



EUROPE: NO SIGNS OF FATIGUE IN THE SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

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Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine exactly one year ago, leading to a conflict of unpredictable length and a lasting transformation of the transatlantic security status quo. Ukraine's European and global allies have not only imposed sanctions on Russia and its military supporters, but are also providing military, financial and humanitarian assistance to defend Ukraine's territorial integrity. Despite the growing economic difficulties Europe is facing and the Russian disinformation campaigns, the level of support for Ukraine within Europe has not diminished over the past year.

In this analysis, we assess the level of "Ukraine fatigue" in Europe from three perspectives, beginning by examining the main trends in military aid from European countries to Ukraine and the main paradigm shifts in the arms transfers; followed by an analysis of the results of the elections in EU Member States; and concluding with a detailed look at the changes in European public opinion concerning the level of support for Ukraine.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The EU defence policy has taken an unprecedented turn. For the first time in its history, the EU has authorized the transfer of lethal weapons to a third country. So far, it has provided Ukraine with €3.6 billion for arms purchases. Moreover, in November, it launched a comprehensive training mission (EUMAM) with a two-year mandate for Ukrainian soldiers. This is the first EU mission that contributes significantly to training soldiers from a non-EU country.

Member states are increasingly breaking long-standing taboos on providing military aid to Ukraine; some of them are now donating lethal weapons from their existing stockpiles. Over the past year, Ukraine has received more and more modern and effective weapons from its European allies. The European countries (including the EU) allied with Ukraine have provided Ukraine with a total of nearly €15 billion in military assistance. In recent weeks, amid a potential Russian spring offensive, there has been another significant levelling up: several Member States, previously reluctant to take strong action against the Kremlin, such as Germany and France, have offered modern heavy weapons from their active stockpiles. More recently, the international dialogue on the supply of fighter jets has also been intensifying.

With the exception of Hungary (and Italy), no party campaigning against helping Ukraine has been able to form a government in the past year. Although such campaign messages have emerged during almost all elections in Europe, parties campaigning with pro-Russian narratives, such as the French National Rally or the Czech ANO, have been defeated by pro-Ukraine candidates.

Opinion polls show that after one year, the majority of Europeans still support initiatives to help Ukraine. In most countries surveyed, there has been a slight decrease in support for measures to help Ukraine compared to the months following the war, but still, a significant proportion of Europeans remain firmly in favour of supporting Ukraine. Although support for accepting refugees and imposing strict sanctions has fallen over the past year (by 9.1 percentage points on average), it remains well above 50% in most countries. Military and financial assistance are slightly less popular. In Germany, the third biggest spender on military aid to Ukraine worldwide, the popularity of arms transfers fell from 55% in March to 48% in December 2022.

The war between Russia and Ukraine in the EU's immediate vicinity has forced the EU and its Member States to make a fundamental paradigm shift in their security and neighbourhood policy. The European "Ostpolitik", which emphasized an understanding and an open policy towards Russia, has become in many ways obsolete, as the war overturned the basic European foreign policy premise, which had sought to 'pacify' the Soviet Union and then independent Russia through fruitful economic relations. As a sign of this change, the past year has witnessed the shattering of a number of taboos, from German arms supplies stretching from helmets to Leopard 2 tanks to military training provided by the EU to third parties.

The EU Member States reacted with remarkable speed and unity to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. In just a few days, the EU had imposed economic sanctions on Russia of an unprecedented scale and, since then, continued to enforce further restrictive measures. The main restrictive measures include:

- *the introduction of a price cap on Russian oil transported by sea and a ban on the import of Russian oil by sea,*
- *a ban on imports of coal and other solid fossil fuels,*
- *a ban on the export of jet fuel and advanced software,*
- *a ban on imports of fertilizers, timber, concrete and cigarettes; and*
- *restrictions on trade in iron, steel and certain luxury goods.*

According to estimates, the Member States have taken in nearly 5 million Ukrainian refugees in total and the EU has provided Ukraine with nearly €30 billion in economic aid and has subsidized the country's arms purchases with more than €3.5 billion. Since November, the EU has also provided training for 15 thousand Ukrainian soldiers every four months.

Despite increasing economic struggles and Russian misinformation campaigns, the level of support for Ukraine within Europe has not diminished over the past year. Most countries still favor helping Ukraine, as reflected in the outcomes of parliamentary and presidential elections held in Europe in the last twelve months. The only exception is Hungary, where a party advocating for less support for Ukraine was capable of forming a government on its own.

INCREASING MILITARY ASSISTANCE

The most striking example of the European countries' commitment to helping Ukraine is the increasing supply of weapons. In the past year, 17 EU Member States, including typically hesitant nations like Germany and Sweden, have supplied Ukraine with heavy weapons - even the EU has provided military aid. This marks a major shift in the EU's defense policy, as it is the first time that it has authorized the delivery of lethal weapons to a non-EU country.

