

EU-GLORDER

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Jeopolitik Çağda Avrupa Birliği ***The EU in an Age of Geopolitics***

SEMINAR HAND OUT

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Table of Content

1) Envisaging the changing security threats: EU and crisis management
Prof. Dr. Emel Parlar Dal

2) Reordering and Rebordering Europe: A critical Geopolitical perspective
Prof. Dr. Beken Saatçioğlu

3) EU and Challenging powers
Dr. Nilay Tüzgen

4) Rescaling and de-geopolitization of Turkish-European relations
Dr. Samiratu Dipama

5) European Geopolitics: A theoretical Approach
Nobuhide Mert Matsumoto

6) EU-China-Russia in an age of geopolitics
Dr. Ahmet Tüzgen

7) European Geopolitics in the Middle East
Doç. Dr. Ferit Belder



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About the Project

Our exciting project, supported by the European Union, focuses on understanding the contemporary international order and examining how we respond to the changing dynamics of the international system. The primary objective of the project is to explore how the European Union's perception of the liberal international order is evolving in response to shifting global power balances and the new geopolitical challenges posed by the rise of illiberal states.

In today's post-Western international order, major global actors are redefining their international roles and responsibilities in order to respond more effectively to global challenges and to address the weakening of multilateralism.

The European Union is one of the principal supranational regional actors significantly affected by this transformation. Accordingly, the project seeks to examine how the EU adapts its foreign and security policies to this evolving geopolitical environment while continuing to promote multilateral cooperation, democratic values, and a rules-based international order.

However, the implications of the post-Western transformation of the international order for the European Union's international and geopolitical influence require further examination. Although the EU has long been regarded as a leading advocate of the liberal international order, systemic changes that have unfolded since the 2008 global financial crisis have contributed to an international environment that is increasingly less Western- and Europe-centered.

This project seeks to address this gap by contributing to teaching, research, and public discussion on the EU's global and geopolitical role in a changing international order.

Jean Monnet Chair

*Rethinking the EU and the
Contested Global Order in A
Geopolitical Age*

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Through a series of intensive educational activities, workshops, and research-oriented discussions targeting selected audiences—including citizens, students, academics, and private sector professionals—the project aims to promote a deeper understanding of the EU's evolving position within the contemporary international system.

More specifically, the project examines the EU's relationship with the liberal international order, its engagement with the emerging world, and its geopolitical role in international politics. It explores how the EU has responded to the post-Western transformation of the international order, how it has adjusted its global position in response to shifts in the international balance of power, and how it has redefined its relations with emerging powers in an international system characterized by the redistribution of power. These questions constitute the central focus of the project.

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Envisaging the changing security threats: EU and crisis management

The security environment surrounding the European Union (EU) has become increasingly complex over the past decade. Traditional military threats now coexist with non-traditional challenges such as cyberattacks, terrorism, irregular migration, pandemics, climate change, energy insecurity, and hybrid warfare. At the same time, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, instability in the Middle East, and growing geopolitical competition have reinforced the need for the EU to strengthen its crisis management capabilities.



**PROF. DR. EMEL
PARLAR DAL**

CHAIR OF THE EUGLORDER PROJECT

The EU approaches security through a comprehensive crisis management framework, combining diplomatic, civilian, economic, humanitarian, and, where appropriate, military instruments. Rather than relying solely on military power, the Union seeks to prevent conflicts, respond to emergencies, stabilize post-conflict societies, and build resilience against future crises. This integrated approach is implemented through the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which enables the EU to conduct civilian and military missions in regions affected by conflict and instability.

Recent crises have demonstrated that many security threats extend beyond national borders. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of coordination in health security, while cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns have underscored the need to protect critical infrastructure and democratic institutions. Climate change has also emerged as a security concern by contributing to resource scarcity, displacement, and humanitarian emergencies.

The adoption of the Strategic Compass in 2022 marked an important step in strengthening the EU's security and defence policy. The document identifies key priorities, including improving crisis response capabilities, increasing resilience against hybrid threats, investing in defence cooperation, and enhancing partnerships with organizations such as NATO and the United Nations. It reflects the EU's recognition that security challenges are becoming more interconnected and require coordinated responses.

