

A warm welcome to the March 2022 edition of TPN's new online newsletter.

Our offering includes an early and inevitably provisional assessment of the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the EU's political development and its relations with NATO and the US. We live in transformative times.

We take pleasure in introducing our readers to Mark Gitenstein, the recently arrived US Ambassador to the EU, and to Roberta Metsola, the first Maltese and only the third woman elected to the presidency of the European Parliament.

We wish you both well in your new roles and look forward to working with you.

We also carry our usual accounts of past events and coming activities, together with some recommendations of materials that we have enjoyed that provoke thought and ideas.

Vivien Haig & The TPN Team

Viewpoint

Standing Together in Defence of Democracy, Europe and the Right to Choose

John Wyles, Senior Fellow, TPN

"We are witnessing the emergence of a global power in this crisis: the European Union. I was confident that a Russian invasion would be a shock to Europe and lead to a robust response. But never would I have predicted the announcements from Germany, EU, and others. Truly stunning."

This tweet from Max Bergmann, Senior Fellow at the Center for American Progress and a former State Department official, underlines the widespread astonishment and satisfaction in the West at the electrifying acts of leadership by the European Union and

its member states in resisting "Putin's War" in Ukraine.

Demonstrations of grimly determined political will through targeted restrictions, arms transfers and packages of sanctions announced from Brussels have already begun to revitalise the transatlantic partnership. Led by the EU institutions, Europe has brought a speedy, united and convincing engagement to the task of resisting and punishing Russia's attack on Ukrainian sovereignty, democracy and the rule of law.

The Biden Administration's coordination and readiness to share intelligence publicly with its allies has been exemplary. Reassuringly, the President's State of the Union message was unequivocal in its commitment to the NATO Treaty's Article 5 "an attack on one is an attack on all" clause.

Some European analysts may be sceptical about Bergmann's assertion that Putin has promoted the EU into the global power league. But both the speed and the substantive range of the EU's reprisals and resistance demonstrated powers of rapid initiative that have long seemed to be missing from the Union of 27. Moreover, its convening power was evident on March 4 when Brexit Britain was present at a Council meeting of foreign ministers in Brussels,

A timely conversation at TPN

Coincidentally, on the day Russia invaded Ukraine, TPN staged an online conversation involving Max Bergmann and Riccardo Perissich, Senior Fellow in the School of Political Economy of Luiss University, on how to advance NATO-EU alignment and cooperation. Inevitably the discussion was dominated by Ukraine and the need for Europe to take more care of its own defence, not least because of America's preoccupation with China and the Indo-Pacific.

Perissich has argued in a recent paper published by the Istituto Affari Internazionali that a stronger European security posture would lack credibility without larger defence budgets and a more integrated approach to exploiting economies of scale. There would be political value to a "European pillar for NATO" that wins public acceptance of bigger defence budgets and alters the perception of American dominance.

The EU and NATO are currently drawing up a joint declaration in the wake of two forward-looking documents, to be adopted shortly: a "strategic compass" from the EU, due to be agreed in March, and the "strategic concept" from NATO, due to be agreed in late June in Madrid. If the declaration is properly prepared, avoiding unnecessary duplication between the two organisations, the next 12 months may witness another historic turning point towards a closer transatlantic partnership".

Germany will lead from the front

The compass and concept drafters' original assumptions will need to be amended to accommodate the longer term implications of the 180 degree policy *volte face* on February 27 by the new German coalition led by Otto Scholz. Signalling a fundamental change in Germany's attitudes to Putin's Russia, which have been much criticised for complacency and lack of ambition for European defence and security, Scholz committed to invest in the coming year €100bn in a special modernisation fund for Germany's military. This at a time when Berlin's entire defence budget is €53bn, or 1.53% of its gdp.

Germany's annual military spending is now set to rise above 2 per cent in the coming years. In 2021 only 10 of NATO's 30 members were at or above this target that was set for achievement by 2024. Putin's aggression means that other countries are now much more likely to move towards the 2pc defence spending target to which they are formally committed. In the last 15 years, Washington has become increasingly angry and impatient at this performance –in President Trump's case dramatically highlighted at one time by his signalling an apparent readiness to pull the US out of NATO.

Putin's war is laden with policy consequences, not all of which can be identified at this time. But the long running debates in Brussels and national capitals on whether relations between the EU and NATO need a more structured framework will certainly gain fresh impulse.

Many of the issues now being debated in government ministries, think tanks and military hierarchies have been around for some years. Is the NATO alliance fit for purpose or "brain dead" as intoned by Emmanuel Macron? How much responsibility should European members try to take for their own defence? Would a genuinely enhanced European Defence and Security policy weaken the US commitment? Should NATO acknowledge that now that Russia and China are in a closer political embrace, it will need to broaden its security focus to include the Indo-Pacific.

It is heart-rendingly tragic that another war of death and destruction in Europe entirely provoked by a rogue dictator is needed to ensure that these and other key questions are properly addressed. *Forza Ukraine.*

TPN Welcomes:

Roberta Metsola

[President of the European Parliament](#)

Malta's rising star ready for new challenges.