The EU has so far provided Ukraine with a total of €3.6 billion in military assistance through the European Peace Facility. A significant part of this amount (€3.1 billion) has been used to finance lethal weapons. EU Member States have donated or supported the purchase of weapons worth a total of €8 billion, according to most estimates. Including the commitments of Norway and the UK, which alone has provided nearly €4 billion in military assistance to Ukraine, total European contribution, according to the Kiel Institute, rises to nearly €15 billion, which is comparable in volume only to the US military assistance of nearly €30 billion.

The commitment of most European countries to support Ukraine with arms increased significantly following the Russian invasion. Before the outbreak of the war – despite the frozen conflict in eastern Ukraine since 2014 – European countries did not support Ukraine with lethal weapons at all. In contrast, today, some countries are already offering heavy equipment from their active stockpiles. Although it would be in vain to look for it on billboards, Hungary also voted for a decision on armed support for Ukraine in the Council of the EU.

In the first few weeks, Western countries sent mainly air defence and anti-tank weapons that could be easily and quickly transported and required minimal training. Later, when it became clear that the war was going to drag on, more and more Soviet-type heavy weapons from the former Warsaw Pact countries began to arrive in Ukraine (Poland, for example, sent 240 T-72 tanks in April), just like the first artillery systems, such as the US-supplied HIMARS rocket launchers and M777 howitzers. In autumn, the focus shifted to air defence in response to Russian attacks on Ukrainian energy infrastructure. The US, Germany and France pledged to deliver the Patriot system, considered one of the most effective missile defence systems worldwide (Patriot systems have not yet arrived in Ukraine).



In November, the European Union launched a two-year comprehensive training mission (European Union Military Assistance Mission, EUMAM) for Ukrainian soldiers. The importance of the mission is demonstrated by the fact that the EU has pledged to train (and equip) 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers every 120 days, which means 45,000 in a year – Mariann Vecsey and Péter Wagner point out in their analysis. Thus, through Operation Interflex - a British-led supplementary training mission with the assistance of 10 allied countries - and EUMAM, Ukraine's European allies provide training for more than 75,000 Ukrainian soldiers per year.

In recent weeks, amid a potential Russian spring offensive, there has been another significant levelling up: several Member States have offered modern heavy weapons from their active units (previously, heavy weaponry came only from their blocked stocks). The Challenger 2 tanks offered by the UK, the CAESAR and Archer artillery offered by the Danes and Swedes, and the Leopard 2A6 tanks promised by the Germans will all be transferred from active stocks.

Most European policymakers previously resisted sending such weapons, worrying that it would be an over-provocation of Russia. Despite mounting pressure, Germany did not allow the transfer of German-made Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine for a long time. The Leopard 2s have long been high on Kyiv's wish list, since they were specifically designed against the T-72s that Russia uses. If they were available in sufficient numbers they would provide serious assistance in a possible spring offensive.