Despite these developments, the EU continues to face important challenges. Differences among member states' foreign policy priorities can complicate rapid decision-making, while limited military capabilities mean that the Union often relies on cooperation with NATO and international partners. Nevertheless, the EU remains an important actor in international crisis management through its emphasis on multilateralism, preventive diplomacy, humanitarian assistance, and civilian crisis response.

As global security threats continue to evolve, effective crisis management will require the EU to remain adaptable, strengthen cooperation among its member states, and maintain a balanced approach that combines security objectives with the promotion of peace, stability, and international law.

Reordering and Rebordering Europe: A critical Geopolitical perspective

The concepts of reordering and rebordering have become increasingly important in understanding the European Union's response to contemporary geopolitical challenges. While European integration has traditionally been associated with the removal of internal borders and the promotion of free movement, recent crises have demonstrated that borders remain central to questions of security, migration, sovereignty, and regional stability. A critical geopolitical perspective examines not only how borders are managed but also how political actors define, justify, and reshape them in response to changing circumstances.



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The European Union was founded on the principle of reducing barriers between its member states. The Schengen Area allows the free movement of people across most internal borders, making mobility one of the defining features of European integration. At the same time, the EU has developed common policies on asylum, immigration, and external border management. Articles 67 and 78 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) establish that these policies should be based on solidarity among member states while ensuring

protection for individuals who require international protection and respecting the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits returning individuals to places where they may face persecution or serious harm.

In recent years, however, Europe has experienced a series of crises that have challenged this model. The migration crisis of 2015, the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and continuing instability in neighbouring regions have all influenced how European states perceive borders. Temporary internal border controls have occasionally been reintroduced, while greater attention has been devoted to strengthening the Union's external frontiers. These developments illustrate that borders remain dynamic political instruments rather than fixed geographical lines.

The concept of reordering Europe refers to broader changes in Europe's political and strategic environment. Geopolitical competition, energy security, defence cooperation, and changing relations with neighbouring regions have encouraged the EU to reconsider many aspects of its external policies. Rather than focusing exclusively on economic integration, the Union has increasingly incorporated security, resilience, and strategic autonomy into its policy agenda. This process does not necessarily replace the EU's traditional commitment to openness and multilateral cooperation but reflects an effort to adapt to a more uncertain international environment.

Rebordering, by contrast, describes the process through which borders regain political significance after a period during which they appeared to be diminishing. This does not simply mean building physical barriers. It also includes stricter migration controls, enhanced surveillance technologies, visa regulations, and closer cooperation with neighbouring countries on border management.

The objective is often to balance freedom of movement within the Union with effective management of the EU's external borders.

A critical geopolitical perspective highlights that these developments involve both practical and political considerations. Borders are not only security mechanisms but also expressions of political priorities and identity. Decisions regarding migration, asylum, and border control often require balancing humanitarian responsibilities with domestic security concerns. Consequently, debates surrounding Europe's borders frequently involve questions of solidarity among member states, burden-sharing, and the protection of fundamental rights.

The European response has therefore combined multiple objectives. On one hand, the EU continues to promote legal migration pathways, international protection for refugees, and cooperation with international organizations. On the other hand, it has strengthened external border management, expanded the role of agencies such as Frontex, and pursued partnerships with neighbouring countries to manage migration flows more effectively. These policies illustrate the EU's attempt to reconcile openness with security in an increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

Reordering and rebordering should be understood as interconnected processes reflecting Europe's adaptation to changing regional and global conditions. They demonstrate that European integration is not a static project but one that continuously responds to new political, security, and humanitarian challenges. From a critical geopolitical perspective, these developments reveal the ongoing effort to balance free movement, solidarity, security, and international legal obligations while preserving the fundamental principles upon which the European Union is founded.

EU and Emerging Powers

The international system has undergone significant transformation in recent decades as the influence of emerging powers has grown alongside that of traditional Western actors. Countries such as China, India, Brazil, Türkiye, and others have expanded their economic, political, and diplomatic roles, contributing to a more multipolar global environment. For the European Union (EU), these developments have required a reassessment of its external relations and foreign policy priorities.



