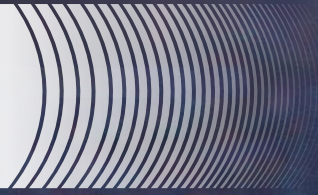


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## *Mind the Red Line*

Limits of  
European  
engagement  
in Russia's war  
against Ukraine

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FES Regional Office  
for International  
Cooperation

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## Methodological details

	Security Radar 2022	Security Radar 2022 Update
 <b>What?</b>	<b>Representative public opinion poll in 14 countries:</b> Armenia, Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Norway, Poland, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the United States	<b>Representative public opinion poll in 4 countries:</b> France, Germany, Latvia and Poland
 <b>Who?</b>	<b>27,500 respondents surveyed in 14 countries</b> Representative samples in each country	<b>8,063 respondents surveyed in 4 countries</b> Representative samples in each country
 <b>When?</b>	<b>September-October 2021</b>	<b>October 2022</b>
 <b>How?</b>	<b>CATI</b> (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing) in Armenia <b>CAWI</b> (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) in the 13 other countries carried out by Ipsos on behalf of FES	<b>CAWI</b> (Computer Assisted Web Interviewing) carried out by Ipsos on behalf of FES



## Limits of European engagement in Russia's war against Ukraine

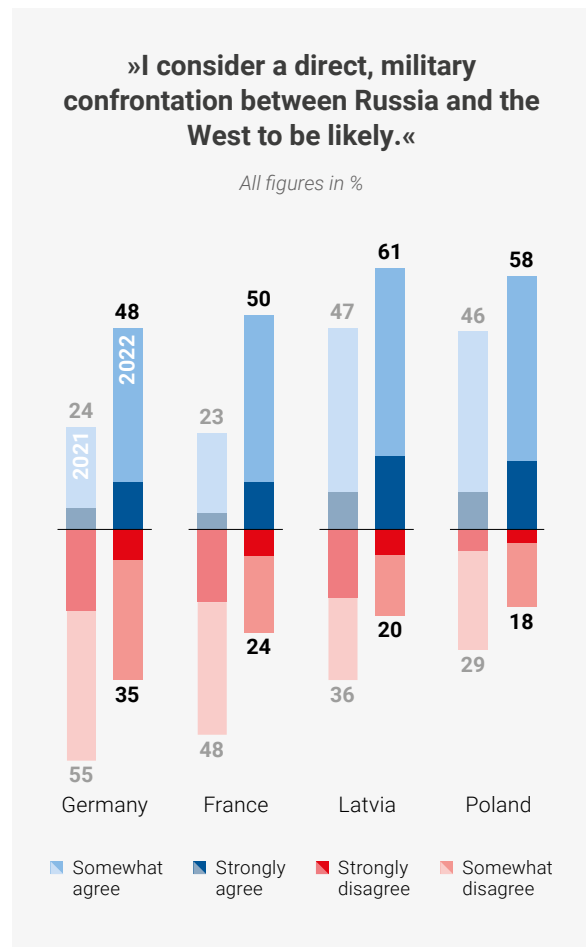
A major interstate war is taking place in Europe. Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine on 24 February 2022 has brought the dangers of war back into the consciousness of European citizens. Ten months into this war, questions arise concerning Europeans' role in it. Currently, they are supporting Ukrainian defence by sanctioning and isolating Russia, delivering weapons to Ukraine and supporting it financially. But the economic decoupling from Russia and especially its energy resources has started to have significant repercussions for European economies and societies. The provision of weapons bears the risk of Russian escalation against the supporting states, even by accident, as we were sharply reminded when a missile fell on Polish soil in November 2022. One of the defining factors in the ongoing war will be the sustainability of European support to Ukraine, which rests on popular consent.

