms are crucial for the EU to navigate contemporary crises effectively and maintain its role as a global leader. By enhancing its internal structures and processes, the EU aims to build a more resilient and adaptive union capable of addressing current and future challenges.

5.2 Enhancing Decision-Making Processes

The European Union has recognized the need to enhance its decision-making processes to better respond to contemporary crises and ensure more efficient governance. This subsection explores the key initiatives and reforms aimed at improving the EU's decision-making mechanisms.

5.2.1 Streamlining Legislative Procedures

One of the primary focuses of the EU's efforts to enhance decision-making is streamlining legislative procedures. The ordinary legislative procedure, also known as the co-decision procedure, involves the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, and the European Commission working together to adopt legislation.⁶⁷ To make this process more efficient, the EU has implemented several measures:

- simplification of procedures: reducing the complexity of legislative procedures to expedite decision-making and minimize bureaucratic delays,⁶⁸
- digitalization: leveraging digital tools and platforms to facilitate faster communication and document sharing among EU institutions.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ European Council/Council of the European Union, *Internal reforms of the EU*.

⁶⁵ B. Stanicek, J. Przetacznik with A. Albaladejo Roman, *Enlargement policy...*, op. cit.

⁶⁶ European Council/Council of the European Union, *Internal reforms...*, op. cit.

⁶⁷ European Union, *How EU policy is decided*, Brussels n.d., https://european-union.europa.eu/institutions-law-budget/law/how-eu-policy-decided_en [date of access: 13.07.2025].

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ European Commission, *Decision-making process in the Commission*, Brussels n.d., https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/decision-making-process-commission_en [date of access: 13.07.2025].

5.2.2 Strengthening Inter-Institutional Cooperation

Enhanced cooperation between EU institutions is crucial for effective decision-making. Key initiatives include:

- regular consultations: increasing the frequency and depth of consultations between the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission to ensure alignment on policy priorities and legislative proposals,⁷⁰
- joint task forces: establishing joint task forces to address specific issues, such as disinformation and hybrid conflicts, allowing for more coordinated and timely responses.⁷¹

5.2.3 Improving Transparency and Accountability

Transparency and accountability are essential for building trust in the EU's decision-making processes. The EU has taken steps to improve these aspects:

- public consultations: engaging citizens, businesses, and other stakeholders through public consultations to gather input and ensure that policies reflect the needs and concerns of the broader community,⁷²
- impact assessments: conducting thorough impact assessments for proposed legislation to evaluate potential economic, social, and environmental effects.⁷³

5.2.4 Adapting to Crisis Situations

The EU's decision-making processes must be adaptable to respond effectively to crises. Measures to enhance adaptability include:

- crisis management frameworks: developing and refining crisis management frameworks that allow for rapid decision-making and resource allocation during emergencies,⁷⁴
- scenario planning: implementing scenario planning exercises to anticipate potential crises and develop contingency plans.⁷⁵

5.2.5 Enhancing Member State Involvement

Involving member states more effectively in the decision-making process is vital for ensuring that EU policies are well-received and implemented across the union. Initiatives include:

⁷⁰ European Union, *How EU policy...*, op. cit.

⁷¹ European Commission, *Decision-making process...*, op. cit.

⁷² European Union, *How EU policy...*, op. cit.

⁷³ Ibidem.

⁷⁴ European Commission, *Decision-making process...*, op. cit.

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

- enhanced dialogue: promoting enhanced dialogue and collaboration between EU institutions and national governments to ensure that member states' perspectives are considered in the decision-making process,⁷⁶
- subsidiarity and proportionality: ensuring that decisions are made at the most appropriate level, respecting the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.⁷⁷

By implementing these measures, the EU aims to create a more efficient, transparent, and responsive decision-making process. These enhancements are essential for addressing contemporary crises and ensuring the EU's continued effectiveness and legitimacy on the global stage.

5.3 Strengthening Inter-Institutional Dynamics

To effectively navigate contemporary crises, the European Union has focused on strengthening inter-institutional dynamics. This subsection examines the measures and initiatives aimed at enhancing cooperation and coherence among EU institutions.

