

Climate Impacts of the Ukraine War

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ABSTRACT

The war in Ukraine has had a profound effect on climate politics and policies around the world. It has caused widespread economic crises and undermined global climate targets. It has also, however, had the potential to speed up energy transition in the mostly developed countries of the Global North. This article discusses these challenges and introduces a special section of this issue of the *Czech Journal of International Relations*, in which several leading scholars share their views on the climate impacts of the war on and beyond the EU.

KEYWORDS

European Union, climate, Ukraine, war, energy, transition

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INTRODUCTION

The war in Ukraine has had a tremendous impact on world politics. It has caused severe economic crises and spurred high inflation, exacerbated existing conflicts, propelled hundreds of thousands of people to leave homes and reconfigured the existing world order, leading some authors to argue that a new Cold War is upon us (KOTKIN 2022). Among the most severe consequences of the war were those in the fields of energy and environmental/climate politics. The Russian grip on oil and gas markets, combined with the market volatility in the face of the war, has led to dramatic increases of resource prices, which hit the European Union (EU) the hardest, but also had significant climate and energy repercussions beyond Europe.

The security implications of the war for Europe are clear. It is generally assumed that the war has destabilized the architecture of European security in military and territorial terms (VOGLER 2023). But the impacts of the war were not bound only to hard security concerns of European states. There are severe climate implications of the war, which have clearly linked hard security concerns to climate concerns. The war economy in Russia and Ukraine but also in the allied countries, has produced a huge amount of carbon emissions (BBC 2022), and has undermined the willingness of many countries to strengthen their climate pledges, as was apparent in the failure of the 2022 UN Conference of Parties in Sharm el-Sheikh. The rise in gas prices and the resulting energy wars have also prompted some countries to discuss reopening/reusing other energy resources such as coal that have slowly been withering in the developed countries' energy mixes.

Europe was particularly hit by the spike in prices. In many of the EU countries, rising energy prices led to inflation – somewhere as high as 25 percent – and the prices of regular commodities and goods have basically doubled over 2022 and 2023. This has in many ways resulted from the growing reliance of several countries (most notably Germany) on Russian gas, which was seen as a means of transition towards renewables. Within one year, the EU has made great strides to detach itself from Russian gas and oil, diminishing the share of Russian oil from 27 percent to below 10 percent by the end of 2022, and that of gas from 31 to 18 percent (EUROSTAT 2023). But the EU was not the only entity hit by the crisis. Inflation and rising prices coupled with the EU's sudden thirst for liquified natural gas (LNG)

that was previously routed to Asia, have had a negative economic effect on most countries around the world. For some developing countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia, the new energy reality meant that they were unable to secure sufficient resources, and experienced several serious blackouts (STORROW – SCHONHARDT 2023).

The global energy supply has indeed been damaged by the war. And yet the reactions of particular countries have been greatly varied. Whereas several developed countries, including many within the EU, have advocated using the opportunity to expand on clean energy sources and decouple from fossil fuels, others were unable to do so and had to resort to burning more coal. The division once again primarily rested on the access to capital – those that were able to afford higher prices were able to diversify, while those that weren't did not. But there were other reasons too, stemming from the perception and securitization of the Russian threat to the relationship with China.

The Forum presented in this issue of the *Czech Journal of International Relations* focuses on the climate impacts of the Ukraine war. It presents six articles that deal with specific questions within the general theme. The first two pieces, written by John Vogler of Keele University and Jon Birger Skjærseth of the Fridtjof Nansen Institute, analyse the immediate impacts of the war and the challenges it brought to the European Union's security and energy strategy. Vogler introduces the forum with several general considerations regarding the impact of the war on the EU's domestic and foreign policy. He shows that whereas before the war, EU conceptions of climate and energy security had begun to converge in a "virtuous synergy" that supported the EU's climate leadership, the war has profoundly altered the immediacy and location of the perceived threat, leading to a dramatic reorientation of energy and security policies. Skjærseth in many ways confirms these claims, and goes one step further to argue that the war has strengthened rather than weakened the 'Fit for 55' package, accelerated the EU's energy transition and created conditions that can strengthen the EU's international climate leadership.

Oleskandra Kovalevska of Metropolitan University Prague and Mats Braun of the Institute of International Relations Prague build on these claims, but focus on the impacts of the war on the EU's narratives rather

than policies. They argue that the war has merged the EU's foundational peace and climate leader narratives to illustrate the EU as the peaceful green leader in contrast to the brutal aggression of the authoritarian and climate-hurting Russian regime. This has further legitimized the EU's transition to renewables via the Fit-for-55 package. Miriam Prys-Hansen of Giga Hamburg and Simon Kaack of Lund University look in more detail at the energy impacts of the war. They focus on the EU's thirst for sustainable resources beyond oil and gas, which was clearly exacerbated by the war. Hydrogen has emerged as a resource with a significant potential to allow the EU to reach its climate targets. Prys-Hansen and Kaack focus on India as one of the EU's main hydrogen trading partners and show its growing importance for the old continent, albeit with significant hurdles.

Ulv Hanssen of Soka University and Florentine Koppenborg of Technical University Munich continue in analysing the influence of the war beyond the EU. They look into the impacts of the war on Japan to show an example of a particular regional dynamic. Japan has securitized the war to advance the country's ongoing security transition, which significantly influenced the wording of the late 2022 new security strategy. At the same time, however, it has been much slower in translating the outcomes of the war to stronger climate pledges and pushing towards renewables. The reason, as Hanssen and Koppenborg argue, lies in Japan's reluctance to be dependent on China, which controls a significant majority of the renewables technology and infrastructure markets. And lastly, Chad Briggs of the Asian Institute of Management and Miriam Matejova of Masaryk University Brno analyse the Russian hybrid warfare strategies that were exacerbated by the war. Briggs and Matejova argue that Russia has been increasingly attacking the climate regime as a means of hybrid warfare by undermining trust in democratic institutions, scientific data, and the resilience of Western societies.

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