This analysis therefore concentrates on German, French, Polish, and Latvian perceptions of the Russian war against Ukraine, based on two surveys conducted in autumn 2021 and autumn 2022. The paper analyses how the war has changed security perceptions in Europe. There is a specific focus on the surveyed countries' involvement in this war and public acceptance of the various instruments being applied. Lastly, the analysis aims at people's expectations of this war to assess how sustainable

## Rising fears and a clearer view on the conflict

The Russian war has had a considerable effect on citizens' fears and concerns in the surveyed countries. Especially the probability of new wars in Europe has risen in the eyes of the participants in our poll. This is most significant in France and Germany. In both countries the level of concern about new wars in Europe nearly doubled between the two surveys, from 39 to 70% in France and from 33 to 69% in Germany. The same applies to concerns about a direct military confrontation between Russia and the West. Again, the numbers have nearly doubled in Germany from 24 to 47% and more than doubled

Figure 1: Military confrontation



support might be and where the limits of engagement lie for European citizens.

in France from 23 to 50%. The possibility of a major inter-state war has clearly become more salient to the citizens of Europe. Whereas this was already perceived as a threat in the east of the Union, it has now also reached Germany and France. Nonetheless, there remains a difference. The threat of a direct military confrontation with Russia seems more likely for the respondents in Latvia and Poland, where the level of concern reaches approximately 60%, whereas in France and Germany it remains a little lower, at around 50%.

We also witness changing perceptions of the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine after the Russian attack. A main conclusion of the



comparison of our surveys conducted in 2021 and 2022 is that more respondents now have an informed opinion on questions surrounding Ukraine. Whereas in 2021 the share of respondents answering 'Don't know' to questions on the nature of and responsibility for the conflict was around 20%, in 2022 the share halved to about 10%.

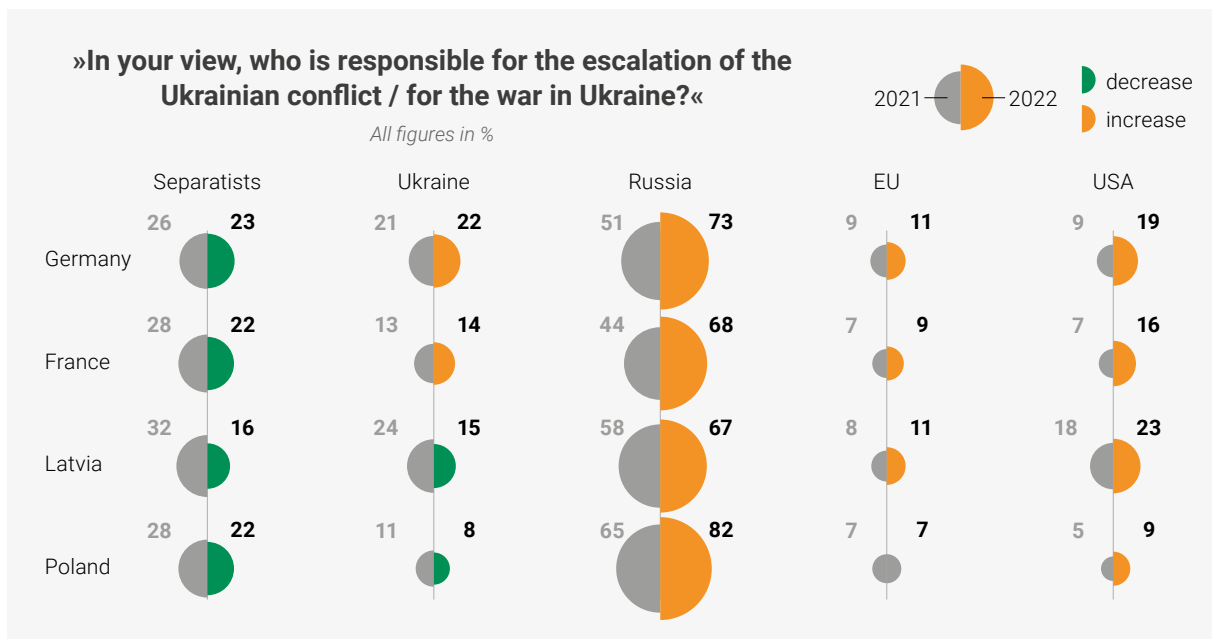
But there are also other common trends. In all four countries the conviction has diminished that the war between Ukraine and Russia is a conflict in which no other countries should intervene. Again, this position is more pronounced in the two eastern than in the two western cases, but the differences are smaller than in 2021. Russia is clearly identified as the main escalating factor, but interestingly there is also a growing belief in all four countries that the United States is part of the escalatory dynamic in this war.

What emerges from these observations is a broadly shared conflict perception among the four EU members that holds Russia responsible for the war. In all four states a relative (and sometimes absolute) majority believes that third countries should not stay out of this conflict. This leads to the question of what kind of intervention is deemed acceptable.