5.3.1 Enhancing Coordination Mechanisms

Improving coordination mechanisms is essential for fostering effective inter-institutional dynamics. Key initiatives include:

- inter-institutional agreements: establishing formal agreements between institutions, such as the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission, to outline roles, responsibilities, and collaborative processes,⁷⁸
- joint committees and task forces: creating joint committees and task forces to address specific issues, ensuring a unified approach and facilitating timely decision-making.⁷⁹

5.3.2 Promoting Informal Cooperation

Informal cooperation plays a crucial role in enhancing inter-institutional dynamics. Efforts in this area include:

- regular informal meetings: organizing regular informal meetings between key institutional actors to discuss ongoing issues and align strategies,⁸⁰

⁷⁶ European Union, *How EU policy...*, op. cit.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁸ S. Vanhoonacker, C. Neuhold, *Dynamics of institutional cooperation in the European Union: Dimensions and effects. An Introduction*, "European Integration online Papers" (EIoP) 2015, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 1-15.

⁷⁹ P. Bocquillon, J.F. Braun, L. Carafa, M. Dobbels, C. Garcia Perez de Leon, *Inter-institutional coordination in the EU: reassessing the legislative balance of power after Lisbon*, Policy Brief, INCOOP Dissemination Colloquium on Inter – and Intra-institutional Cooperation in the EU System of Multilevel Governance', Brussels, 11 October 2013.

⁸⁰ S. Vanhoonacker, C. Neuhold, *Dynamics of...*, op. cit.

- networking opportunities: encouraging networking opportunities and informal exchanges among officials from different institutions to build trust and understanding.⁸¹

5.3.3 Strengthening Communication Channels

Effective communication is vital for robust inter-institutional dynamics. The EU has implemented several measures to strengthen communication channels:

- digital platforms: utilizing digital platforms to facilitate real-time communication and information sharing among institutions,⁸²
- transparency initiatives: enhancing transparency through initiatives such as the inter-institutional register for lobbyists and advisory groups on ethics.⁸³

5.3.4 Balancing Institutional Powers

Balancing the powers of different EU institutions is critical for maintaining effective inter-institutional dynamics. Key measures include:

- revising legislative procedures: adjusting legislative procedures to ensure a balanced distribution of power among the European Parliament, the Council, and the Commission,⁸⁴
- empowering oversight bodies: strengthening the roles of oversight bodies, such as the European Court of Auditors and the European Ombudsman, to ensure accountability and transparency.⁸⁵

5.3.5 Fostering a Culture of Collaboration

Creating a culture of collaboration is essential for sustaining strong inter-institutional dynamics. Efforts in this area include:

- training and development: providing training and development programs for EU officials to enhance their collaborative skills and understanding of inter-institutional processes,⁸⁶
- cultural exchange programs: implementing cultural exchange programs to promote mutual understanding and respect among officials from different institutions.⁸⁷

⁸¹ P. Bocquillon et al., *Inter-institutional coordination...*, op. cit.

⁸² S. Vanhoonacker, C. Neuhold, *Dynamics of...*, op. cit.

⁸³ P. Bocquillon et al., *Inter-institutional coordination...*, op. cit.

⁸⁴ S. Vanhoonacker, C. Neuhold, *Dynamics of...*, op. cit.

⁸⁵ P. Bocquillon et al., *Inter-institutional coordination...*, op. cit.

⁸⁶ S. Vanhoonacker, C. Neuhold, *Dynamics of...*, op. cit.

⁸⁷ P. Bocquillon et al., *Inter-institutional coordination...*, op. cit.

By strengthening inter-institutional dynamics, the EU aims to enhance its capacity to respond to contemporary crises effectively. These efforts are crucial for ensuring cohesive and coordinated action across the union, thereby reinforcing the EU's role as a resilient and adaptive global actor.

6. Future Directions and Policy Recommendations

6.1 Lessons Learned from Current Crises

The European Union has faced numerous crises in recent years, each providing valuable lessons that can inform future policy directions and enhance the EU's resilience. This subsection explores the key lessons learned from these crises.