DR. NİLAY TÜZGEN

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The EU traditionally promoted a rules-based international order founded on multilateral cooperation, international law, and open markets. However, the rise of emerging powers has introduced new opportunities for cooperation as well as new areas of competition. Rather than viewing these countries solely through one perspective, the EU has increasingly adopted differentiated approaches that recognize the diversity of their political systems, economic interests, and strategic ambitions.

China provides one of the clearest examples of this balanced approach.

In its 2019 EU-China Strategic Outlook, the European Union described China simultaneously as a cooperation partner, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival. This framework reflects the complexity of the relationship. The EU and China cooperate on issues such as climate change, global trade, and sustainable development, while also competing in technology, investment, industrial policy, and global influence. At the same time, differences regarding human rights, market access, and regional security—including developments concerning Taiwan—continue to shape political dialogue between the two sides.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has also influenced European debates. While some European countries have viewed Chinese investment as an opportunity to improve infrastructure and economic connectivity, others have expressed concerns regarding strategic dependence, transparency, and critical infrastructure. Consequently, the EU has sought to diversify its economic partnerships and strengthen its own connectivity initiatives while maintaining dialogue with China.

Relations with other emerging powers are similarly shaped by a combination of cooperation and strategic interests. The EU works closely with countries such as India, Brazil, South Africa, and Türkiye on trade, energy, regional stability, migration, and global governance. These partnerships demonstrate that the EU's external policy extends beyond traditional alliances and increasingly reflects the changing distribution of global economic and political influence.

The relationship between the EU and Türkiye illustrates this complexity. Türkiye remains an important strategic partner due to its geographic location, economic ties with Europe, role in regional security, and cooperation on migration management.

At the same time, the relationship also involves longstanding political and institutional challenges. As a result, EU–Türkiye relations continue to evolve through dialogue, sectoral cooperation, and mutual strategic interests despite periodic disagreements.

Understanding these relationships also requires moving beyond purely state-centric analysis. Contemporary international relations involve multiple levels of interaction, including governments, regional organizations, businesses, civil society, and international institutions. This broader perspective helps explain why cooperation can continue in areas such as trade, energy, or climate policy even when political disagreements persist in other fields.

Overall, the EU's engagement with emerging powers reflects an effort to adapt to an increasingly multipolar international system. Rather than adopting a single policy toward all rising powers, the Union seeks to balance cooperation, economic competition, and the protection of its strategic interests. This pragmatic approach recognizes that emerging powers are becoming increasingly influential in shaping global governance while highlighting the importance of dialogue, multilateralism, and mutually beneficial cooperation in addressing shared international challenges.

Rescaling and de-geopolitization of Turkish-European relations

Relations between Türkiye and the European Union (EU) have long been shaped by geography, economics, security, and political cooperation. Traditionally, these relations have often been interpreted through geopolitical concepts that emphasize Türkiye's strategic location as a bridge between Europe and Asia or as a buffer zone on the EU's southeastern frontier.



**DR. SAMIRATOU
DIPAMA**

THOMAS SANKARA
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While geography remains important, contemporary approaches increasingly suggest that Turkish–European relations should also be understood through broader political, economic, and social interactions. In this context, the concepts of rescaling and de-geopoliticization provide useful analytical perspectives.

Rescaling refers to the idea that international relations are shaped by interactions occurring at multiple geographical and political levels rather than exclusively between national governments.

Instead of focusing only on state-to-state diplomacy, rescaling highlights the importance of local authorities, regional organizations, businesses, civil society, universities, and transnational networks. This perspective recognizes that cooperation between Türkiye and the EU extends beyond formal accession negotiations and includes areas such as trade, migration management, education, environmental policy, transportation, and research collaboration.

The historical development of EU–Türkiye relations illustrates this multi-level character. The 1963 Ankara Agreement established the foundation for closer economic and political cooperation, while the 1995 Customs Union significantly expanded economic integration. These institutional arrangements created extensive links between public institutions, private sectors, and societies on both sides. As a result, the relationship cannot be understood solely through high-level political negotiations but must also consider the wide range of interactions that occur across different governance levels.

