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## Instrumental goals shape EU citizens' attitudes to the Russia–Ukraine war over time

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The European Union (EU) legislation suggests that EU member states progressively adopt and implement policies that are primarily in line with the broader European interests, and secondarily with specific national interests. Yet, citizens from various EU member-states often oppose these EU directives and adopt attitudes that favour national interests. The current study investigates whether EU citizens progressively comply with—or digress from—the directives of the superordinate EU group during the Russia–Ukraine war. In a two-wave study we investigated the role of instrumental reasons (i.e., maximisation of material gain) to cooperate with an EU outgroup, namely Russia, in Greeks' (an EU member state) compliance with the EU directives over time during the Russia–Ukraine war. We hypothesised and found that instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia: (a) encourage EU citizens to support digressing from EU directives and (b) predict decreased identification with the superordinate identity of EU over time. Moreover, since NATO's approach to the Russian invasion closely mirrors that of the EU, we further investigated the effects of instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia on Greeks' identification with a different superordinate group, namely NATO. Results were largely similar to those we obtained when focusing on EU as a superordinate group.

**Keywords:** Instrumental goals; Compliance with EU; Europeanization; Ukraine–Russia war; Superordinate identity; War-related reactions.

According to the European Union (EU) legislation, all EU member states are expected to adopt practices that are in line with European goals and interests rather than solely with national ones and, hence, implement policies that match EU standards (Chatzopoulou, 2015; Sampson Thierry & Martinsen, 2018). This tendency, known as *Europeanization* (Cowles et al., 2001; Héritier, 2001) illustrates the idea of identifying with a superordinate group (i.e., a larger group identity that encompasses subgroups of both the ingroup and outgroup; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005), such as EU, and acting in line with the superordinate group's interests and objectives. Yet, this tendency raises important questions about the willingness and capacity of *EU subgroups* (i.e., EU member states) to implement laws and policies that are determined by the *EU superordinate group*. Scholars claim that EU member states vary in the way in which they implement EU legislation

(Thomann & Sager, 2017; Versluis et al., 2011; see also Steunenberg & Toshkov, 2009) with some countries being willing, some unwilling and some just being unable to implement EU laws and policies (Börzel et al., 2010; Di Lucia & Kronsell, 2010; Treib, 2014). Differently put, despite the pressure on unanimously implementing official EU decisions such as adopting restrictive measures (i.e., sanctions) against countries that threaten EU values, some EU countries are either less willing or less capable to comply with EU regulations and prefer to act in line with their national goals (Giumelli et al., 2022). This happens because decisions made by the EU are often costly to citizens (Schwebach, 2000). Particularly, the decision to sanction Russia in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has proven to be costly to all EU member states, with some of them being almost unable to afford the economic ramifications of the imposition of sanctions to Russia (Noack & Brady, 2022).

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Individual citizens across the EU clearly have felt the economic costs of the sanctions. Among those sanctions is the ban on almost 90% of Russian oil imports by the end of 2022 (Council of the European Union, 2022b), which has detrimental economic ramifications for EU citizens as it increases inflation and exacerbates poverty (European Investment Bank, 2022). Indeed, the Russia–Ukraine war, and the EU sanctions that followed, decreased energy supplies and raw materials coming from Russia, whereas the demand across the EU have remained high. The outcome is that prices of vital products have increased drastically, creating threat and uncertainty to individual citizens of EU countries (Government of The Netherlands, 2022). As a consequence, individual citizens often oppose the strategies that the superordinate group (the EU) adopts to deal with the Russian war, detach from the EU ideals and even justify the Russian invasion of Ukraine (France 24, 2022; Stamouli & Bayer, 2022). Overall, one would argue that (some) EU countries might perceive their national interests to be better served (at least economically) if they go against the EU directives and keep a more collaborative attitude towards Russia.