6.1.1 Crisis Response Mechanisms

The EU's experience with recent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, has highlighted the importance of having robust and flexible crisis response mechanisms. Key lessons include:

- rapid mobilization of resources: the ability to quickly mobilize financial and human resources is crucial. Instruments like SURE, CRII, CRII+, and REACT-EU have demonstrated the need for swift and adaptable financial mechanisms,⁸⁸
- coordination and cooperation: effective crisis management requires strong coordination and cooperation among EU institutions and member states. The establishment of joint task forces and inter-institutional agreements has proven beneficial.⁸⁹

6.1.2 Policy Adaptation and Flexibility

The dynamic nature of crises necessitates adaptable and flexible policy frameworks. Lessons learned include:

- policy flexibility: policies must be adaptable to changing circumstances. The EU's ability to adjust its cohesion policy and budgetary allocations in response to crises has been a key factor in its resilience,⁹⁰
- innovative solutions: crises often require innovative solutions. The development of new instruments and the adaptation of existing ones have been critical in addressing unprecedented challenges.⁹¹

⁸⁸ T. Kiss-Gálfalvi et al., *Lessons learned from the implementation of crisis response tools at EU level – Part 1*, details.

⁸⁹ Ibidem.

⁹⁰ T. Kiss-Gálfalvi, C. Alcidi, A. Ounnas, E. Rubio, H. Crichton-Miller, D. Gojsic, *Lessons learned from the implementation of crisis response tools at EU level – Part 2: Future challenges, parliamentary control and policy options*, Brussels M024,

⁹¹ T. Kiss-Gálfalvi et al., *Lessons learned from the implementation... – Part 1*, op. cit.

6.1.3 Communication and Transparency

Clear communication and transparency are vital for maintaining public trust and ensuring effective crisis management. Key insights include:

- public engagement: engaging with the public and maintaining transparency about the measures being taken helps build trust and ensures compliance with crisis response measures,⁹²
- information sharing: efficient information sharing among EU institutions, member states, and the public is essential for coordinated action and informed decision-making.⁹³

6.1.4 Resilience and Preparedness

Building resilience and preparedness for future crises is a critical lesson from recent experiences. Important aspects include:

- scenario planning: conducting scenario planning and preparedness exercises helps anticipate potential crises and develop contingency plans,⁹⁴
- strengthening infrastructure: investing in resilient infrastructure, including digital and healthcare systems, enhances the EU's capacity to withstand and respond to crises.⁹⁵

By learning from recent crises, the EU can strengthen its policies and mechanisms to better navigate future challenges. These lessons underscore the importance of adaptability, coordination, transparency, and resilience in ensuring the EU's continued effectiveness and stability.

6.1.5 Role of Member States in Crisis Responses

Member states play a crucial role in the EU's crisis response mechanisms. Their involvement is essential for ensuring effective and coordinated action across the union. Key aspects of their role include:

- activation of crisis mechanisms: member states can trigger the EU's crisis response mechanisms, such as the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) arrangements, by invoking the solidarity clause. This allows for rapid and coordinated decision-making at the EU political level,⁹⁶

⁹² Idem, *Lessons learned from the implementation... – Part 2*, op. cit.

⁹³ Idem, *Lessons learned from the implementation... – Part 1*, op. cit.

⁹⁴ Idem, *Lessons learned from the implementation... – Part 2*, op. cit.

⁹⁵ Idem, *Lessons learned from the implementation... – Part 1*, op. cit.

⁹⁶ European Council/Council of the European Union, *How the EU responds to crises and builds resilience*, last review 19 November 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/eu-crisis-response-resilience/> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

- resource mobilization: member states contribute to the mobilization of resources, including financial aid, medical supplies, and personnel. The Union Civil Protection Mechanism, for example, relies on contributions from member states to provide quick and effective assistance during crises,⁹⁷
- implementation of EU policies: member states are responsible for implementing EU policies and measures at the national level. This includes adhering to guidelines and regulations set by the EU and ensuring that national actions are aligned with EU-wide strategies,⁹⁸
- cross-border cooperation: effective crisis management often requires cross-border cooperation. Member states work together to address challenges that transcend national borders, such as pandemics, natural disasters, and security threats,⁹⁹
- information sharing: member states play a vital role in sharing information with EU institutions and other member states. This includes reporting on the situation on the ground, providing data for analysis, and participating in joint assessments,¹⁰⁰
- solidarity and support: the principle of solidarity is central to the EU's crisis response. Member states support each other through mutual aid and assistance, reinforcing the collective resilience of the union.¹⁰¹

By actively participating in these areas, member states enhance the EU's capacity to respond to crises effectively. Their involvement ensures that the EU's crisis response is comprehensive, coordinated, and capable of addressing the diverse challenges it faces.