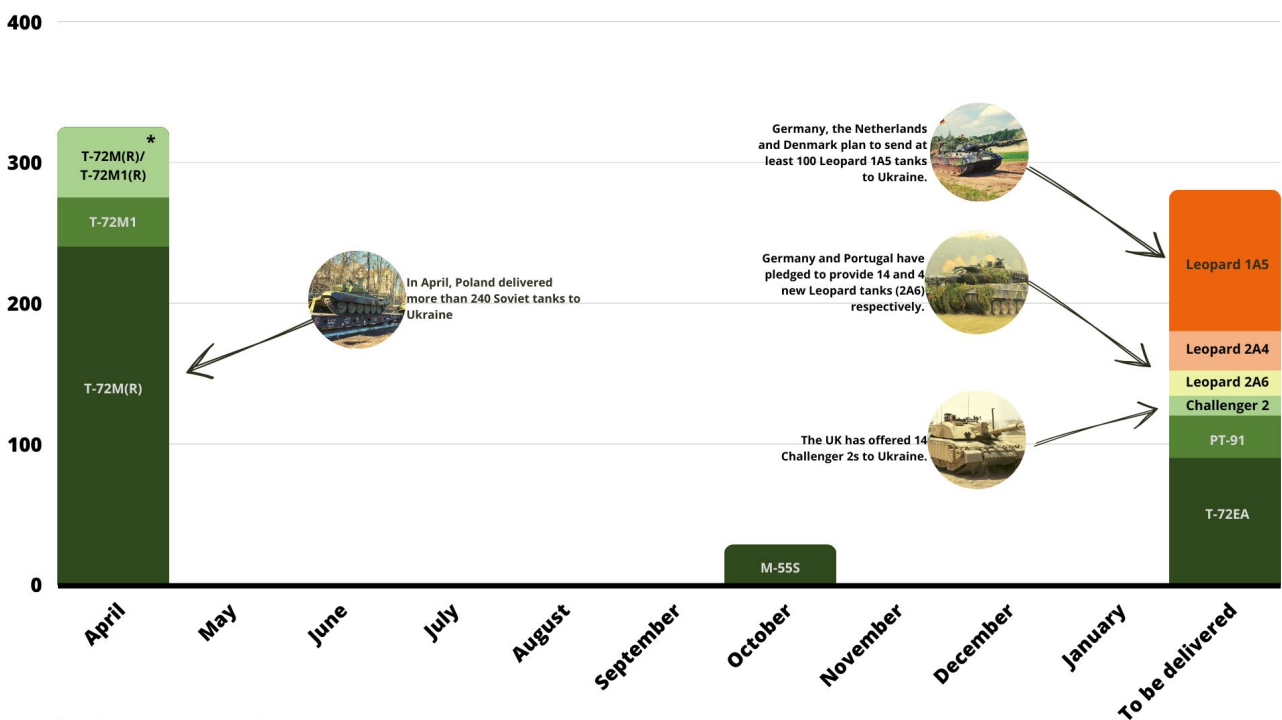
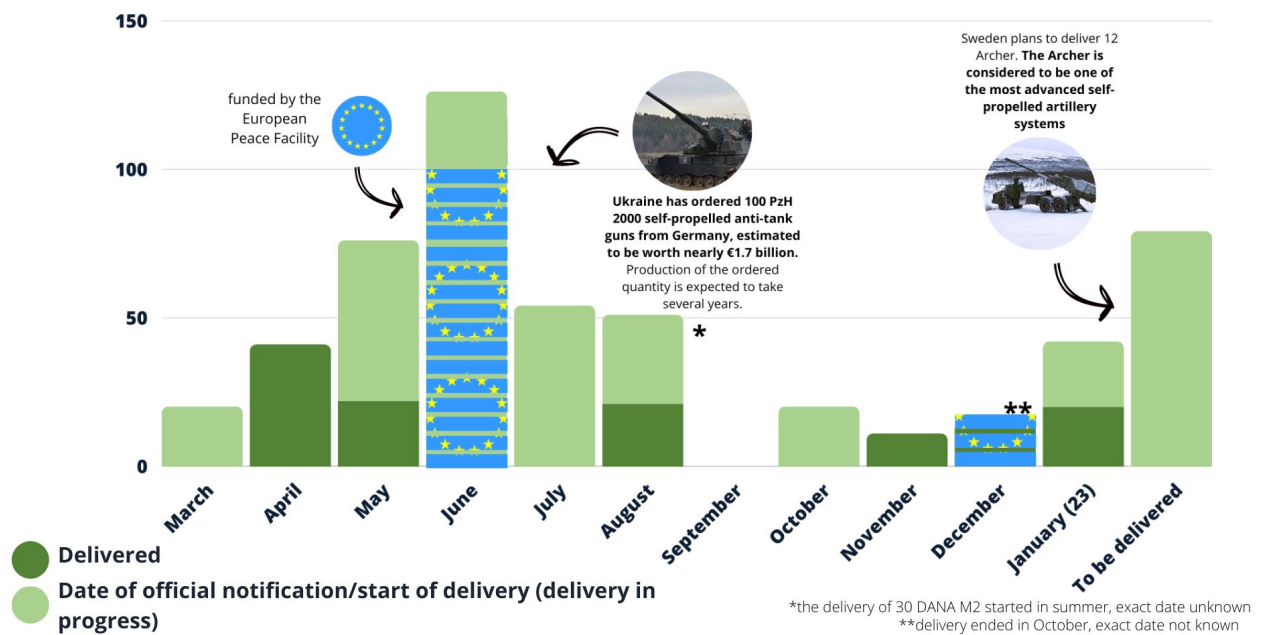
However, on 25 January, after much debate and reluctance, Berlin announced that it would allow the transfer of Leopard 2s to Ukraine, and committed to supply 14 Leopard 2A6 tanks itself. Following the German announcement, Poland pledged to deliver 14 Leopard 2 tanks, Norway 8, Spain 6, and Portugal 4. However, no further concrete details have emerged on most of the offers, and the number is far below the 300 tanks requested by Kyiv. Nevertheless, Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark have promised to deliver more than a hundred of the older Leopard 1A5 type tanks to Ukraine. Even though these are relatively weaker than the Russian tanks in terms of armament, but stronger in terms of mobility, fire control and electronics, while still lagging behind the capabilities of the Leopard 2.

More recently, the international dialogue on the supply of fighter jets has also been intensifying. At the end of January, France was open to sending Dassault Mirage fighter jets, and a few weeks later, London did not rule out the idea of sending fighter jets as a "long-term option".

The commitment of European countries to send heavy weapons is illustrated in the two graphs below. The first graph shows the delivery of howitzers and other artillery systems by EU Member States, Norway and the United Kingdom.

Over the past year, European countries have made a series of new pledges to supply artillery systems to Ukraine. Most recent promises include French Caesar 8x8 self-propelled guns and Swedish Archer self-propelled artillery systems.

The second graph below shows the number of tanks sent by European countries to Ukraine since the outbreak of the war. The graph clearly shows the weight of the recent announcements regarding the delivery of tanks: apart from the T-72s sent by Poland and the Czech Republic in April, in exchange for tanks from Germany, and the 28 M-55Ss delivered by Slovenia in August, also in exchange for weapons from Germany, European countries refrained from delivering tanks to Ukraine until a few weeks ago.