The role of third countries in this war is a more complex issue, in relation to which we can observe interesting differences between the level of engagement. As tools of engagement, we examined a series of instruments ranging from widening the sanctions, a ban on Russian oil and gas, more weapons delivery, and finally the potential sending of soldiers into the war. Overall, there is broad support for more sanctions on Russia, with all countries showing absolute majorities agreeing with such a measure. A similar picture emerges on the broader issue of countries' dependence on Russia after the attack. There is support by clear majorities in all countries for becoming more independent, even if this has effects on living standards. However, the picture becomes more nuanced when the focus shifts to tangible impacts that are easier to understand. When asked whether the respective country should ban imports of oil and gas from Russia, even if this leads to further price increases, the support becomes less pronounced.

As for more robust support for Ukraine that goes beyond economic means, a different picture is discernible. The question of providing more weapons to the Ukrainian military finds the four countries rather divided into nearly equal parts. This instrument of support is thus politically contested.

Figure 2: Responsibility for the war





But there is a clear red line when it comes to sending troops to Ukraine. Respondents in all four polled countries overwhelmingly oppose the sending of troops by their country. Here it becomes clear that citizens seem to be very conscious of the distinction between supporting Ukraine and becoming a party to the war.

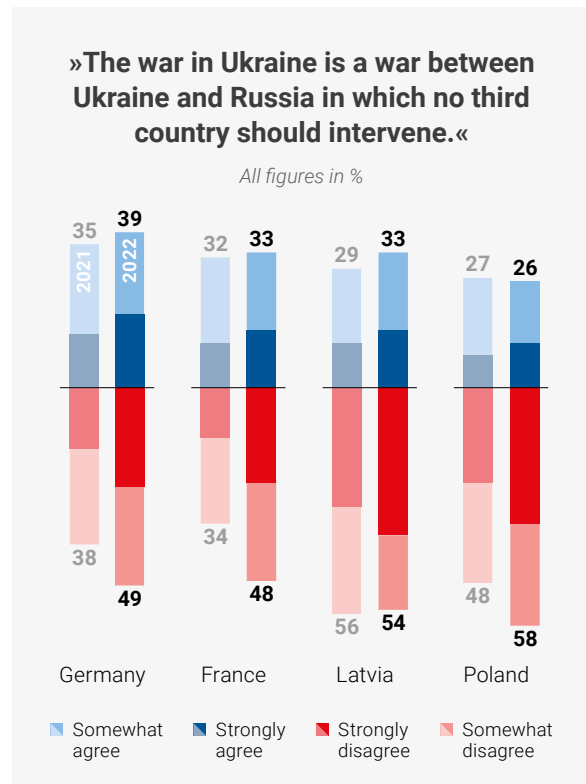
Looking ahead, the responses reveal a rather sombre picture with a high level of understanding of the complexity of the situation. The populations in the four surveyed countries have a fairly realistic view of the duration of this war and do not expect it to end soon. There is a broadly shared view that the war will not be decided on the battlefield – by either side. The biggest differences between the four countries are opinions on a military victory for Ukraine: whereas this is seen as a probable outcome by nearly a third of respondents in Poland and Latvia, only about a tenth in France and Germany believe it to be so.

When offered a rather simplistic choice between 'peace' and 'justice' there is a clear East-West divide. In France and Germany there are relative majorities supporting peace even at the cost of territorial compromises, whereas respondents in Latvia and Poland tend to reject this choice. Notably, in all four countries there are sizeable shares opting for the third option 'neither nor', in Poland and Latvia even relative majorities of respondents. Finally, the war is perceived in all countries as a territorial war between Russia and Ukraine and not as part of a broader ideological conflict between democracies and autocracies or an overarching geopolitical fight between Russia and the West.