6.1.6 Challenges Faced by Member States

Member states encounter several challenges when responding to crises, which can impact the overall effectiveness of the EU's crisis management efforts. Key challenges include:

⁹⁷ European Council/Council of the European Union, *How the Council coordinates the EU response to crises*, last review 21 October 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/ipcr-response-to-crises/> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

⁹⁸ Group of Chief Scientific Advisors, *Strategic crisis management in the EU: Improving EU crisis prevention, preparedness, response and resilience*, Scientific Opinion No.13, November 2022 (Supported by SAPEA Evidence Review Report No. 11), Brussels 2022.

⁹⁹ European Council/Council of the European Union, *How the EU responds to crises...*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁰ European Council/Council of the European Union, *How the Council coordinates...*, op. cit.

¹⁰¹ Group of Chief Scientific Advisors, *Strategic crisis management in the EU...*, op. cit.

- resource limitations: many member states face constraints in financial, human, and material resources, which can hinder their ability to respond effectively to crises. This is particularly evident in smaller or economically weaker states,¹⁰²
- coordination and communication: ensuring seamless coordination and communication among member states and EU institutions can be challenging. Differences in national priorities, administrative structures, and crisis management capabilities can lead to fragmented responses,¹⁰³
- diverse legal and regulatory frameworks: the varying legal and regulatory frameworks across member states can complicate the implementation of EU-wide measures. Harmonizing these frameworks while respecting national sovereignty remains a significant challenge,¹⁰⁴
- public trust and compliance: building and maintaining public trust is crucial for effective crisis management. Member states must ensure transparent communication and foster public compliance with crisis response measures, which can be difficult in times of uncertainty and misinformation,¹⁰⁵
- economic disparities: economic disparities among member states can lead to unequal impacts of crises. Wealthier states may have more resources to mitigate the effects of crises, while poorer states may struggle to provide adequate support to their populations,¹⁰⁶
- cross-border issues: crises often have cross-border implications, requiring coordinated responses. However, differences in national policies and priorities can hinder effective cross-border cooperation and joint action,¹⁰⁷
- political and social factors: political instability, social unrest, and varying levels of public support for EU initiatives can affect the ability of member states to implement and adhere to EU crisis response measures.¹⁰⁸

Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to enhance coordination, build capacity, and foster solidarity among member states. By learning from these experiences, the EU can develop more effective and inclusive crisis management strategies.

¹⁰² European Council/Council of the European Union, *How the EU responds to crises...*, op. cit.

¹⁰³ M. Szczepanski, *A decade on from the crisis: Main responses and remaining challenges*, EPRS Briefing PE 642.253, 17 October 2019, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/642253/EPRS_BRI\(2019\)642253_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2019/642253/EPRS_BRI(2019)642253_EN.pdf) [date of access: 13.07.2025].

¹⁰⁴ S. Lehne, *The EU and the Creative and Destructive Impact of Crises*, Carnegie Europe, Brussels 18 October 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2022/10/the-eu-and-the-creative-and-destructive-impact-of-crises?lang=en¢er=europe> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

¹⁰⁵ European Council/Council of the European Union, *How the EU responds to crises...*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁶ M. Szczepanski, *A decade on...*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁷ S. Lehne, *The EU and the Creative...*, op. cit.

¹⁰⁸ European Council/Council of the European Union, *How the EU responds to...*, op. cit.