So European countries are more committed than ever to support Ukraine with arms. Taboos are breaking down, so much so that in January, a number of countries have already made pledges from their active forces. The "Ukraine fatigue", if it is somewhat perceived in public opinion, has not, in practice, led to a reduction in support for Ukraine.

In addition to Poland, Germany and France are now also making significant pledges to Ukraine, and Italy's Giorgia Meloni is also committed to supporting Ukraine. All this demonstrates a political commitment on the part of the EU's large Member States that is likely to shape the direction of EU foreign policy in the long term. Although there is a chance that candidates campaigning to curb support for Ukraine could come to power in Slovakia, and pro-Russian parties are gaining strength in Bulgaria, these developments are unlikely to have a lasting impact on the EU's foreign policy.

ELECTIONS IN EUROPE: THE CONSTITUENTS STILL VOTE FOR THE SUPPORT OF UKRAINE

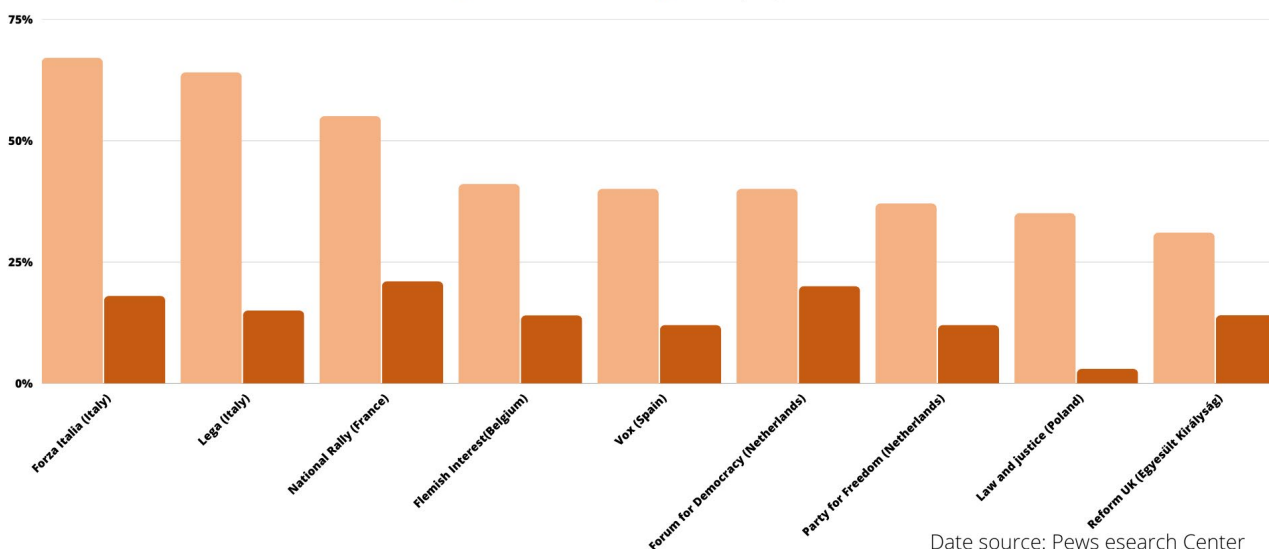
Since the start of the Russian offensive, there have been more than a dozen parliamentary and presidential elections in Europe. One of the ways in which the constituents of EU member states show their commitment towards supporting Ukraine is their voting behaviour. There have only been very few parties that are either openly pro-Russian or question the necessity of aiding Ukraine, which were able to form governments. The importance of western ideals is obvious even in countries that elected right-wing populist or far-right presidents. Giorgia Meloni, Italy's newly elected prime minister, formed her government in tandem with Matteo Salvini's anti-sanction Lega, and Silvio Berlusconi's openly pro-Russian Forza Italia. Meloni confirmed multiple times that she is committed to the support of Ukraine and her allegiance towards NATO. The far-right-leaning Sweden Democrats party, during the parliamentary elections, banned one of its members after he had shared content on social media that questioned the Bucha massacre.

According to the Pew Research Center's study conducted in early 2022, the traditionally far-right, pro-Russian populist voters' attitudes towards Russia have significantly worsened compared to previous years.

Favourability toward Russia has dropped sharply among Europe's right-wing populists

% who have a favorable opinion of Russia

2020 summer 2020 spring



Date source: Pews research Center
*the data is from 2019

Favourability toward Russia has dropped sharply among Europe's right-wing populists (Data source: Pew Research Center, compiled by Political Capital)

For most of the election campaigns, the war on the border of Europe and the stance towards the Russian aggression was an important topic. The Europeans' solidarity and the significant drop in favorable views towards Russia are noticeable by how different parties often used the tactic of accusing their opponents of supporting Russia and shining light on rival politicians' past relations with Russia. In the summer of 2022, the Swedish Social Democratic Party, which was in power at the time, stated that the nationalist party Sweden Democrats "poses a security threat for the country" due to their neo-Nazi connections and their inability to choose between the USA and Russia. Emmanuel Macron, in the second round of the French presidential election, called Marine Le Pen, whose previous election campaigns were indeed supported by the Kremlin, a "mercenary of Putin". Less successfully, in Hungary, the United Opposition's politicians often referred to Viktor Orbán as "Putin's sock-puppet".