### Convergence and differences

As we have already pointed out, there are considerable differences between the two western and the two eastern countries. But it is worth putting one substantial aspect centre stage: respondents in Germany and France notably claim that their countries have been weakened by this war. This might explain why they are also more open to reaching

Figure 3: Intervention



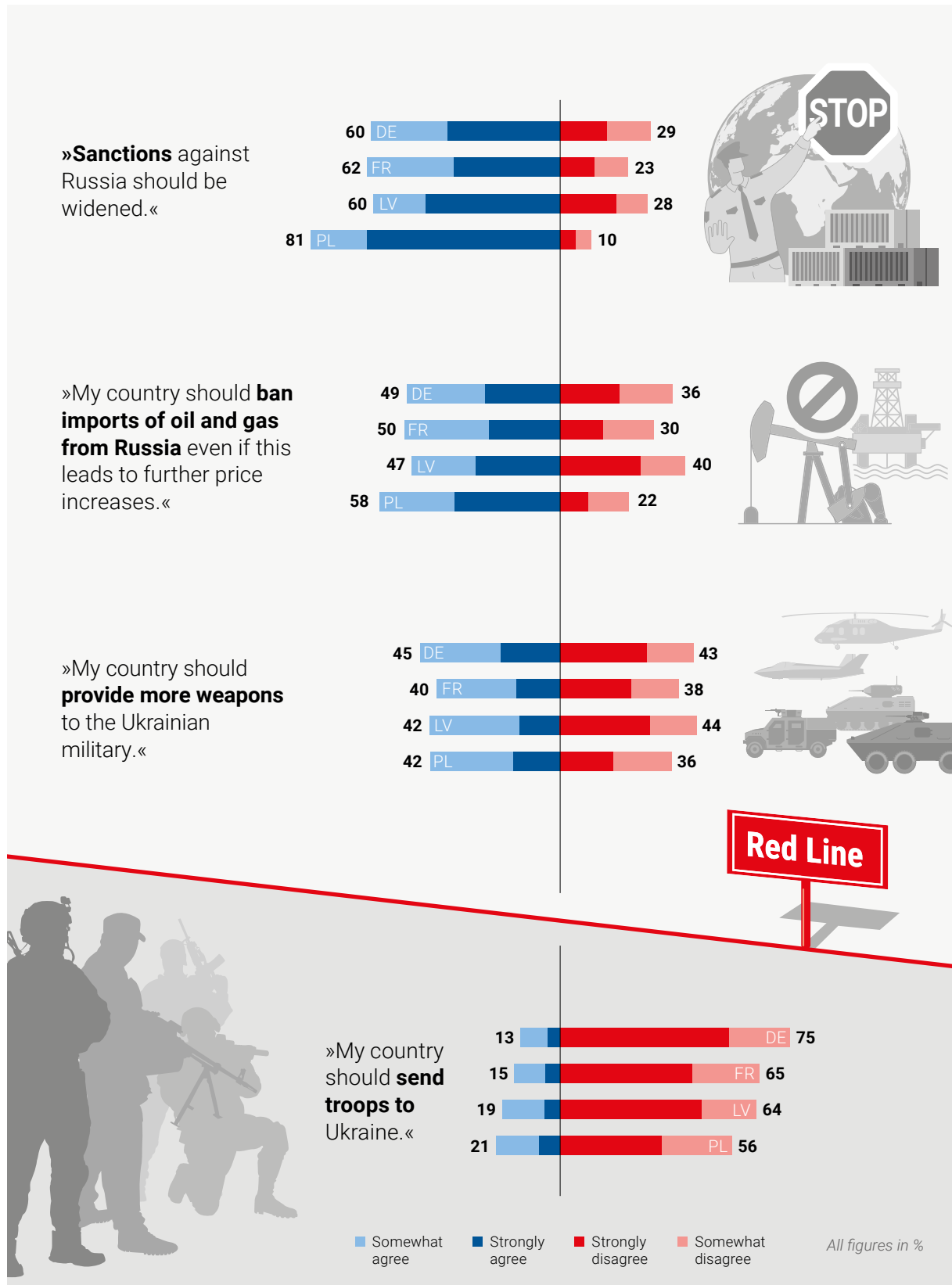
Looking at the broader geopolitical picture, three winners are identified that seem to have become stronger in the eyes of the public: the US, NATO, and China. The EU seems to have been less affected, whether positively or negatively, but there is also a clear loser. Russia is perceived by considerable majorities in all four countries to have been weakened by this war.

a peace agreement, even if it may entail territorial compromises for Ukraine.

Poland, on the other hand, seems to be the country most invested in this war, showing the most pronounced support on all questions regarding Ukraine, as well as housing a considerable part of Ukrainian war refugees without this being politically contested. That might also be connected with the



Figure 4: Levels of engagement





perception that Poland has been strengthened by this conflict and that the centre of gravity of European security has moved towards the east. The preparedness to send troops is relatively higher than in the other countries and the opposition lower. It is the only country in which the question of weapons delivery is not polarising society into two equal blocs, but showing stronger support for more weapons

deliveries. The widening of sanctions is also broadly backed by a significantly higher part of society than in the three other cases and, last but not least, the 'justice' camp – opting to punish Russia, even at the cost of more Ukrainians being displaced or killed – is highest in Poland, where the 'peace' camp is also smallest.

