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Europe's Frontier Countries: The EU's Geopolitical Test

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Brussels, 23 March 2026 - Europe's frontier regions are no longer peripheral but have become the primary testing ground for the EU's geopolitical credibility. A [new ECIPE Policy Brief](#) argues that developments across Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Belarus, the Western Balkans and the Black Sea region form a connected security continuum, where pressures in one area directly affect stability in others.

The paper finds that the EU's current approach remains fragmented, treating interconnected challenges through separate policy tracks such as enlargement, defence and neighbourhood policy. In a geopolitical environment defined by competition and coercion, this compartmentalisation risks turning local vulnerabilities into systemic exposure.

At the same time, the EU faces a widening gap between political ambition and operational capacity. While new initiatives and strategic frameworks have expanded the Union's geopolitical language, translating these into sustained and coordinated action remains uneven. Military mobility constraints, enforcement challenges and insufficient protection of critical infrastructure illustrate the difficulty of converting instruments into cumulative strategic effect.

The brief also highlights the limits of a reactive posture. Recent developments beyond Europe's immediate neighbourhood, including the war involving Iran and the resulting instability across the Gulf, demonstrate that the EU cannot choose the crises affecting its interests, but must be prepared to respond to their consequences.

"Europe's frontier regions reveal not only where pressure is applied, but how effectively the EU can respond when multiple challenges unfold simultaneously", says Tengiz Pkhaladze, author of the study. "The key issue is not the absence of tools, but the ability to use them in a coherent and sustained way."

The paper argues that strengthening Europe's geopolitical role does not primarily depend on new institutional designs, but on the ability to connect existing instruments and act with greater coherence, adaptability and continuity. Bridging Europe's frontlines is

presented as a strategic approach to move from managing risks separately to addressing them collectively.

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