The early days of the Russian offensive against Ukraine coincided with two European elections: The Hungarian parliamentary election on 3 April and the first round of the French presidential election on 10 April. The attack by Russia completely shifted the course of the campaign in both countries. Both the Hungarian prime minister and the French head of state gained a strong position due to their decisional authority, which allowed the projection of a "strong and efficient leadership". Interestingly, in France, which is traditionally regarded as understanding towards Russia, president Macron managed to garner support through his strong support of Ukraine. In the case of Hungary, one of the main messages of the ruling party was the stance that Hungary should stay out of the war at all costs. In his victory speech after the election, Viktor Orbán addressed president Zelensky as his opponent. In the Slovenian election, which took place also in April, the topic of the war was not as prominent. Both Janez Janša and his opponent Robert Golob held strongly anti-Russian stances in their campaigns.

The Hungarian Fidesz's and the French National Rally 's campaign messages regarding the war show eerie resemblance: both parties emphasized the difficulties that the war and the sanctions caused to the people's livelihood. The National Rally, which is in opposition, campaigned mostly with the loss of purchasing power. Fidesz, the ruling party in Hungary, campaigned mostly with populist messages, focusing on maintaining the energy subsidies for the people and providing the 13th-month pension and tax refunds.

After the start of the war, Fidesz's campaign messages repeated ad nauseam the following statement: War or peace? Those who want peace should choose the "national" side, while those who want war should side with the left. Le Pen also structured her slogans on her constituents' fear of direct conflict. "I am obsessed with peace!" she stated during a political debate organized by TF1 television. "I am afraid, sorry that I have to state it like this, that France possibly, against its will, has to join a war due to obligations forced by alliances."

Similar narratives are also prominent in other countries' populist parties. For example: during the Czech parliamentary elections that were held in January 2022, Andrej Babiš borrowed Fidesz's "pro-peace" disinformation narratives, though he was unsuccessful. Matteo Salvini tried to gather the public's support by questioning the effectiveness of sanctions against Russia.

In Bulgaria, following snap elections, the openly pro-Russia Revival party was able to double its votes compared to the previous election, collecting 10.2%. Still, most of the Bulgarian population choose to support parties that side with Ukraine.

Results of the major parliamentary and presidential elections of the past year (3 parties with the most votes; parties campaigning with pro-Russian narratives highlighted in red)

Hungary	Fidesz (54.1%)	United Opposition (34.4%)	Our Home Movement (5.9%)
France	Emmanuel Macron (58.5%)	Marine Le Pen (41.5%)	
Slovenia	Freedom Movement (34.5%)	Slovenian Democratic Party (23.5%)	New Slovenia – Christian Democrats (6.9%)
Sweden	Swedish Social Democratic Party (28.3%)	Moderate Party (19.9%)	Sweden Democrats (17.5%)
Italy	Brothers of Italy (26%)	Democratic Party – IDP (19%)	Leauge (8.77%)
Latvia	Harmony (19.8%)	The Conservatives (13.6%)	Development/For! (12%)
Bulgaria	GERB (25.3%)	We Continue the Change (20.2%)	Movement for Rights and Freedoms (13.8%)

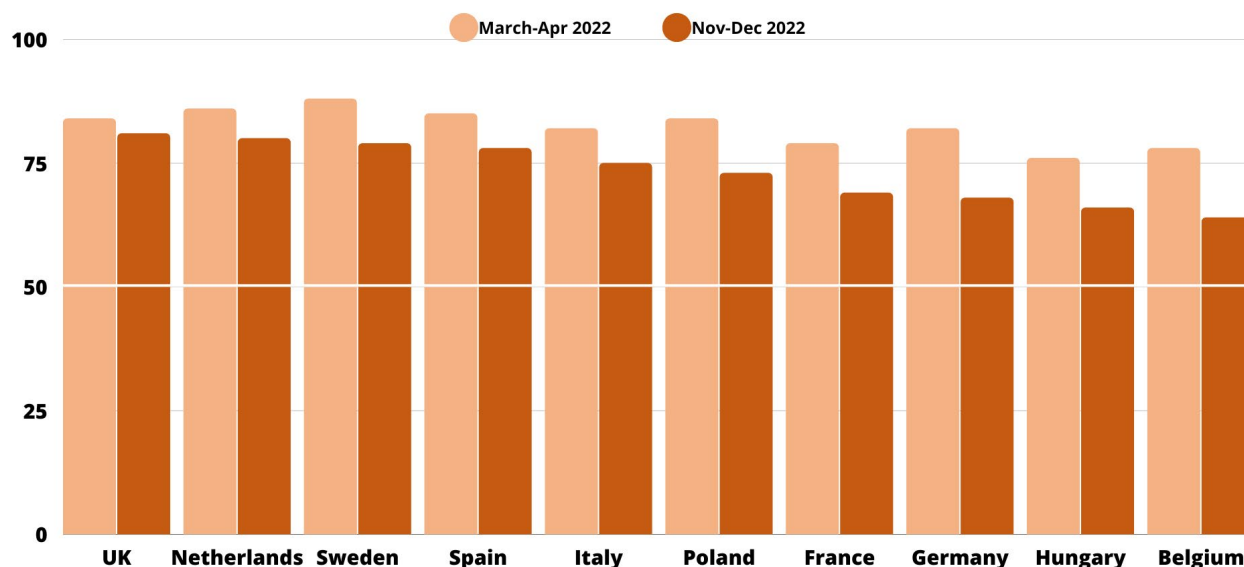
Results of the major parliamentary and presidential elections in 2022 (compiled by Political Capital)