## **Summary**

The survey shows that there is growing awareness of the war. The Russian war against Ukraine has substantially changed perceptions of conflict and crisis in the surveyed countries. It has brought back fears of war, awareness of developments in Ukraine, questions concerning the broader frame of this war, and the involvement of the respective countries in it. There is a clear convergence towards the view that Russia is responsible for the escalation. This might seem obvious in light of the unprovoked attack and full-scale Russian invasion, but behind these numbers lies another development. The respondents show a deeper understanding of the war in Ukraine. This allows them to attribute blame for the conflict more easily than in 2021, as the number of people opting for 'Don't know' has decreased considerably.

The four countries start from different places and this is visible throughout this report. However, a convergent tendency is observable, although national idiosyncrasies remain notable. The concerns about war and conflict in general and Russia more specifically were already rather high in Poland and Latvia, even before the Russian attack, whereas France and Germany were far less concerned, with war seemingly far away and improbable. Ten months into the war, differences are still obvious in the survey, but have become smaller.

When looking at how respondents characterise this war and how their countries are related to it, a clear line is discernible between support and direct involvement. We have seen that a higher number of respondents in all four countries do not agree with the notion that this is a war between Russia and

Ukraine in which no third country should intervene. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a growing sense that, because Russia is clearly identified as the aggressor, other countries should also play a role in helping the party that has been attacked. However, in the perception of respondents this role is clearly limited. Sanctions as well as greater national independence from Russian fossil fuels are broadly supported, even if there is a hint of caution when price increases are mentioned.

When it comes to more direct support in the form of weapons the societies appear to be more polarised and cautious. Even in Poland, where support for Ukraine is most clearly expressed throughout the survey, a sizable share of respondents reject the provision of more weapons to Ukraine, whereas the other three countries are split equally. Direct involvement in the war by sending national troops is overwhelmingly opposed and represents a red line. Both items show a sense of the risk of unintended escalation through engagement, possibly related to the increased awareness of a possible direct military conflict between Russia and the West.

A similar distancing from this war can be observed in its characterisation. There is a clear rejection of the notion that this war might be part of a broader ideological conflict between democracy and autocracy. Such a notion would inevitably include all four countries directly and therefore make them parties to the conflict at least on an ideological level. The same goes for the characterisation of the war as a proxy conflict between Russia and the West. This is also not shared by a large part of respondents in the four countries.