The EU sanctions against Russia hence enable a test of predictions derived from literature on the superordinate identity theory (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). For instance, a subgroup's interests (e.g., the interests of an EU member-state) may or may not be compatible with those of the superordinate group (e.g., European Union) (Boomgaarden et al., 2011; Hooghe & Marks, 2009). Interestingly, in certain situations, a subgroup's interests may be better served by collaborating with another outgroup than by complying with the directives of the superordinate group. The literature has so far investigated how subgroups respond to a superordinate group when the interests between the two are not compatible: When a superordinate group is perceived as a threat to the subgroup's interests (e.g., opposing goals, objectives or priorities), a subgroup is more likely to perceive the superordinate group as illegitimate (Grosfeld et al., 2022). However, no research has yet examined how subgroups respond to a superordinate group when they perceive their interests to be better served by collaborating with an outgroup, rather than with the superordinate group. In this study, we investigate how instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia (an EU outgroup) influences EU citizens' responses to EU policies (e.g., sanctions) and their identification with the superordinate EU identity. This contribution relies on the literature on social psychology (e.g., the superordinate identity theory) but also on international relations to investigate whether instrumental reasons to keep positive relations with Russia (i.e., with the aim to defend material and tangible interests, Sherif & Sherif, 1969) shapes EU citizens' opinions about the war, and prompt them to deviate from the interests and directives of the superordinate group. More specifically, we investigate whether instrumental

reasons to cooperate with Russia (a) encourage EU citizens to oppose EU sanctions and measures against Russia, and support the Russian invasion in Ukraine, and (b) decrease EU citizens' identification with the superordinate identity of EU over time. In addition, we investigate if the link with EU identification would generalise to NATO, another superordinate group of many EU countries, and an essential partner of EU with which EU shares "common values, strategic interests and a majority of member nations" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2021).

We investigated these research questions in a large sample of participants from Greece, an EU member state since 1981 and a NATO country since 1952. We ran a study with two measurement points during the Russia–Ukraine war. The first wave took place in March 2022, shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and after the first round of EU sanctions against Russia were announced. The second wave took place 2 months later (May, 2022) when Russian forces had blocked Ukrainian ports, contributing to a global food security crisis, and when the EU had agreed to ban 90% of Russian oil imports by the end of the year. At each time point, we measured participants' instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia during the war, support for the Russian invasion, imposition of incapacitative punishments to Russia (i.e., stop Russia from causing further harm; Carlsmith & Darley, 2008; Fousiani & Van Prooijen, 2022a; Kahane et al., 2018), identification with EU (i.e., sense of belonging to the EU; see Sani et al., 2015; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and identification with the NATO, a broader superordinate social identity of Greeks. Importantly, besides the above measures that mostly assess attitudes; we included two behavioural measures in Time 2, namely opposition to the Russian–Ukraine war and support for sanctions against Russia. The inclusion of these measures aims at testing the robustness of the hypothesised effects and their connection to actual behaviours.

### **EU membership and compliance with EU policies: The case of endorsing sanctions**

The EU expects its member states to comply with all regulatory measures of the Treaties such as the decisions, directives and regulations that spring from it. The so-called Europeanization movement (Cowles et al., 2001; H eritier, 2001) imposes the EU member states to act in line with the broader EU interests rather than the confined national interests (Chatzopoulou, 2015; Sampson Thierry & Martinsen, 2018). The social identity literature (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), and particularly the superordinate identity theory, can effectively elucidate these expectations of the EU. According to this theory, subgroups that belong to a larger superordinate group are supposed to incorporate the interests of the

superordinate group into their own group's interests and follow the directives of the superordinate group (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). Importantly, this concept of "dual identification" where subgroup identities are recognised, valued, and integrated within a broader group, results in experiencing more positive social identities (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007; Dovidio et al., 2007; Schmid et al., 2009). When it comes to EU as a superordinate group in particular, research shows that affiliation with the broader EU group is connected with stronger support for political unification and compliance with the EU regulations (Chalmers & Dellmuth, 2015; Sindic et al., 2019).