The concept of de-geopoliticization complements this perspective by encouraging analysis beyond traditional geopolitical narratives. Rather than viewing Türkiye only through its strategic location or security significance, this approach emphasizes functional cooperation and shared policy interests. Issues such as trade, energy, migration, climate policy, digital transformation, and scientific cooperation increasingly shape the relationship alongside questions of security and regional stability. This does not imply that geopolitics has disappeared; instead, it suggests that geopolitical considerations should be examined together with economic, institutional, and societal dimensions.

Türkiye's identity as both a European and Asian country continues to influence its relations with the EU. Descriptions of Türkiye as a "bridge country" or a "buffer zone" remain common in political discourse because of its geographic position connecting Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. However, these labels represent only one aspect of a much broader relationship. The extensive economic interdependence, close commercial ties, people-to-people exchanges, and institutional cooperation between Türkiye and the EU demonstrate that their relationship cannot be reduced to geography alone.

Viewing Turkish–European relations through rescaling also helps explain why cooperation often continues despite political disagreements. Although differences may emerge on enlargement, foreign policy, or democratic governance, collaboration frequently persists in areas such as customs, migration management, higher education, transportation, and regional economic development. This reflects the existence of multiple channels of interaction that operate simultaneously at different political and societal levels.

Overall, the concepts of rescaling and de-geopoliticization offer a broader understanding of EU–Türkiye relations. They encourage moving beyond a purely state-centric or geopolitical interpretation by recognizing the importance of multi-level governance, institutional cooperation, and transnational networks. Rather than replacing geopolitical analysis, these perspectives complement it by demonstrating that contemporary Turkish–European relations are shaped by a combination of strategic, economic, institutional, and societal factors that together define one of the EU's most significant external partnerships.

European Geopolitics: A theoretical Approach

Geopolitics examines how geography influences political power, foreign policy, and international relations. Rather than viewing geography as a deterministic force, modern geopolitical analysis considers how states interpret and use geographical realities to pursue their strategic interests. As presented in this lecture, geopolitics can be understood as the interaction between territory, political decision-making, and national objectives, where geographical conditions both shape and are shaped by state policies.



**NOBUHIDE MERT
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MARMARA
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Classical geopolitical thought provides several theoretical frameworks for understanding Europe's strategic importance. One of the earliest is Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory, introduced in 1904. Mackinder argued that control of the Eurasian landmass—particularly Eastern Europe and the Heartland stretching across central Eurasia—would provide decisive strategic advantages due to its vast resources, defensibility, and internal communications. According to this perspective, Eastern Europe occupies a pivotal position because it serves as the gateway to the Eurasian interior.

An alternative interpretation was developed by Alfred Thayer Mahan, who emphasized the strategic significance of maritime power. Mahan argued that states possessing strong navies, secure sea lines of communication, and control over strategic maritime chokepoints enjoy considerable political and economic advantages. For Europe, whose prosperity has historically depended on maritime trade and overseas connections, sea power has remained an important component of geopolitical influence.

Nicholas Spykman's Rimland Theory complemented and challenged Mackinder's approach by arguing that the coastal regions surrounding Eurasia—the Rimland—are more strategically significant than the Heartland itself. Since these areas combine large populations, economic activity, maritime access, and military mobility, Spykman maintained that controlling the Rimland was essential for maintaining global balance. Europe occupies the western section of this coastal belt, reinforcing its continuing geopolitical importance.

These classical theories significantly influenced twentieth-century strategic thinking. During the Cold War, George Kennan's Containment Strategy proposed limiting Soviet expansion through long-term political, economic, and diplomatic measures rather than direct military confrontation. At the same time, the Soviet Union developed the Brezhnev Doctrine, which justified intervention within socialist states to preserve communist rule. This approach was later abandoned under the Sinatra Doctrine, which allowed Eastern European countries greater freedom to determine their own political systems and contributed to the peaceful transformation of Europe at the end of the Cold War.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, European geopolitics entered a new phase. Many Central and Eastern European countries sought membership in NATO and the European Union to enhance their security, strengthen democratic institutions, and integrate into Western political and economic structures. NATO, in turn, accepted new members as part of its open-door policy while seeking to promote stability across the continent. However, several countries—including Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova—remained outside the Alliance, creating what has often been described as a geopolitical "grey zone." These regions continue to occupy an important place in European security discussions because they lie between Euro-Atlantic institutions and Russia's sphere of influence.