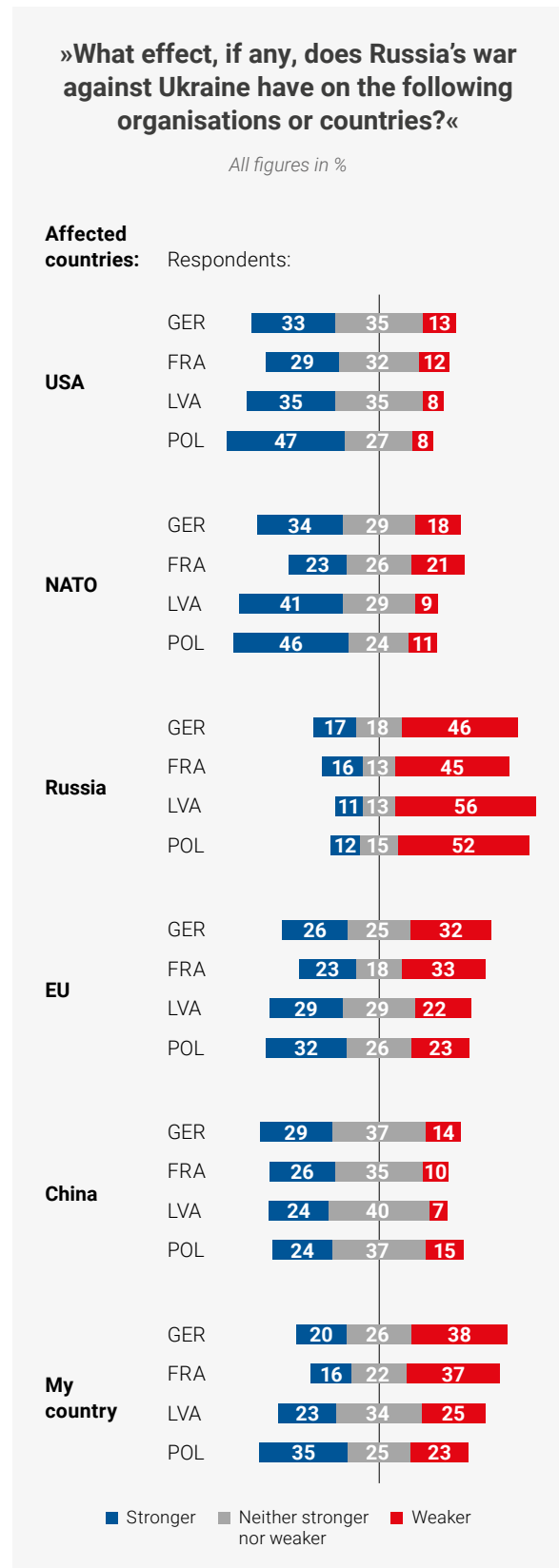
## Outlook

Summarising our findings in a political perspective, four observations emerge. We can observe a common awareness that Russia is the aggressor against Ukraine, as well as a potential enemy. There is also stable support for Ukraine, but no willingness to become embroiled in this war. The softer measures in support of Ukraine are approved of across the board, namely decoupling from Russia's oil and gas as well as sanctions. This was the case before winter set in and rising energy costs have impacted living costs in the respective countries. The societies' willingness to suffer has not yet been tested and could prove to be a weak pillar in upholding sustainable support for Ukraine without economic measures softening the impact of rising prices.

The provision of weapons is already politically contested and divides societies. The red line, however, is the direct involvement of troops. The threshold between support act and main act that seems to guide respondents is also expressed in the framing of this war, which is defined neither in ideological nor in geopolitical terms. This allows the expression of continued but limited support, without being in danger of becoming a party to the conflict.

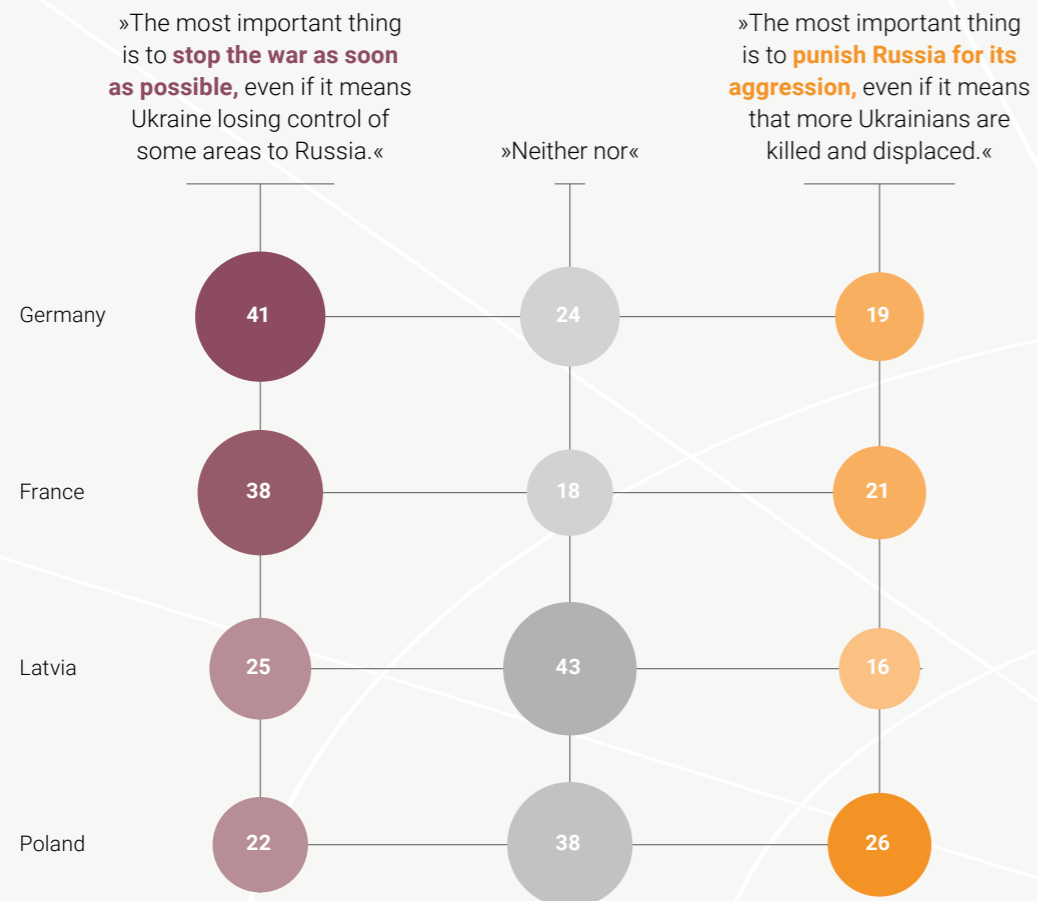
What is notable concerning the sustainability of support is its setting in the context of a widely shared expectation that the war will be ongoing for the foreseeable future, without a clear path towards ending it. European citizens thus seem to be buckling up for a longer conflict. Despite that rather grim outlook, there is a clear wish to support the attacked Ukraine against the aggressor Russia, but to stay out of direct conflict. This allows for a continued sanctions regime, although it might need to be combined with packages mitigating the effects on energy prices, when these start to bite into people's pockets. The ongoing provision of weapons needs to be explained continuously and case by case, as it could become a polarising issue. Governments need to be aware of the escalatory risks in this conflict, which could be linked to their support for Ukraine, given that the one leitmotif of this survey is the red line between helping and participating. This red line marks the limit of engagement for the countries we analysed.