6.1.7 Overcoming Resource Limitations

Addressing resource limitations is crucial for enhancing the EU's crisis response capabilities. Here are several strategies to overcome these challenges:

- enhanced financial mechanisms: strengthening financial instruments such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) can provide member states with the necessary funds to respond to crises effectively. These mechanisms offer financial support to mitigate the economic impact of crises and ensure swift recovery,¹⁰⁹
- pooling and sharing resources: encouraging member states to pool and share resources can enhance collective resilience. For example, the EU Civil Protection Mechanism facilitates the sharing of emergency supplies, medical equipment, and personnel among member states during crises,¹¹⁰
- public-private partnerships: leveraging public-private partnerships can help mobilize additional resources and expertise. Collaborations with private sector entities can provide innovative solutions and financial support, particularly in areas such as healthcare, technology, and infrastructure,¹¹¹
- capacity building and training: investing in capacity building and training programs for national and local authorities can enhance their ability to manage crises. This includes training in crisis management, emergency response, and the use of digital tools for coordination and communication,¹¹²
- digital transformation: embracing digital transformation can improve efficiency and resource management. Implementing digital platforms for real-time information sharing, coordination, and decision-making can streamline crisis response efforts and reduce resource wastage,¹¹³
- flexible budget allocations: adopting flexible budget allocations allows for the reallocation of funds to priority areas during crises. This ensures that resources are directed where they are most needed, enhancing the EU's ability to respond swiftly and effectively,¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ T. Kiss-Gálfalvi at al., *Lessons learned from the implementation... – Part 1*, op. cit.

¹¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹¹ European Council/Council of the European Union, *How the EU responds to crises...*, op. cit.

¹¹² Operation Council, *Crisis Management in Operations: Lessons Learned and Strategies for Resilience*, 24 September 2024, <https://operationscouncil.org/crisis-management-in-operations-lessons-learned-and-strategies-for-resilience/> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

¹¹³ HR Fraternity, *Resource Constraints: Meeting Stakeholder Needs in a Crisis*, <https://www.hrfraternity.com/business-excellence/resource-constraints-meeting-stakeholder-needs-in-a-crisis.html> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

¹¹⁴ Human Risks, *Fundamental Components of an Effective Crisis Response Strategy*, 15 October 2024, <https://humanrisks.com/blog/fundamental-components-of-an-effective-crisis-response-strategy/> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

- strengthening supply chains: enhancing the resilience of supply chains is critical for ensuring the availability of essential goods and services during crises. This includes diversifying supply sources, increasing stockpiles of critical supplies, and improving logistics and distribution networks,¹¹⁵
- solidarity and mutual support: fostering a culture of solidarity and mutual support among member states is essential. Mechanisms such as the EU Solidarity Fund provide financial assistance to member states affected by major disasters, reinforcing the principle of solidarity within the union.

By implementing these strategies, the EU can overcome resource limitations and enhance its capacity to respond to future crises. These measures will ensure that member states are better equipped to manage emergencies and maintain stability across the union.

6.2 Recommendations for Enhancing Resilience

Building on the lessons learned from recent crises, the following recommendations aim to enhance the European Union's (EU) resilience and preparedness for future challenges.

6.2.1 Strengthening Crisis Response Mechanisms:

- develop permanent crisis response units: establish dedicated crisis response units within EU institutions to ensure rapid and coordinated action during emergencies. These units should be equipped with the necessary resources and authority to mobilize quickly,¹¹⁶
- enhance the Union Civil Protection Mechanism: expand the capabilities of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism to include a broader range of crises, such as cyber-attacks and pandemics. This will ensure a more comprehensive and flexible response.¹¹⁷

6.2.2 Promoting Policy Adaptation and Flexibility:

- implement adaptive policy frameworks: develop policy frameworks that can be quickly adapted to changing circumstances. This includes creating flexible budget allocations and regulatory mechanisms that allow for rapid adjustments in response to emerging crises,¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Expert Panel, Forbes Councils Member, Forbes Coaches Council, *14 Ways to Build a Solid Crisis Management Strategy*, "Forbes" 16 September 2000, <https://www.forbes.com/consent/ketch/?toURL=https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbescoachescouncil/2020/09/16/14-ways-to-build-a-solid-crisis-management-strategy/> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

¹¹⁶ T. Kiss-Gálfalvi at al., *Lessons learned from the implementation... - Part 1...*, op. cit.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, *Lessons learned from the implementation... - Part 2...*, op. cit.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, *Lessons learned from the implementation... - Part 1...*, op. cit.