Yet, scholars report important variations in the implementation of EU policies among member states (i.e., EU subgroups) (Börzel et al., 2010; Di Lucia & Kronsell, 2010; Steunenberg & Toshkov, 2009; Versluis et al., 2011). Indeed, EU citizens are often dissatisfied with EU policies when new geopolitical issues and global crises occur, and oppose the EU directives when those are economically unprofitable. A recent example is the opposition of individual citizens to the EU measures against Russia for the invasion of Ukraine (Jenkins, 2022). Many citizens see the restrictive measures against Russia as ineffective (Jenkins, 2022) because their consequences, along with the countermeasures taken from Russia (Russian News Agency, 2022), have hit the European economy hard (European Investment Bank, 2022). Indeed, restrictive measures are not only costly to the targets (Biersteker et al., 2016; Giumelli, 2013; Giumelli et al., 2022; Gordon, 2011) but also to the senders/punishers (Schwebach, 2000), and in the case of the EU sanctions against Russia, to the EU members states and individual citizens (European Investment Bank, 2022). Stopping the purchase of Russian oil and imposing individual travel bans and asset freezes following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Council of the European Union, 2022c) and the invasion in Ukraine in February 2022 (European Commission, 2022a) has increased uncertainty and brought about major disruptions to world trade (Noack & Brady, 2022), all heavily experienced by EU citizens (Government of The Netherlands, 2022; see also Gravity Model for the estimates of sanctions' consequences to the sanctioning countries; Hufbauer et al., 1990). Interestingly, although the governments of most EU member states have complied with the EU directives and have officially joined the EU sanctions against Russia, lay people in many of those states are opposed to most restrictive measures against Russia, and even adopt a supportive stance towards Russia. In Greece, for instance—followed by Italy and then France—citizens find the sanctions costly and ineffective, and believe that Greece should not get involved in what Russia is doing with Ukraine (van der Ploeg, 2022). How can these deviations of EU citizens from the EU directives be explained? In the following,

we aim to answer this relevant question building on, and extending the realistic conflict theory (Sherif & Sherif, 1969).

### Instrumental concerns, compliance with EU policies and identification with EU

While the EU can be a source of a positive "EU identity" (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007; Dovidio et al., 2007; Schmid et al., 2009), it may also conflict with national groups' confined interests (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). For example, people experience the loss of national power and culture due to European integration as highly threatening (Boomgaarden et al., 2011). A perceived threat to the national interests, in turn, has been negatively related to supporting EU membership (Christin & Trechsel, 2002) and positively related to the willingness to exit the EU (Binzer Hobolt & Brouard, 2011). Importantly, national identity is arguably deeper rooted than an EU identity (Fuchs, 2011).

The realistic conflict theory (Sherif & Sherif, 1969) argues that in intergroup conflict situations, people's actions are largely motivated by *instrumental concerns*, meaning that they strive to maximise their own group's material and tangible gains (De Cremer & Van Vugt, 2002). Accordingly, when people feel that their group's material and tangible profit is put in jeopardy, people try to gain it back or claim it through alternative sources. For instance, Teixeira et al. (2011) found that when instrumental concerns of a group are at stake, people are more willing to put identity concerns aside and come closer with the adversary group and explore mutually beneficial solutions (see also Hamlin & Jennings, 2007). Therefore, although honouring the superordinate EU identity might be important to the EU members states (Crisp & Hewstone, 2007; Dovidio et al., 2007; Schmid et al., 2009; for relevant research in international relations, see also Giumelli et al., 2022), when the EU membership is considered to be "costly" to a state member's national interests and when collaborating with another outgroup (i.e., Russia in this case) is seen as more profitable, people may respond with violations of the EU regulations and with decreased identification with the EU identity over time.

