

Geopolitics of a Post-Growth Europe



GEF GREEN EUROPEAN FOUNDATION

Why did we write this report?

Basically, to get a conversation started between critics of economic growth and geopolitical thinkers.

Post-growth and geopolitics are 2 ways of thinking that do not go well together.

Or to put it differently: ecological and geopolitical security are hard to reconcile.

Limits to growth

“It is unlikely that a long-lasting, absolute decoupling of economic growth from environmental pressures and impacts can be achieved at the global scale.”

European Environment Agency, 2021



It is unlikely that we will be able to solve the climate and biodiversity crises as long as our economy continues to grow.

To get back into balance with the living world, we need to scale back overproduction and overconsumption.

That is the call of the degrowth movement.

More and more scientists agree that rich countries should stop chasing growth of their Gross Domestic Product, GDP.

The next speaker Gaya Herrington, will tell your more about the limits to growth.

One important insight that we borrowed from her is that it is better to manage the end of growth, through democratic deliberation, than to have it imposed on us by ecological breakdown, which would spell massive social upheaval.

Geopolitics

In geopolitics, many determinants of power – trade, aid, technology, defence – are closely linked to GDP.



However, degrowth, or post-growth, fail to resonate with experts in foreign and security policy. It is easy to see why.

In geopolitics, many determinants of power – trade, aid, technology, defence – are closely linked to GDP.

If they do not ignore planetary boundaries altogether, geopolitical thinkers prefer to talk about 'green growth'.

But it is precisely this narrative of 'green growth' that degrowth and post-growth thinkers try to refute.

Whereas geopolitical thinkers opt for an easy way out by embracing green growth, many degrowthers also cut corners.

Their pacifism and antimilitarism is downright naïve, at a time when aggressive autocracies are invading their democratic neighbours.

Russia's imperialist attack on Ukraine has brought war to the doorstep of the European Union.

It forces us to take a hard look at defence and deterrence.

After all, the transition beyond growth must be democratic.

Democracy offers a public space to challenge the growth dogma.

Many 'degrowthers' even advocate deepening democracy by extending it to the economic sphere, as a way to overcome the compulsion to grow inherent in shareholder capitalism.

Democracy in turn relies on constitutional safeguards that protect the rule of law, pluralism, and human rights.

Preventing ecological collapse will not only require green policies at the national level, but also unprecedented global cooperation.

This will not happen in the 'might is right' world that autocrats dream of; that would be a world with even more violent chaos.

Democracies can misbehave as well, but they are more inclined to resolve conflicts peacefully, in accordance with the global rules that just about every country has ever agreed to.

A rules-based international order is indispensable not just for preventing more wars, but also for tackling the climate and biodiversity crises.

Uneasy questions

- Can we, in the European Union, be the first to stop pursuing economic growth and still be a global actor?
- Would we be able to defend ourselves, our allies, democracy, human rights and the international rule of law?
- Can post-growth and geopolitics support each other in some ways? If so, how?



So the degrowth movement should be more concerned about protecting democracy, human rights and the international rule of law. In turn geopolitical thinkers would do well to recognise the limits to growth.

Together, they should try to find answers to some uneasy questions:
Can we, in the European Union, be the first to stop pursuing economic growth and still be a global actor?

Would we be able to defend ourselves, our allies, and our values?
Can post-growth and geopolitics support each other in some ways? If so, how?

Geopolitics of a Post-Growth Europe



GEF GREEN EUROPEAN FOUNDATION

In our report, which based on the interviews and meetings we held last year, we offer some tentative answers to these questions. I will briefly outline some of these answers.

Strengthen EU external action

Work for more unity in the EU's external action in order to use diplomatic, financial, and military resources more effectively. This includes abolishing vetoes in foreign and security policy, speaking with one voice, merging diplomatic services, creating an EU seat on the United Nations Security Council, and integrating member states' armed forces.