- encourage innovation: foster a culture of innovation within EU institutions and member states to develop new tools and approaches for crisis management. This can be achieved through funding research and development initiatives and supporting public-private partnerships.¹¹⁹

6.2.3 Enhancing Communication and Transparency:

- improve crisis communication strategies: develop comprehensive crisis communication strategies that ensure clear, transparent, and timely information dissemination to the public and stakeholders. This includes leveraging digital platforms and social media to reach a wider audience,¹²⁰
- strengthen information sharing: enhance information sharing mechanisms among EU institutions, member states, and international partners. This will facilitate better coordination and informed decision-making during crises.¹²¹

6.2.4 Building Resilience and Preparedness:

- invest in resilient infrastructure: prioritize investments in resilient infrastructure, including healthcare systems, digital networks, and critical supply chains. This will enhance the EU's ability to withstand and recover from crises,¹²²
- conduct regular preparedness exercises: organize regular crisis simulation exercises to test and improve the EU's preparedness and response capabilities. These exercises should involve all relevant stakeholders, including member states, EU institutions, and private sector partners.¹²³

6.2.5 Fostering Solidarity and Mutual Support:

- strengthen solidarity mechanisms: reinforce mechanisms that promote solidarity and mutual support among member states. This includes enhancing the EU Solidarity Fund and other financial instruments that provide assistance during crises,¹²⁴

¹¹⁹ European Council/Council of the European Union, *How the EU responds to crises...*, op. cit., ibidp.

¹²⁰ J. Le Blanc, P. Benczur, *Resilience*, Brussels n.d., https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/scientific-activities-z/resilience_en.

¹²¹ European Commission, *Building Europe's societal resilience*, https://state-of-the-union.ec.europa.eu/state-union-2023/building-europes-societal-resilience_en [date of access: 13.07.2025].

¹²² European Commission, Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (EuropeAid), *Building Resilience: The EU's approach*, "EU Factsheet", Brussels 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/aid/countries/factsheets/thematic/EU_building_resilience_en.pdf [date of access: 13.07.2025].

¹²³ BlackBerry AtHoc, *Best Practices in Crisis Management: Communications Planning*, White Paper, Irving June 2020, <https://www.blackberry.com/content/dam/bbcomv4/blackberry-com/en/products/resource-center/white-papers/wp-best-practices-in-crisis-management.pdf> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

¹²⁴ R. Assi, H. Dib, D. Fine, T. Isherwood, *Rethinking resilience: Ten priorities for governments*, Chicago November 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/industries/public%20and%20social%20sector/our%20insights/rethinking%20resilience%20ten%20priorities%20for%20governments/rethinking-resilience-ten-priorities-for-governments-vf.pdf> [date of access: 13.07.2025].

- promote cross-border cooperation: encourage cross-border cooperation and joint initiatives to address common challenges. This can be achieved through regional partnerships and collaborative projects that leverage the strengths of different member states.¹²⁵

By implementing these recommendations, the EU can enhance its resilience and preparedness for future crises, ensuring a more robust and coordinated response to emerging challenges.

6.3 Strategic Priorities for the EU

As the European Union navigates an increasingly complex and volatile global landscape, it has identified several strategic priorities to guide its actions and policies in the coming years. These priorities aim to enhance the EU's resilience, competitiveness, and global influence.

6.3.1 A Free and Democratic Europe:

- promoting and safeguarding the rule of law: ensuring that all member states adhere to the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law is fundamental. This includes strengthening mechanisms to monitor and enforce compliance,¹²⁶
- strengthening democratic resilience: enhancing the resilience of democratic institutions against internal and external threats, such as disinformation and cyber-attacks,¹²⁷
- protecting media freedom: safeguarding the independence and pluralism of the media to ensure a free and informed public debate.¹²⁸

6.3.2 A Strong and Secure Europe:

- enhancing defense capabilities: investing in defense and security to protect the EU's borders and citizens. This includes developing a common defense policy and increasing cooperation among member states,¹²⁹

¹²⁵ Eox, *Top Strategies for Building Preparedness and Resilience in Crisis Situations*, Post 27 November; https://eoxs.com/new_blog/top-strategies-for-building-preparedness-and-resilience-in-crisis-situations/ [date of access: 13.07.2025].

¹²⁶ European Council/Council of the European Union, *Strategic agenda 2024-2029*, last review 1 December 2024, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/strategic-agenda-2024-2029/>.