For the reasons described above, we assume that the EU directives (e.g., to join sanctions against Russia and to oppose to the Russian invasion of Ukraine) are seen as highly costly to EU member states' national interests whereas supporting Russia is seen as having higher instrumental value (i.e., is economically more profitable). As EU sanctions accumulated over time since the onset of the war, it can be expected that the perceived instrumental value of cooperating with Russia would prompt EU countries to progressively oppose the EU policies and thus respond with decreased willingness to endorse

sanctions against Russia and incapacitate Russia (i.e., assign utilitarian sanctions with the aim to deter an offender from re-offending in the future or from causing further harm; Carlsmith & Darley, 2008; Fousiani & Van Prooijen, 2022a; Kahane et al., 2018), as well as with a progressively increased support for the Russian invasion in Ukraine. Importantly, we also expect that for the same reasons, EU countries will progressively identify with the EU identity less (i.e., their sense of belonging to the superordinate group of EU and their sense of commonality with its members will decrease; see Sani et al., 2015; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) to the extent that they perceive cooperating with Russia as more profitable. Indeed, cost–benefit concerns are seen as the most important predictors of support for the EU and the citizens who support the EU and identify with it are those who benefit from it the most (e.g., Anderson & Reichert, 1995; Gabel, 1998; Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Tucker et al., 2002). Given the recent incompatibility of the EU and Russian agendas and the indirect conflict between the two as response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine (Council of the European Union, 2022c) EU members' perception of instrumental goals to cooperate with Russia implies a perception of the EU membership as an obstacle to the cooperation with Russia. Therefore, instrumental goals to cooperate with Russia will be related to lower identification with EU over time.

Based on the above, we stated the following hypotheses:

Perception of instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia:

**Hypothesis 1a** is positively related to support for the Russian invasion in Ukraine over time.

**Hypothesis 1b** is negatively related to imposing incapacitating sanctions against Russia over time.

**Hypothesis 2** is negatively related to identification with EU over time.

Besides EU as a superordinate group, 21 EU countries have another superordinate identity in common as well, NATO. NATO's aim is to ensure peace in Europe, encourage collaboration among its constituents and protect their freedom. It is remarkable that these objectives were pursued in light of the challenge posed by the Soviet Union during the Second World War (NATO, 2022). Importantly, and similar to EU, NATO has exceptionally negative relationships with Russia, particularly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine (BBC, 2015; Everett, 2022).

More specifically, NATO strongly denounces Russia's unprovoked aggression against Ukraine, which they describe as a peaceful and democratic nation that has a strong partnership with NATO. Like the EU, NATO has imposed severe sanctions on Russia and is providing exceptional support to Ukraine, allowing it to exercise its right to self-defence and potentially join NATO (NATO, 2023). However, this position could create the impression that NATO is acting at the expense of its members' instrumental objectives by making Russia an adversary. Based on the above and the importance of instrumental interests to group members (Teixeira et al., 2011), we propose the following additional hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 3** Perception of instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia is negatively related with identification with NATO over time.

## THE CURRENT STUDY: THE CASE OF GREECE

The present study was conducted in a large sample of Greek citizens. Greece is a particularly interesting case to investigate not only because it is an EU and a NATO member, but also due to its financial ties with Russia, which make the instrumental value of collaborating with Russia evident. Russia and Greece have important financial agreements, including the “Friendship and Cooperation Agreement” and the “Agreement on Economic, Industrial, Technological, and Scientific Cooperation,” which have kept them economically connected (Hellenic Republic, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). However, after Greece officially endorsed all EU and NATO sanctions against Russia, a diplomatic crisis arose, and Russia added Greece to its list of “unfriendly nations” (Lee, 2022). As a result of the disrupted economic collaboration with Russia and the loss of a political ally, many Greeks opposed the EU policies that the Greek government (as most other EU governments) has officially endorsed, with in (April) 2022 60% of Greeks opposed sanctions against Russia and holding both Russia and Ukraine culpable for the invasion (Kokkinidis, 2022).<sup>1</sup> Given the financial ties between Greece and Russia and the severe economic ramifications that the endorsement of EU sanctions brought about to Greeks, we deem Greece a particularly interesting case to investigate. EU nations such as Greece, whose economy is closely intertwined with Russia, may perceive EU membership as an obstacle to their national strategic interests, with Russia serving as a key financial partner. This could impact Greek citizens' support for EU directives and their identification with the EU and NATO.

<sup>1</sup> The remaining 40% either endorse the EU directives or hold a neutral stance on the issue.