PUBLIC OPINION: NO SIGNIFICANT DROP IN SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

Last year, Ipsos asked questions about measures to support Ukraine in 28 countries, including 9 EU Member States and the UK, in March-April and November-December. The results show that, despite growing difficulties in making ends meet, a significant proportion of Europeans remain firmly supportive of the country defending itself against Russian aggression, albeit at a somewhat declining rate over time. Eurobarometer surveys show similar results.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? -- [My country] should take in Ukrainian refugees from the current conflict

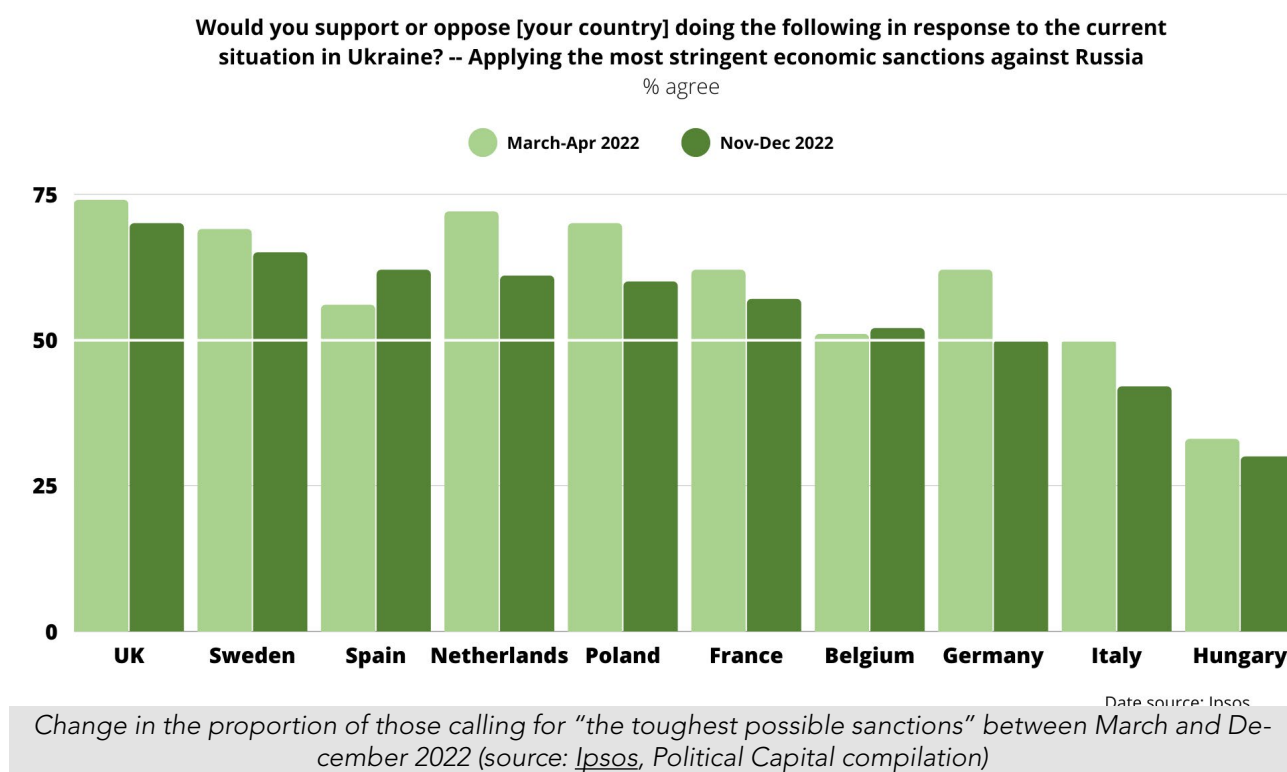
% agree



Change in support for welcoming refugees between March and December 2022 (source: Ipsos, Political Capital compilation)

In the countries surveyed at the end of last year, there was still overwhelming support for measures to host Ukrainian refugees, even if this figure fell slightly: most notably in Germany and Belgium (by 14 percentage points), Hungary and France (by 10 percentage points), and in the UK by only 3 percentage points.