Figure 5: Effect of war

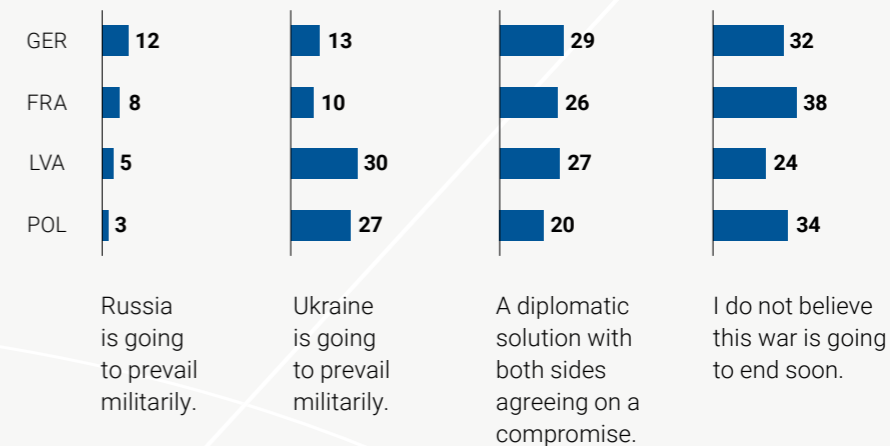




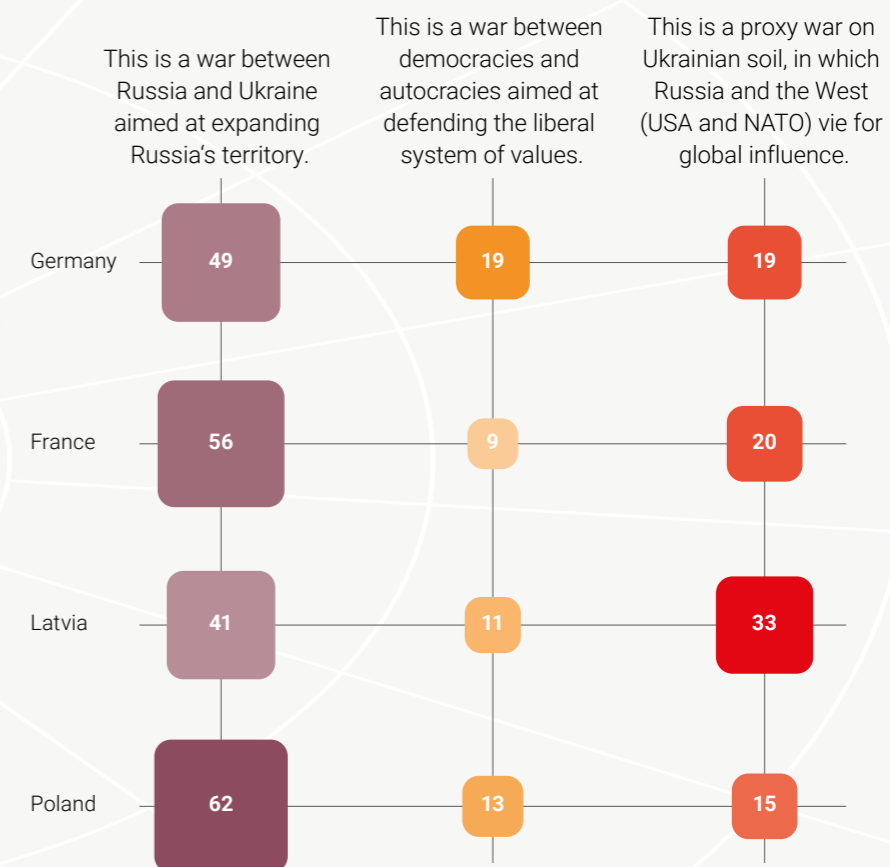
»Which of the following statements comes closest to your view?«