## METHOD

### Participants

A total of 646 respondents participated in the first wave of the study. Of those, 507 took part in the second wave (254 females;  $M_{age} = 30.56$ ,  $SD = 8.93$ ; response rate: 78.48%). Participants were Greeks living in Greece. Of the respondents, 62% had higher education (at least a bachelor's degree) and 17.7% were students. The vast majority were Christian Orthodox (51.4%), while non-religious followed (39.4%). The sample was stratified to be nationally representative on the benchmarks gender, age and ethnicity. Based on a sensitivity power analysis, 507 respondents provide with 95% power to detect a small effect size ( $r = .16$ ).<sup>2</sup>

### Procedure

Data collection was online via Prolific. This study was part of a larger project on people's responses to the Russian–Ukraine war. We collected the data in two waves with an interval of 2 months in-between. We assessed attitudinal measures in both waves. However, we assessed behavioural measures in the second wave only. Respondents were invited to fill out the survey voluntarily and anonymously. Respondents were paid £1.50 for their participation in each of the two waves. We obtained ethics approval prior to the study.

A copy of the dataset and the Online Supplemental Materials (OSM) can be found on OSF:

[https://osf.io/tsqvd/?view\\_only=4662fcc9cc8342438727be05ee6368b1](https://osf.io/tsqvd/?view_only=4662fcc9cc8342438727be05ee6368b1)

The preregistered hypotheses can be also found on OSF<sup>3</sup>:

<https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/XK5JS>.

This research involves human participants. All procedures performed in this study were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. For the present research, we got approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of Groningen, the Netherlands, Nr PSY-2122-S-02.

### Measures

*Instrumental Reasons to Cooperate with Russia* was measured in T1 with four items (adapted from Wang et al., 2012). A sample item was “Greece should plan on restoring the relationship with Russia just for the sake of future collaboration with Russia.” The reliability of the scale was .92.

*Support for Russian Invasion in Ukraine* was assessed in T1 and T2 with a 4-item scale that we developed (e.g., “I support the Russian invasion in Ukraine”). The reliability of the scale was .84 in both waves.

*Incapacitative Motives for Sanctioning Russia* was assessed in T1 and T2 with the scale of Fousiani and Van Prooijen (2019, 2022a, 2022b); see also (Fousiani & Demoulin, 2019; Fousiani et al., 2019) after adapting it to the specifics of the study. The scale included five items (e.g., “The main reasons to back sanctions against Russia should be to incapacitate Russia and prevent it from violating other countries' basic human rights in the future”). The reliability of the scale was .91 in both waves.

*Identification with EU* was measured in T1 and T2 with a 4-item scale (adapted version of La Barbera & Capone, 2016; Spears et al., 1997). A sample item was “I feel I am deeply tied to other European Union citizens”. The reliability of the scale was .93 in both waves.

*Identification with NATO* was measured in T1 and T2 with a similar scale as the Identification with EU but adapted to the NATO context (e.g., “I feel Greece is deeply tied to other NATO member states”). The reliability of the scale was .89 in T1 and .90 in T2.

All measures were assessed on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *absolutely disagree*, 7 = *absolutely agree*). The complete measures are presented in the Online Supplemental Material (OSM).

### Behavioural measures

To test the robustness of the results, in the second wave of the study we also included two behavioural measures to assess (a) opposition to the war and (b) support for sanctions against Russia. Opposition to the war was assessed by asking participants if they had signed an online petition against the Russian invasion in Ukraine. Support for sanctions was assessed by asking participants if they

<sup>2</sup> We currently also have a different paper under review based on the same larger dataset. This article does not include perceived instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia (i.e., the main independent variable in the current paper), and instead examines the cross-lagged effects between EU identification and support for the war. Given the fundamentally different research question, this other paper was preregistered as a separate project. For full transparency, here we provide the preregistration of this different paper: [https://osf.io/nxctj?view\\_only=c0efede651cc48898eac40683c7e0684](https://osf.io/nxctj?view_only=c0efede651cc48898eac40683c7e0684)