There is also overwhelming support for sanctions in the European countries surveyed by Ipsos. After the outbreak of the war, the only country in which there was a minority (33%) in favour of tough sanctions against Russia was Hungary, while support for sanctions exceeded 60% in more than half of the countries surveyed. By the time of the second round of the survey, support for sanctions had already fallen in most countries - by more than 10 percentage points in the Netherlands, Germany and Poland - but still remained above 50% in eight out of the ten countries.



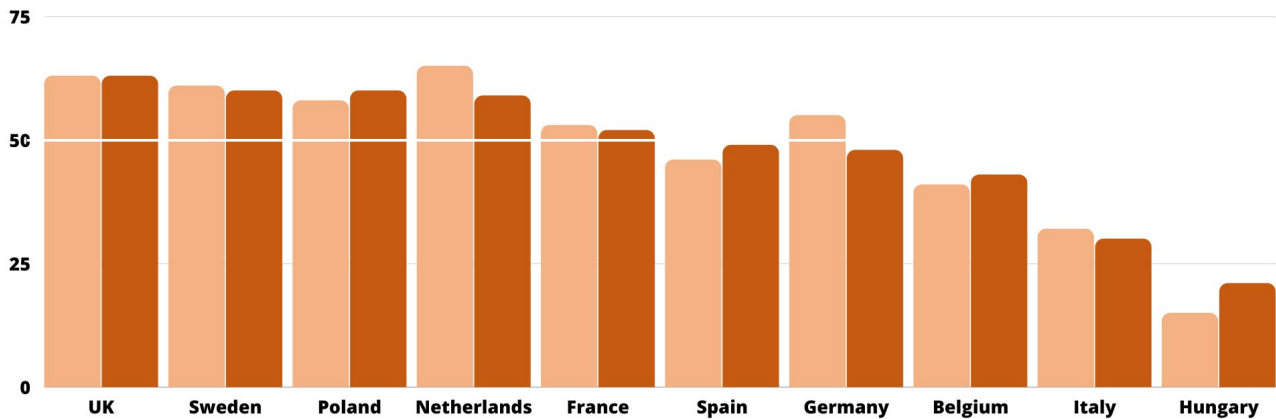
As for the public perception of supporting Ukraine with weapons, the poll by Ipsos shows that it exceeds 50% in half of the countries surveyed. An important addition is that all countries surveyed by Ipsos, except Hungary, supply weapons to Ukraine.

The level of support for arms transfers has not changed significantly in most countries over the past year: it has typically decreased but has increased in some countries, such as Spain, Poland, Belgium and even Hungary. The latter is presumably due to the fact that it was a much hotter topic during the election campaign than at the time of the end-of-year survey. In Germany, the third biggest spender on military aid to Ukraine worldwide, public support for arms transfers fell by 7 percentage points, from 55% to 48%. Overall, therefore, Russia's strategy of deterring European countries and their leaders from supplying arms has not been successful.

Would you support or oppose [your country] doing the following in response to the current situation in Ukraine? -- Providing weapons and/or air-defense systems to the Ukrainian military

% agree

Mar-Apr 2022 Nov-Dec 2022



Data source: Ipsos

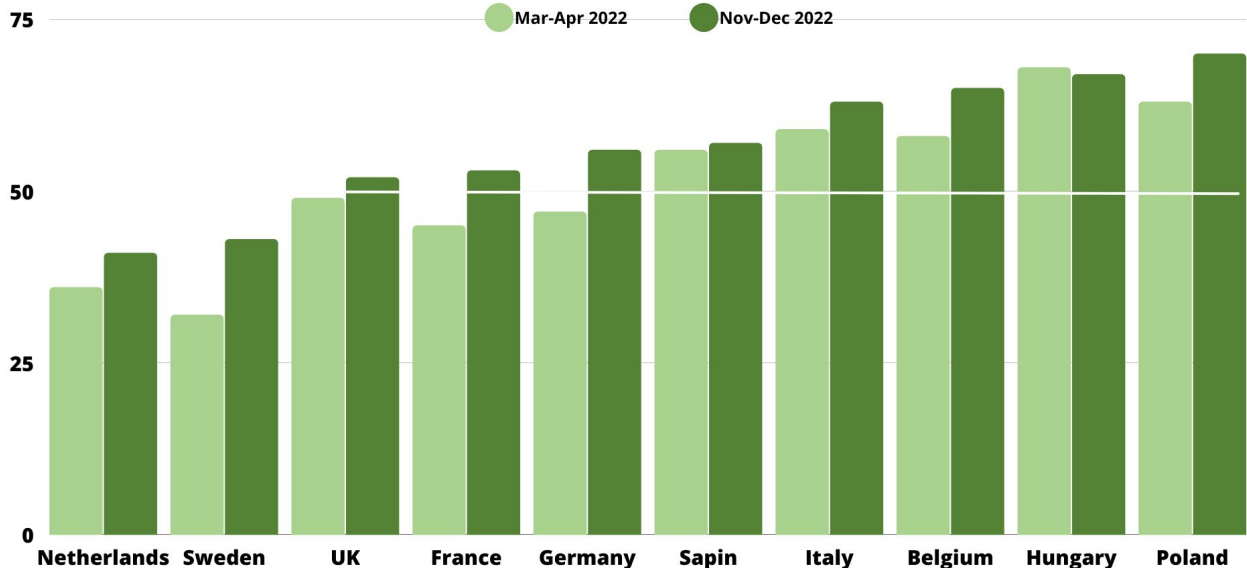
Change in support for policies calling for the transfer of weapons and/or air defence systems between March and December 2022 (source: Ipsos, Political Capital compilation)