The presentation also highlights broader theoretical debates about Europe's changing geopolitical environment. Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis suggested that cultural and civilizational identities could become increasingly important in international politics after the Cold War, while contemporary discussions examine Russia's Eurasian geopolitical outlook and the continuing strategic significance of Eastern Europe. These perspectives illustrate that European geopolitics cannot be understood solely through military or territorial competition but also involves questions of identity, historical memory, political values, and regional order.

Finally, contemporary European geopolitics continues to evolve in response to changing global circumstances. The presentation notes that recent developments, including the war in Ukraine, debates over European defence, and uncertainty in transatlantic relations, have encouraged renewed discussion about Europe's strategic autonomy and security responsibilities.

These developments do not invalidate classical geopolitical theories; rather, they demonstrate that concepts such as land power, sea power, strategic geography, and regional balance remain valuable analytical tools when combined with contemporary political, economic, and institutional perspectives.

Overall, a theoretical approach to European geopolitics shows that Europe's strategic position results from the interaction of geography, history, institutions, and political decision-making. Classical theories provide important conceptual foundations, while contemporary developments demonstrate the need to adapt these frameworks to an increasingly interconnected and multipolar international environment. This combination of historical theory and modern geopolitical analysis offers a balanced framework for understanding Europe's evolving role in international politics.

EU-China-Russia in an age of geopolitics

The international environment has become increasingly shaped by geopolitical competition, strategic rivalry, and economic interdependence. Since the end of the Cold War, relations between the European Union (EU), China, and Russia have evolved considerably. The optimism of the 1990s, when economic globalization and international cooperation were expected to reduce geopolitical tensions, has gradually given way to a more competitive international environment. Today, the interactions among these three actors reflect a combination of cooperation, competition, and security concerns.



**DR. AHMET BİLAL
TÜZGEN**

MILLİ SAVUNMA
ÜNİVERSİTESİ

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the European Union expanded its political and economic engagement with both China and Russia. During this period, trade increased significantly, investment flows grew, and political dialogue became more frequent. Many policymakers believed that economic interdependence would contribute to greater international stability and encourage closer cooperation. This period is often described as one in which globalization and multilateral institutions played a central role in international relations.

Over time, however, geopolitical considerations became increasingly important. Relations between the EU and China developed into a complex partnership involving both cooperation and competition. China became one of the European Union's largest trading partners, creating deep economic links through trade, investment, and global supply chains. At the same time, differences over market access, technology, human rights, and strategic industries led the EU to adopt a more balanced approach. Consequently, the European Union today views China simultaneously as a partner for addressing global challenges, an economic competitor, and a systemic rival in certain areas.

Relations with Russia followed a different trajectory. Although cooperation initially expanded after the Cold War, disagreements concerning regional security, energy dependence, and the post-Soviet space gradually increased. Events such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 fundamentally altered EU–Russia relations. The European Union responded through economic sanctions, efforts to reduce energy dependence on Russia, and increased support for Ukraine. These developments reinforced the importance of security and defence within the EU's foreign policy.

The evolving relationships among the EU, China, and Russia demonstrate that economic interdependence does not eliminate geopolitical competition. While trade and investment continue to connect states, strategic concerns increasingly influence decisions regarding technology, energy, infrastructure, critical supply chains, and security. The COVID-19 pandemic, disruptions in global logistics, and the war in Ukraine further highlighted the importance of resilience and reducing excessive strategic dependencies.

In response to these changes, the European Union has sought to strengthen its capacity to act in an increasingly uncertain international environment. Concepts such as strategic autonomy, economic security, and resilience have gained greater importance within European policy discussions. These concepts do not imply isolation from global markets but rather emphasize the ability to protect critical sectors, diversify partnerships, and respond effectively to geopolitical challenges while maintaining commitments to international cooperation and multilateralism.