<sup>3</sup> Here, we report two deviations from the preregistered hypotheses: (a) In the preregistration we also stated a hypothesis with conspiracy beliefs as an outcome variable. (b) Moreover, we had originally stated the hypothesis that identity goals (i.e., need for inclusion to the EU and the NATO) would moderate the hypothesised relationships. Yet, none of these effects came out significant. To streamline the paper, we did not include conspiracy beliefs and identity goals in the current contribution.

had signed an online petition supporting the imposition of sanctions against Russia (“Yes,” “No,” or “I was not aware of such a petition, otherwise I would have signed it”). For the analysis, we recorded the respondents’ answers such that negative responses (no) took the value  $-1$ , positive responses took the value  $1$ , and “I did not know/I was not aware” responses took the value  $0$ . Therefore, lower values indicated no behavioural action and higher values indicated behavioural action.<sup>4</sup>

### Control variables

Previous research has shown that age (Chasteen, 2005), gender (1 = man, 2 = woman; Lorenzi-Cioldi et al., 1995), religion (1 = Christian Orthodox, 2 = Christian Catholic, 3 = Protestant, 4 = non-religious, 5 = other; Licata et al., 2012) and ideology (1 = left-wing, 10 = right-wing; Balliet et al., 2018) are associated to intergroup processes and identity issues. Accordingly, these variables served as control variables. Moreover, given the ties and cultural similarity between Greece and Russia, we also controlled for participants’ identification with Russia via a 4-item self-developed scale (e.g., “Russian people have similar traditions, customs and values with Greeks”; 1 = *absolutely disagree*, 7 = *absolutely agree*. See OSM for the complete scale).

## RESULTS

Correlations between the study variables, means and standard deviations are presented in Table 1.

### Effects of instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia on compliance and identification with EU over time

To test the hypothesis that instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia is (a) positively related to support for the Russian invasion in Ukraine and (b) negatively related to incapacitative motives for punishing Russia and identification with the superordinate EU identity over time, we analysed the data including autoregressive effects in MPlus 8 (Muthén & Muthén, 2017). Instrumental reasons to cooperate in T1 were the predictor whereas (a) support for the invasion in T2 (controlling for support for the invasion in T1), (b) incapacitative motives in T2 (controlling for incapacitative motives in T1), (c) identification with EU in T2 (controlling for identification with EU in T1) and (d) identification with NATO in T2 (controlling for identification with NATO in T1) were the dependent variables. We found all the effects to be

significant. More specifically, and in line with Hypothesis 1a, instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia was positively related to increased support for the Russian invasion over time. Moreover, instrumental reasons were negatively related to incapacitating Russia over time, providing support for Hypothesis 1b. Finally, instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia was negatively related to identification with EU over time, supporting Hypothesis 2. Finally, we found similar effects on identification with NATO independent of these effects on EU identification, supporting Hypothesis 3 (see Table 2 for the relevant statistics).

### Effects of instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia in T1 on behavioural measures in T2

We further investigated the effect of instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia on people’s behavioural responses to the war, namely opposition to the war (e.g., being against Russian invasion) and support for stricter sanctions against Russia. We conducted regression analyses using SPSS 27. Instrumental reasons in T1 were the predictor variable while (a) opposition to the war and (b) support for sanctions against Russia in T2 were the outcome variables, while age, gender, religion and ideology were added as control variables. In line with Hypotheses 1a and 1b, we showed that instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia in T1 were negatively related both to opposition to the war  $b = -0.07$ ,  $SE = 0.02$ ,  $t = -3.95$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $CI\ 95\% (-0.10, -0.03)$ ,  $R^2 = 0.04$ ,  $\Delta F(1477) = 14.81$ ,  $p < .001$  and to support for sanctions against Russia in T2  $b = -0.09$ ,  $SE = 0.01$ ,  $t = -6.20$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $CI\ 95\% (-0.11, -0.06)$ ,  $R^2 = 0.09$ ,  $\Delta F(1477) = 38.45$ ,  $p < .001$ . None of the control variables had a significant effect on any of the two outcome variables. It is noteworthy that when running the analyses without the inclusion of the control variables, the results are largely similar.