Support for financial assistance lags behind that of arms transfers. In December 2022, the majority in eight out of the ten countries surveyed said that their country could not afford to provide financial assistance to Ukraine in the current economic crisis. Interestingly, the Poles, who are among the unanimous supporters of Ukraine, are the least supportive of their government providing financial aid to Ukraine: 63% of Poles at the beginning of the war and 70% a year after the war reject the possibility of financial aid. Therefore, it is crucial that decision-makers at the European level continue to grant financial assistance to Ukraine, which, by providing joint credit line or EU funds, poses less of a threat to the level of social support that still exists, as it has less impact on individual Member States' expenditure.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement? -- Given the current economic crisis, ... cannot afford to lend financial support to Ukraine

% agree

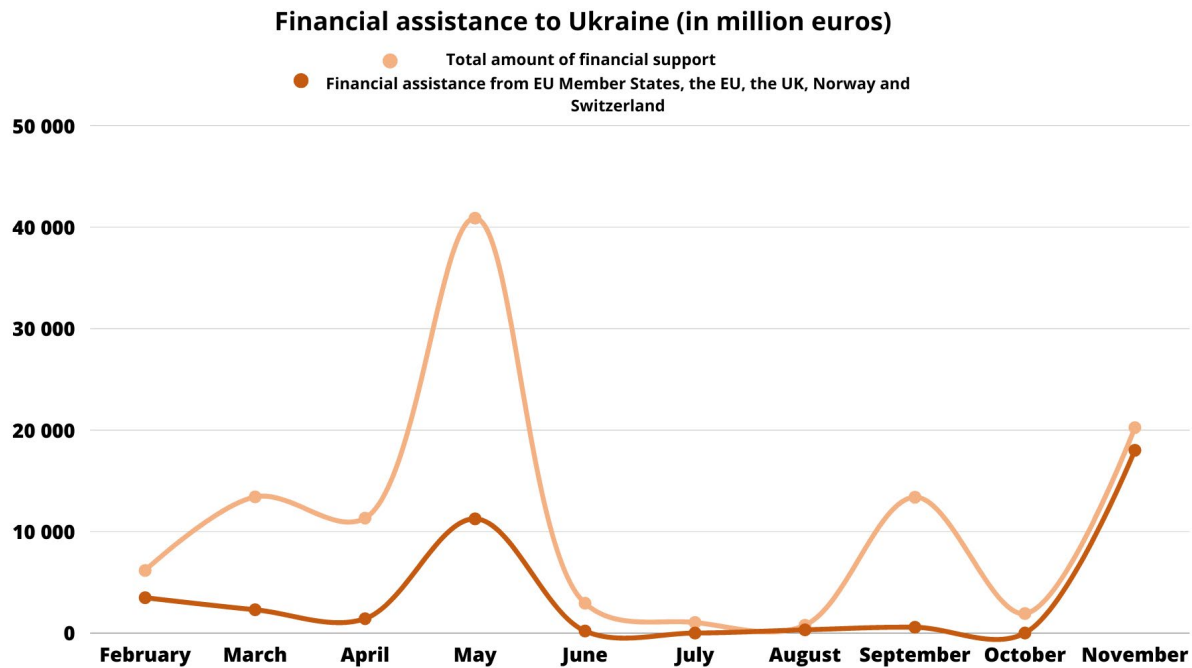
Mar-Apr 2022 Nov-Dec 2022



Data source: Ipsos

Change in the number of people who oppose financial support for Ukraine between March and December 2022 (source: Ipsos, Political Capital compilation)

As the war progresses, the level of individual financial assistance from European countries is on the decline, in contrast to the clear increase in commitment concerning arms transfers. According to the [Kiel Institute](#), almost one-fifth of the financial assistance sent to Ukraine came from European countries bilaterally in the months following the outbreak of the war. By contrast, European countries have made few commitments to further individual financial support since the summer. The picture is nuanced by the fact that EU Member States decided to disburse an additional 18 billion euros in loans within the EU framework in December.



Data source: Kiel Institute

Financial aid to Ukraine over the past year (source: [Kiel Institute](#), Political Capital compilation)

CONCLUSION

It seems that Europe has not grown tired of supporting Ukraine, even during the difficulties of the past year. Although public enthusiasm for helping Ukraine has been on a slight downward trend in most countries, parties campaigning on pro-Kremlin narratives have not achieved any breakthroughs, except for Hungary and, to some extent, Italy. Thus, the “Ukraine fatigue,” even if it is having an impact, has not shifted public opinion, and has not reduced support for Ukraine significantly.