¹²⁷ European Union, *EU priorities*, https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities_en [date of access: 13.07.2025].

¹²⁸ European Council/Council of the European Union, *Strategic agenda 2024-2029*.

¹²⁹ European Union, *EU priorities*, https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities_en [date of access: 13.07.2025].

- addressing hybrid threats: strengthening the EU's ability to detect, prevent, and respond to hybrid threats, including cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns,¹³⁰
- promoting strategic autonomy: reducing dependency on external actors for critical technologies and resources, thereby enhancing the EU's strategic autonomy.¹³¹

6.3.3 A Prosperous and Competitive Europe:

- fostering innovation and digital transformation: promoting research, innovation, and digitalization to drive economic growth and competitiveness. This includes supporting startups and investing in digital infrastructure,¹³²
- ensuring sustainable growth: implementing policies that promote sustainable economic growth, including the transition to a green economy and the achievement of climate neutrality by 2050,¹³³
- strengthening the single market: enhancing the functioning of the single market to ensure the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people.¹³⁴

6.3.4 A Green and Sustainable Europe:

- achieving climate neutrality: committing to ambitious climate targets, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing the use of renewable energy sources,¹³⁵
- protecting biodiversity: implementing measures to protect and restore biodiversity, including the conservation of natural habitats and the promotion of sustainable agriculture,¹³⁶
- promoting circular economy: encouraging the transition to a circular economy where resources are reused, recycled, and conserved.¹³⁷

¹³⁰ European Council/Council of the European Union, *Strategic agenda 2024-2029*.

¹³¹ European Union, *EU priorities*, https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities_en [date of access: 13.07.2025].

¹³² European Council/Council of the European Union, *Strategic agenda 2024-2029*.

¹³³ European Union, *EU priorities*, https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities_en [date of access: 13.07.2025].

¹³⁴ European Council/Council of the European Union, *Strategic agenda 2024-2029*.

¹³⁵ European Union, *EU priorities*, https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities_en [date of access: 13.07.2025].

¹³⁶ European Council/Council of the European Union, *Strategic agenda 2024-2029*.

¹³⁷ European Union, *EU priorities*, https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/eu-priorities_en [date of access: 13.07.2025].

6.3.5 A Global Europe:

- strengthening global partnerships: building and maintaining strong partnerships with countries and regions around the world to promote peace, stability, and prosperity,¹³⁸
- promoting multilateralism: upholding and strengthening the rules-based international order through active participation in multilateral institutions and agreements,¹³⁹
- addressing global challenges: leading global efforts to address challenges such as climate change, migration, and global health crises.¹⁴⁰

By focusing on these strategic priorities, the EU aims to build a more resilient, competitive, and influential union capable of addressing both current and future challenges.

Conclusions

This paper has explored the European Union's strategic responses to contemporary crises, focusing on disinformation and hybrid conflicts, particularly in the context of the war in Ukraine. The key findings from our analysis are summarized as follows:

- institutional changes and reforms: the EU has undertaken significant institutional reforms to enhance its resilience and strategic coherence. These reforms include streamlining legislative procedures, strengthening inter-institutional cooperation, and improving transparency and accountability,
- enhancing decision-making processes: efforts to enhance decision-making processes have focused on simplifying legislative procedures, promoting inter-institutional cooperation, and improving communication channels. These measures aim to ensure more efficient and responsive governance,
- strengthening inter-institutional dynamics: the EU has implemented various initiatives to strengthen inter-institutional dynamics, including enhancing coordination mechanisms, promoting informal cooperation, and balancing institutional powers. These efforts are crucial for fostering effective collaboration among EU institutions,
- lessons learned from current crises: the EU has learned valuable lessons from recent crises, such as the importance of rapid resource mobilization, policy adaptation, clear communication, and building resilience. Member states play a critical role in crisis responses, but they also face challenges such as resource limitations and coordination issues,

¹³⁸ Ibidem.

¹³⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem.