Overall, the relationship between the European Union, China, and Russia illustrates the complexity of international politics in an age of geopolitics. Cooperation remains necessary on global issues such as climate change, trade, and international governance, yet strategic competition and security concerns increasingly shape diplomatic relations. Understanding these interactions requires recognizing that contemporary international relations are defined not by a simple division between cooperation and conflict, but by the coexistence of both. The EU's approach therefore reflects an ongoing effort to balance economic engagement, political dialogue, and the protection of its strategic interests within a rapidly changing global order.

European Geopolitics in the Middle East

The attacks carried out by Hamas against Israel on 7 October 2023 marked a major turning point in Middle Eastern politics and significantly affected the European Union's foreign policy. The attacks resulted in the deaths of civilians and the taking of hostages, prompting widespread international condemnation. Israel responded with a large-scale military campaign in Gaza, creating a humanitarian crisis characterized by extensive civilian casualties, displacement, and the destruction of critical infrastructure.



**DOÇ. DR. FERİT
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Since then, the European Union (EU) has sought to balance its long-standing support for Israel's security with its commitment to international law, humanitarian principles, and the protection of civilians.

The EU's initial reaction was clear in condemning the attacks and recognizing Israel's right to self-defence, provided that such actions remain consistent with international humanitarian law. This position reflected the EU's longstanding approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which combines support for Israel's security with advocacy for a negotiated two-state solution.

At the same time, European institutions emphasized that military operations should distinguish between combatants and civilians and should comply with the principles of proportionality and necessity under international law.

As the conflict continued, humanitarian concerns became increasingly central to the EU's policy. European institutions and member states substantially increased humanitarian assistance to the civilian population in Gaza through international organizations and humanitarian partners. The Union repeatedly called for improved humanitarian access, protection of civilian infrastructure, and the delivery of essential aid, including food, water, medical supplies, and fuel. The EU also supported humanitarian pauses and later broader ceasefire initiatives intended to facilitate the delivery of assistance and reduce civilian suffering.

Alongside humanitarian assistance, the EU consistently reaffirmed its opposition to unilateral measures that could undermine prospects for a lasting peace. European leaders criticized proposals involving permanent territorial changes in Gaza and rejected the forced displacement or relocation of the Palestinian population. Maintaining the territorial integrity of Gaza and preserving the possibility of a future Palestinian state remained important elements of the EU's diplomatic position.

Despite these initiatives, the EU has faced criticism regarding the effectiveness and consistency of its response. One of the principal challenges has been the diversity of views among its member states. While some governments advocated stronger political pressure on Israel and demanded an immediate ceasefire, others placed greater emphasis on Israel's security concerns. As a result, the Union often struggled to present a unified political position, limiting its ability to exercise greater diplomatic influence during the conflict.

Critics have also argued that the EU's response relied heavily on humanitarian assistance without being accompanied by sufficiently robust political measures. Although European institutions repeatedly emphasized compliance with international humanitarian law, the Union generally refrained from adopting stronger collective actions that might have increased political pressure on the parties involved. Consequently, some observers viewed the EU as an important humanitarian actor but a comparatively cautious geopolitical actor. Others, however, argue that maintaining dialogue with all relevant parties and preserving unity among twenty-seven member states inevitably requires compromise and moderation.

This illustrates the dual nature of the EU's role in the crisis. On the one hand, the Union has provided substantial humanitarian assistance, consistently supported international law, opposed forced displacement, and continued to advocate a negotiated two-state solution. These actions demonstrate the EU's continued commitment to multilateral diplomacy and civilian protection. On the other hand, its cautious political approach and internal divisions have led some analysts to question whether the Union has exercised the level of diplomatic influence expected from a major global actor.

Nevertheless, the continuing conflict has highlighted the limits of the EU's external action, particularly when member states hold differing political priorities and when humanitarian concerns increasingly require difficult political decisions. As the conflict evolves, the challenge for the European Union will remain finding an approach that is both principled and sufficiently effective to contribute to a sustainable and lasting peace in the region.

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*Jean Monnet
Chair*

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