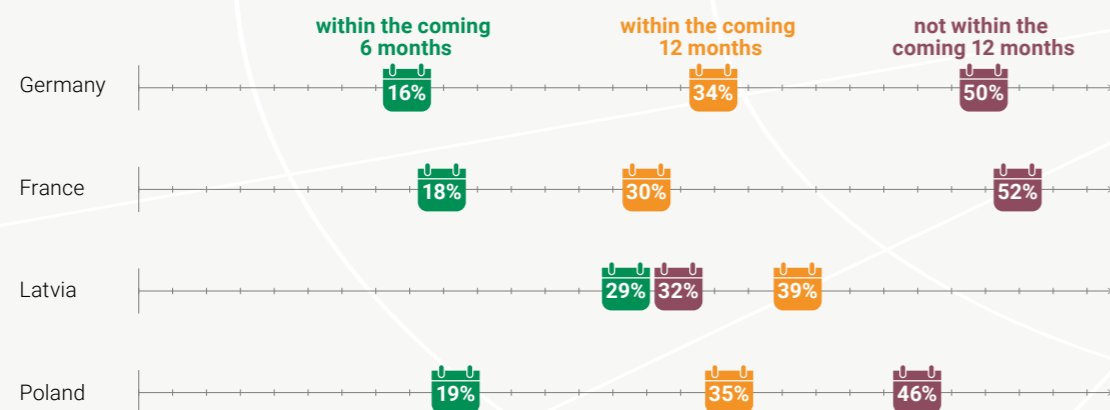
»How do you believe this war is going to end?«



»How would you characterise Russia's war against Ukraine?«



»In your opinion, when will the war between Russia and Ukraine come to an end?«



Combined responses "strongly agree" and "somewhat agree". Deviations from 100 % result from: "don't know" and "no answer". All figures in %

## ***FES ROCPE in Vienna***

Established in 2016, the FES Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe (FES ROCPE) addresses today's profound challenges to European security. It also works closely with the OSCE towards revitalising cooperative security.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 was a watershed moment for security in Europe and has rendered obsolete previous visions of European order. A new Cold War or even more unstable relations between Russia and the West are the probable outcome of this war, creating an environment of confrontation and containment in Europe. At the same time, planetary challenges such as climate change or pandemics continue to threaten peace and security and require cooperative approaches.

In these uncertain times, FES ROCPE continues to develop new ideas under the aegis of solution-oriented policymaking, together with experts, politicians and policy planners from Eastern Europe, Russia, the EU and the US. The aim is to tackle interconnected security challenges, contribute to conflict resolution and strengthen the idea of common and indivisible security in Europe in the spirit of the Paris and Istanbul Charters (1990/1999). It is our belief that organisations such as the FES have a responsibility to come up with new ideas and to introduce them into the political process in Europe.

Our activities include:

- regional and international workshops aimed at developing new concepts on stabilising the security situation in Europe, dealing with conflicts and achieving lasting peace in Europe;
- maintaining a regional network of young professionals working on de-escalation, cooperation and peace in Europe;
- regular public opinion polling on security matters;
- cooperation with the OSCE in the three dimensions of security: the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human.

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