## DISCUSSION

The Europeanization movement (Cowles et al., 2001; Hérítier, 2001) suggests that all EU member states over time endorse practices that are in line with European regulations rather than merely with national interests (Chatzopoulou, 2015; Sampson Thierry & Martinsen, 2018). This movement reflects the concept of identifying with a superordinate group and acting in line with that group’s interests (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2005). Yet, citizens of certain EU member states do not embrace this tendency

<sup>4</sup> When adopting a stricter behaviourist approach (i.e., one either performs or does not perform the behaviour) and coding “Yes” as 1 and “No” as well as “I was not aware of such a petition, otherwise I would have signed it” as 0, the results we obtain are similar to those reported here.

**TABLE 1**  
Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of the measured variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Instrumental goals T1	4.45	1.89	-											
2. Support Russian invasion T1	2.68	1.39	.62***	-										
3. Support Russian invasion T2	2.77	1.42	.62***	-.82***	-									
4. Incapacitative motives T1	5.40	1.38	-.52***	-.64***	-.59***	-								
5. Incapacitative motives T2	5.38	1.41	-.51***	-.63***	-.64***	.74***	-							
6. Identification - EU T1	4.79	1.52	-.19***	-.28***	-.29***	.35***	.37***	-						
7. Identification - EU T2	4.71	1.52	-.18***	-.32***	-.32***	.35***	.37***	.84***	-					
8. Identification - NATO T1	4.03	1.56	-.26***	-.29***	-.32***	.39***	.35***	.56***	.53***	-				
9. Identification - NATO T2	4.01	1.54	-.28***	-.31***	-.32***	.39***	.36***	.53***	.58***	.79***	-			
10. Identification - Russia	3.49	1.29	-.18***	.37***	.35***	-.24***	-.30***	-.06	-.05	-.10*	-.09	-		
11. Ideology	4.40	1.90	-.07	.14***	.11*	-.02	-.02	.17***	.16***	.30***	-.28***	.15***	-	
12. Age	30.56	8.93	.04	.12**	.13**	-.06	-.11*	.15***	.13**	.19***	.12**	.14**	.19***	-

*Notes:* Instrumental goals to cooperate with Russia, support for the Russian invasion, incapacitative motives for sanctioning Russia, identification with EU, Identification with NATO and Identification with Russia were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Ideology was measured in a 10-point scale (1 = left-wing, 10 = right-wing). Age was measured in years. \*\*\**p* < .001.

and support alternatives to the EU agenda (Thomann & Sager, 2017; Versluis et al., 2011; see also Steunenberg & Toshkov, 2009). The current study sought to investigate the effects of instrumental reasons to cooperate with an EU outgroup, namely Russia, on EU citizens' (a) compliance with the broader EU policies regarding the Russia–Ukraine war (namely, support for incapacitating Russia via sanctions and support for the Russian invasion of Ukraine) and (b) identification with the superordinate EU and NATO identities over time. A large sample of Greek citizens took part in a study with two waves. Results showed that perceiving instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia is positively related to increasingly digressing from the EU directives. More specifically, instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia were positively related to supporting the Russian invasion of Ukraine and negatively related to assigning incapacitative sanctions against Russians over time. These results provided full support for Hypotheses 1a and 1b and are in line with prior research showing that when instrumental concerns of the core group (e.g., a national group) are at stake, superordinate group's directives eventually take second place and people explore mutually beneficial solutions with the adversary group (see Hamlin & Jennings, 2007; Teixeira et al., 2011). Moreover, we found that instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia at Time 1 predict Greeks' behavioural responses to the war at Time 2, such that instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia deter Greeks from behaviorally opposing sanctions against Russia or the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These findings provide further support to Hypotheses 1a and 1b.