In electing Roberta Metsola as its president for the next two and a half years, the European Parliament has opted for experience, authority and self confidence. Her path to success was cleared by the usual backroom deals between the main parties, but her assumption of the presidency with a wide margin of 458 votes has been greeted with general satisfaction.

She is only the third woman ever elected to the EP's presidency (the most recent was in 2022). She is, in fact, not only the youngest ever elected to the office but also the first Maltese. A 43-year-old mother of four sons, Metsola has the presentational skills and charm to make an impact both inside the parliament and with the wider European public. She is a fluent speaker, thinks on her feet and seems to be keenly aware of the opportunities – and limitations – of her role.

Early in her term at the beginning of March she had a providential televised opportunity to demonstrate her easy, relaxed approach to speechmaking.

In well crafted remarks welcoming an online address to the EP by Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, she declared that European support for Ukraine is at its “Whatever It Takes” moment.

With President Zelenskyy very publicly campaigning for Ukraine's almost instant entry into the EU, she smartly sheltered behind an EP resolution supporting Ukraine's candidate status for membership. Candidate status promises neither brief negotiation nor rapid accession.

Small member states have to try harder to maneuver their people into key positions in the EU institutions. Metsola's political emergence since her election to the EP in 2015 is a personal triumph likely to be seen as an important step in Malta's reputational recovery. In recent years, the island's image has been more than a little tarnished by

headlines focusing on political corruption and a mafia-style killing of the much respected investigative journalist, Daphne Caruana Galizia.

Much of her debut press conference required her to fend off questions from Maltese journalists about her support for Malta's complete ban on abortion.

Asked whether she will maintain her anti-abortion position, she said that while in office her public advocacy will speak for the EP's position backing pro-choice and safe access to abortion as a human right.

She says Malta is very pro-European and that the rule of law "must not regress in any member state." She campaigned for EU membership as a student activist and was first elected to the Strasbourg parliament in 2013. Both she and her Finnish husband ran unsuccessfully for office in 2009 – the first married couple to have sought election from two member states.

A qualified lawyer, Metsola took a diploma in European Studies at the College of Europe. She worked for eight years in the Maltese Permanent Representation to the EU and for a year or so as legal adviser to the High Representative for Foreign Policy, Catherine Ashton.

John Wyles

TPN Welcomes:

Mark Gitenstein

Ambassador of the United States of America to the European Union

Biden's "best personal friend" on a mission to defend democratic values

Since the time of John W. Tuthill in 1962, who was the first appointment, and through until the 1980s, US Ambassadors to the EU were most often professional diplomats. Their exchanges with the White House were usually mediated through the State Department and their appointment rarely owed anything to a personal relationship with the President of the day.

In more recent times, appointees have usually had some familiarity with international relations, business or working inside the Washington beltway. Many began their careers as lawyers, and often arrived in Brussels via investment banking and/or corporate CEOs. Some were friends of the president who appointed them and others had contributed to funding his election campaign.

Mark Gitenstein, who took over the US Mission in January at the age of 74, is more qualified for the role by experience, knowledge and friendship than many of the 18 men and one woman who have preceded him. Perhaps a close and long lasting friendship with President Joe Biden is the most important explanation for his arrival at Rue Zinner, but it does not tell the whole story. The new envoy has had the opportunity to study the EU from the unusual perspective of the Embassy in Bucharest where he served as US Ambassador to Romania from 2009-2012.

Memory of and respect for him is still palpable in Romania. Dacian Ciolos, a former Romanian prime minister, credits Gitenstein with building a rapprochement between the US and Romania after some difficult years. "In a period when democratic and anti-corruption institutions were tested to the limit, he was a very strong defender of the rule of law," Ciolos told Politico.

Defending democracy, its values and the rule of law, will drive Gitenstein's public mission in the future as they have in the past. They have been at the heart of his activities in the last decade, especially in central and eastern Europe both as an ambassador but also as a lawyer serving NGOs and commercial clients. He was awarded the Star of Romania, the nation's highest honour in 2012.

With this on his CV, his appointment to a senior job in Europe was almost inevitable, given Joe Biden's intimate knowledge of the man. In the 1970s, he began working with Biden for 13 of the 17 years he spent on the staff of the Senate Judiciary and Intelligence Committees. Biden has described him as "my best personal friend. We have raised each other's children..... we consider the Gitensteins to be almost relatives." He co-chaired the Senator's transition to the Vice-Presidency under President Obama in 2008 and helped set up his transition to the presidency in 2020.

Ambassador Gitenstein closed an eloquent You Tube presentation with a conclusion that will no doubt feature in the many speeches he is destined to make in Europe during his term of office. "We are strong together when we work together," he said, highlighting the Trade and Technology Council and the joint EU-US pledge to reduce global methane emissions as "two examples of value-driven, future-focused cooperation with the EU that I will prioritise as ambassador".

John Wyles