- recommendations for enhancing resilience: to enhance resilience, the EU should focus on strengthening crisis response mechanisms, promoting policy adaptation, improving communication, building resilient infrastructure, and fostering solidarity among member states. Public-private partnerships and flexible budget allocations are also essential for overcoming resource limitations,
- strategic priorities for the EU: the EU's strategic priorities include promoting democracy and the rule of law, enhancing defense capabilities, fostering innovation and sustainable growth, achieving climate neutrality, and strengthening global partnerships. These priorities aim to build a more resilient, competitive, and influential union.

These key findings highlight the EU's efforts to navigate contemporary crises and underscore the importance of adaptive and forward-looking strategies in enhancing the EU's capacity to address future challenges.

The strategic responses of the European Union to contemporary crises, such as disinformation and hybrid conflicts, have significant implications for European integration. These responses highlight both the strengths and challenges of the integration process, shaping the future trajectory of the EU.

The EU's coordinated efforts to address crises have reinforced the principles of unity and solidarity among member states. By working together to combat disinformation and manage hybrid conflicts, the EU has demonstrated the value of collective action. This has strengthened the sense of shared purpose and mutual support, which are foundational to European integration.

Institutional reforms and enhanced decision-making processes have improved the cohesion and efficiency of EU institutions. These changes facilitate more effective governance and policy implementation, contributing to a more integrated and coherent union. The emphasis on inter-institutional cooperation and streamlined legislative procedures helps to align the actions of different EU bodies, fostering a more unified approach to crisis management.

While the EU's strategic responses have generally promoted integration, they have also highlighted the challenges posed by divergent national interests. Member states have different priorities and capacities, which can lead to tensions and disagreements. Addressing these differences requires ongoing dialogue and compromise, ensuring that all member states feel represented and supported within the EU framework.

The need to respond effectively to crises has driven efforts to harmonize policies across member states. This includes aligning national regulations with

EU-wide standards, particularly in areas such as cybersecurity, information integrity, and defense. Policy harmonization enhances the EU's ability to act cohesively and strengthens the internal market, furthering the goals of European integration.

The EU's experiences with recent crises have underscored the importance of resilience and adaptability. By developing flexible policy frameworks and crisis response mechanisms, the EU can better withstand future challenges. This adaptability is crucial for maintaining the momentum of European integration, as it allows the union to evolve in response to changing circumstances.

Effective crisis management enhances the EU's credibility and influence on the global stage. By demonstrating leadership in addressing disinformation and hybrid conflicts, the EU can strengthen its role as a global actor. This increased influence supports the EU's strategic interests and promotes the values of European integration internationally.

In summary, the EU's strategic responses to contemporary crises have significant implications for European integration. These responses reinforce unity and solidarity, enhance institutional cohesion, address divergent national interests, promote policy harmonization, foster resilience and adaptability, and strengthen global influence. Together, these factors contribute to a more integrated and resilient European Union.

As we conclude this exploration of the European Union's strategic responses to contemporary crises, it is evident that the EU has made significant strides in addressing the challenges posed by disinformation and hybrid conflicts. The war in Ukraine has underscored the urgency of these issues, prompting the EU to adapt and innovate in its crisis management strategies.

The institutional changes and reforms implemented by the EU have strengthened its resilience and strategic coherence, enabling more effective governance and policy implementation. Enhancing decision-making processes and inter-institutional dynamics has fostered a more unified and coordinated approach to crisis management.

The lessons learned from recent crises highlight the importance of rapid resource mobilization, policy adaptation, clear communication, and building resilience. Member states play a crucial role in these efforts, and addressing the challenges they face is essential for the EU's overall effectiveness.

Our recommendations for enhancing resilience emphasize the need for robust crisis response mechanisms, flexible policy frameworks, improved communication, resilient infrastructure, and solidarity among member states. Public-private partnerships and flexible budget allocations are also vital for overcoming resource limitations.

Looking ahead, the EU's strategic priorities will guide its actions in promoting democracy, enhancing security, fostering innovation, achieving sustainability, and strengthening global partnerships. These priorities aim to build a more resilient, competitive, and influential union capable of addressing both current and future challenges.

In conclusion, the EU's ability to navigate contemporary crises and adapt to an ever-changing global landscape is a testament to its resilience and commitment to European integration. By continuing to learn from past experiences and implementing forward-looking strategies, the EU can ensure a stable and prosperous future for all its member states and citizens.

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