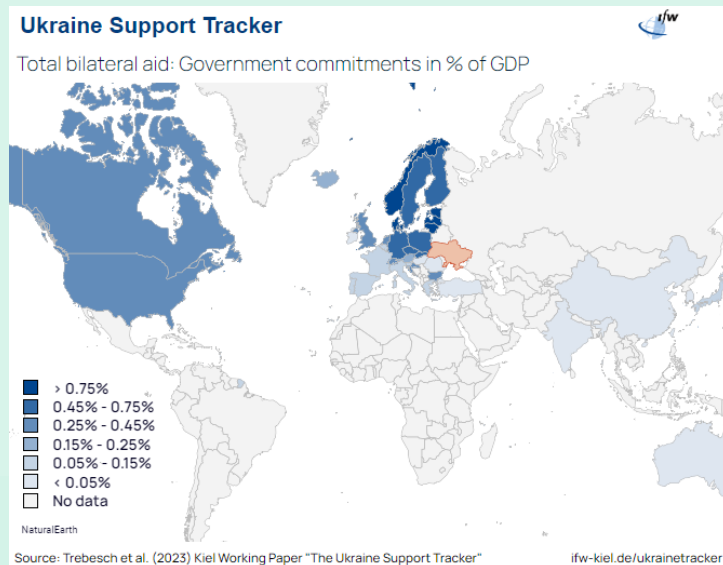


GEF GREEN EUROPEAN FOUNDATION

A post-growth EU would have to be more united in its external policies. This includes getting serious about defence integration. Of the 200 billion euros that the 27 EU countries spend annually on defence, 20 to 120 billion could be saved, depending on the level of integration. These savings should be used to increase combat power. The better the member states' military forces fit together, the more bang we get for our buck. Defence integration also requires that EU governments jointly develop and procure new weapons systems.

It is urgent to strengthen EU defence. In the global rivalry between democracy and autocracy, the US may well defect from our camp at the next presidential election if Donald Trump prevails. We need to prepare for an Atlantic storm. NATO may lose its credibility as the guarantor of our security. We need to be able to support Ukraine and defend ourselves against Russian aggression without relying on the US. This is a tall order.

#StandByUkraine



I know the Spanish left is not fond of NATO.
Well then, meet the moment, rise to the occasion.
Take responsibility for the security of our continent, for the defence of democracy.
This starts in Ukraine.
Spain lags behind in providing military, financial and humanitarian aid to Ukraine.
It gives less than significantly smaller countries such as Sweden and Denmark.
It is still importing LNG from Russia, funding the aggressor.
Sorry for being blunt, but Spain should clean up its act.
Call your government.

Enlarge and deepen the Union

Work towards the EU accession of Ukraine, the Western Balkan states, and others in order to strengthen the Union's security, geopolitical clout, and legitimacy.

Make sure the EU is ready for enlargement. Preserving core values and mutual trust requires stronger EU oversight of the rule of law, human rights, and democracy – both in candidate countries and member states.



Taking in new members would become an even stronger geopolitical imperative for a post-growth EU.

More members means more resources, more legitimacy.

Ukraine, if it survives the Russian invasion with our help, could be a formidable ally even before accession, both in terms of civil courage and military strength.

EU enlargement must be accompanied by a more robust oversight of the rule of law, human rights and democracy.

It only takes one outlier – like the authoritarian Hungarian government today – to undermine mutual trust and cripple decision-making.

The growth of the far right makes it all the more important that the EU acts against democratic backsliding within its borders.

The EU should be less tolerant of the **intolerant**.

It should become a *militant democracy*.

Partner with the Global South

- Couple strategic autonomy with solidarity. While reducing its overreliance on imported energy and materials, a post-growth EU should support the Global South in creating new sources of income and jobs.
- Promote value addition in metal-mining countries, through joint investments and technology transfer. Even a post-growth Europe would need to import metals for its energy transition.
- Make sure the EU and its member states live up to their commitments regarding development cooperation and international climate finance.
- Take the lead in debt erasure so that over-indebted governments in the Global South can invest in improving public services.
- Formally apologise for slavery and colonialism.



