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How the EU Fails to Live Up to Its Promise of European Peace

Since its formation in 1993, the European Union has been a bulwark of economic power
and democracy. The world's most developed supranational organization has fostered peace and
economic development within its borders on the basis of free trade and political unity, becoming
the world's third economic superpower behind China and the United States and expanding it's
sphere of influence to 27 member states. The strength of their economy is greatly derived from
the diversity between countries and the variety of products they are able to produce, transport,
and sell both within the Union and outside. This economic diversity gives the EU a great deal of
soft power, allowing them to tariff imports on a large scale with almost everything but certain
natural resources being produced domestically. Not only is the European Union diverse in its
economy, but in policy and culture as well. The EU's motto, "United in Diversity" is
representative of what the organization feels is its strongest attribute. However, when a closer
look is taken at the EU's diversity, it becomes quickly apparent that what is such a strong cultural
attribute is a hindrance to EU efficiency and agreement as a whole. Countries bicker for years
over trivial matters, hardly able to escape a gridlock of their own design and repeatedly reaching
'agreements' that primarily serve the interests of richer countries, especially France and
Germany. This inequality in policy becomes more and more apparent the further one gets from

core EU countries. Border countries in the Balkans and other parts of Eastern Europe are under

constant threat of Russian aggression, a threat which recently presented itself after the Russian

Federation invaded Ukraine. If the EU was capable of standing up as the peacekeeping force it

wants itself to be, the invasion would have been settled quickly. Individual countries have the

ability to respond, but not the power to do so effectively, and division prior to the war means that

the EU cannot respond as one. While the diversity in policy between member states is arguably

the EU's strongest attribute, the bureaucratic stranglehold that exists as a byproduct of this

diversity makes it nearly impossible for the EU to act with unanimity against threats on their

borders and fulfill their supposed role as a peacekeeping organization.

Diversity is, and should be, viewed as a favorable asset to any democratic country or

organization. This extends to ethnicities, cultures, classes, and of course political ideologies.

Without diversity, democracies lack new ideas, and their entire systems stangante. The only

downside to having as large a demographic spread as the European Union is that the many

different ideologies and cultures all remain entrenched within their nation's historical footsteps.

This leads to disagreement between member states whenever something must be agreed upon,

and the issue is only exacerbated when the decisions that must be made are of high importance

and utmost urgency. As Carolyn Moser from the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public

Law and International Law puts it, "Contrary to the motto of the Union, "United in diversity,"

there is a great deal more cacophony than unity among member states when it comes to issues

with foreign affairs, security and defense implications." (Moser). When it comes to the situation

in the Ukraine, there is no right answer for how to respond to Putin's aggression. Some states

argue for containment, others for direct confrontation, and others for non-involvement.

Unfortunately, however, to determine a position or respond to Russia in a joint manner, all 28

states must be in consensus with each other and the likelihood of that happening on a military matter is low. Indeed, in November 2021 EU foriegn defense ministers bickered over the establishment of a 5000 member 'reaction force', a force which was only agreed upon in March 2022 with a goal of raising the force by 2030.

These 5,000 soldiers are a long shot from the goal of 60,000 set out by the EU in the 90s, and had the European Union not been paralysed by bureaucracy for almost three decades, they could have sent a deployment of soldiers to Ukraine in a heartbeat. Instead of being self-sufficient as such a rich collection of countries should be able to do, the EU outsourced to NATO and the U.S. military, placing 65,000 defense troops in bases across western Europe. While outsourcing to the world's largest military may seem like a smart idea, it means that the EU has a lack of strategic autonomy, and on the off chance they do agree upon a military stance, they have very little ability to act upon their decision. Not only that, but the reliance upon the United States means that EU member states have become increasingly lax in their domestic defense policies. According to the 2021 analysis written by MIT's Hugo Meijer and Stephen G. Brooks, "…with such a high level of insurance [member states] have been able to steadily shrink their militaries and outsource their defense to Washington. … With their high per capita GDPs, these allies can afford to devote more money to their militaries, yet they have no incentive to do so. … This is welfare for the rich." (Meijer, Brooks). Countries as rich as France and Germany should be more than capable of responding to threats within and abroad of the EU borders, however, they have neutered themselves by relying too heavily upon U.S. aid and focusing on securing only domestic interests.

All of this is not to say that the European Union has completely failed to promote peace as an organization. Indeed, western Europe has seen a period of peace following World War Two

that prior to the establishment of NATO and eventually the EU would have been completely unprecedented. However, this peace only extends fully to core EU countries, starting to peeter out the further east one looks, and disappearing entirely once beyond the border. In fact, the EU seems entirely unwilling to take a stance at all upon military actions. As Andrew Williams of New Statesman UK points out, "Sanctions may be imposed, diplomatic measures applied, but they're often muted. Too frequently for some commentators, the economic weight of the EU has counted for nothing when faced with intractable conflicts around the world." (Williams). This tends to be the tone for the EU; richer individual states such as Germany, France, and until recently, the UK, military operations, but the EU governing body will turn its head as if nothing is happening. This occurs with frightening frequency too. During the Iraq War, the Russian Annexation of Crimea, and now the Invasion of Ukraine, ministers in Brussels treat conflict as a taboo issue. Perhaps thoughts and prayers will be sent to people affected by war, but the EU will turn its back on those same people to instead protect its economy from a specter that does not threaten it.

As the Ukrainian conflict drags on with no end in sight, the failures of the European Union as a peacekeeper become clearer than ever. Failure to react during times of crisis in other parts of the world can be dismissed since those conflicts are not European problems. However, Russian aggression in Ukraine is an extremely European problem, and the EU should respond as such. Sadly, they are unable to; completely immobilized by their inability to function as the unified body they so desperately wish to be. Circular arguments and heavy reliance on U.S. security stops the EU from "contributing to peace, security, and the sustainable development of the Earth, and enforcing strict observance of international law within the wider world" as every member state swore to do in the Lisbon Treaty. The complete and utter failure of the EU to

enforce peace and security, and enforce the observance of international law within Ukraine lays bare the fundamental issue within the dysfunctional organization; the Union is anything but united, and this lack of unity is a direct hindrance to world peace.

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