A post-growth EU would not only benefit from having more members, but also from having more partners.

Our report contains many proposals for strengthening partnerships – non-exclusive partnerships – with the Global South.

Some of these will be costly for an EU without economic growth.

Global security comes at a price.

One of the **synergies** between post-growth and geopolitics may be the fact that a post-growth EU would be less dependent on imported energy and materials.

But this will also create tensions with the Global South.

Increasing the export of natural resources is often still viewed as a way to develop the economy, even by democratically elected, progressive governments of not-so-poor countries such as Brazil and Chile.

Our report outlines a partial way out of this dilemma.

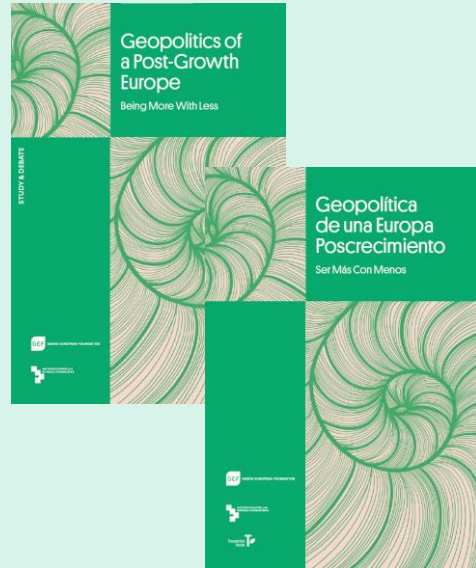
Because a post-growth EU would still need critical metals for its energy transition, it should assist metal-mining countries in adding more value to their metal ores, f.i. by producing batteries.

This would provide them with more income and better jobs.

Geopolitics of a Post-Growth Europe

Table of Contents

Foreword by <i>Sien Hasker & Laurent Standaert</i>	5
ESSAY	
Sparing the Planet, Shielding Democracy by <i>Richard Wouters</i>	7
INTERVIEWS	
Geopolitics Beyond Growth Interview with <i>Gaya Herrington</i>	23
Can Europe Defend Itself Without Growth? Interview with <i>Sven Blacop</i>	28
Steering Away From Extractivism Interview with <i>Peter Newell</i>	36
The EU-Chile Trade Agreement: A Degrowth Perspective Interview with <i>Gabriela Cabaña Alvear</i>	42
What Stands in the Way of Post-Growth? Interview with <i>Cristina Monge & Giorgos Kallis</i>	46
RECOMMENDATIONS	
Geopolitical Pathways for a Europe Beyond Growth	53



You can find more proposals in our report.
The report also contains some of the interviews we held.
Each language version has a different selection of interviews.

Interviews



'War is degrowth by disaster, you want to avoid that'

The climate and biodiversity crises confront us with the limits to growth. But can we let go of economic growth in a world full of conflict, where GDP counts as...



Geopolitics beyond growth

The degrowth movement is rapidly gaining popularity in Europe. It advocates renouncing economic growth. But without growth, can we still stand up for our values...



ARTIKEL

Who wants to be a subordinate?

Policymakers won't abandon the mantra of economic growth unless a strong social movement forces them to do so, according to international relations expert Jesús...



ARTIKEL

'What good is the perfect society if you can't defend it?'

There are increasing doubts as to whether continued economic growth is compatible with a liveable planet. The degrowth movement is gaining popularity in Europe...



You can find all the interviews we conducted, with critics of economic growth and geopolitical thinkers, on this website. We are very grateful to the interviewees, including Gaya Herrington and Jesús Núñez, because they provided us with important insights.

Geopolitics of a Post-Growth Europe

Stay informed:

gef.eu/newsletter 

Suggestions?

rwouters@groenlinks.nl



There will be more webinars and seminars on post-growth and geopolitics this year.

If you want to keep up to date, subscribe to the Green European Foundation's newsletter.

And if after today you come across good ideas, don't hesitate to send them to me.

Thank you for your attention.

I look forward to our discussion.