Furthermore, instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia were negatively related to identifying with the superordinate EU and NATO identities over time. These results supported Hypotheses 2 and 3, and further showed that the effects of instrumental concerns on identification with the EU generalise to alternative superordinate identities as well, such as the NATO identity. Indeed, cost–benefit concerns seem to be important predictors of support for the directives of superordinate identities (e.g., Anderson & Reichert, 1995; Gabel, 1998; Gabel & Palmer, 1995; Tucker et al., 2002) and are able to shift the attention to national interests over the broader social identities' interests.

### Theoretical and practical implications

This study has two important theoretical implications. First, although prior research has pointed out the role of instrumental concerns (maximising tangible gains of the ingroup) in intergroup relations and intergroup competition (De Cremer & Van Vugt, 2002; Scheepers, 2008; Teixeira et al., 2011; see also realistic conflict theory; Sherif & Sherif, 1969), this is the first study to investigate how instrumental reasons to cooperate with another



**TABLE 2**  
Effects of instrumental goals to cooperate with Russia in T1 on war-related responses and identification with EU and NATO over time

		<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>95% CI</i>
Instrumental goals to cooperate with Russia in T1 on:	Support for Russian invasion T1	0.77***	0.05	0.70; 0.85
	Support for Russian invasion T2	0.73***	0.05	0.66; 0.81
	Incapacitative motives T1	-0.54***	0.04	-0.60; -0.47
	Incapacitative motives T2	-0.56***	0.04	-0.60; -0.47
	Identification with EU T1	-0.17***	0.04	-0.24; -0.11
	Identification with EU T2	-0.20***	0.04	-0.27; -0.13
	Identification with NATO T1	-0.25***	0.04	-0.32; -0.18
	Identification with NATO T2	-0.27***	0.04	-0.35; -0.20
	Identification with Russians T1	0.39***	0.05	0.31; 0.46
	Gender	-0.22	0.11	-0.41; -0.03
	Age	0.02*	0.006	0.004; 0.03
	Religion	-0.10***	0.03	-0.15; -0.04
	Ideology	0.03	0.03	-0.02; 0.09

Notes: Instrumental goals to cooperate with Russia, support for the Russian invasion, incapacitative motives for sanctioning Russia, identification with EU and identification with NATO were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* to 7 = *Strongly agree*). \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

group, influence lay people's compliance with the policies and directives of their superordinate ingroup (e.g., European Union and NATO) over time. More specifically, this is the first study to show how instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia, one of the EU's largest trade partners and oil suppliers (European Commission, 2022b), shape EU citizens' identification with EU and NATO over time. This finding reveals the influential role that tangible and material profits play in identity-related concerns and informs the social identity literature (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Second, to our knowledge, there is no previous research on how instrumental goals influence people's war-related responses over time. In this study, combining and extending the literature on social psychology (Scheepers, 2008; Sherif & Sherif, 1969; Teixeira et al., 2011) and international relations (Giumelli et al., 2022), we showed that instrumental goals of an observer (i.e., Greeks in this contribution) prevent people from supporting war victims (e.g., Ukraine) and prompt them to take the side of an offender (e.g., Russia) as long as maintaining positive relationships with the offender is profitable to them. These findings are in line with the international relations literature which reveals an uneven application of EU policies and directives among EU member states and the resistance of certain member states to (Giumelli et al., 2022).

In addition to its theoretical implications, this study has practical implications in two ways. First, the findings can aid European governmental institutions and politicians in shaping the attitude and behaviour of European citizens towards impactful international issues. For instance, if European governments wish to promote their agenda on important geopolitical issues, politicians should consider the significance of instrumental goals (compared to other goals, such as identity-based goals) within EU countries. In other words, politicians may need to highlight the

tangible (besides the symbolic) benefits of their policies to win public support. Second, non-EU countries can apply the study's findings to reduce international conflicts by pursuing mutually beneficial outcomes. For example, non-EU governments may find it encouraging that EU countries are willing to collaborate with them as long as their instrumental goals are served. This presents an opportunity to identify common ground between EU and non-EU countries to improve outcomes for everyone involved.

### Limitations and future directions

Despite the important theoretical and practical implications of the study and the strength of its two-wave measurement design, the current study includes a number of limitations. First and foremost, the current findings come from a single, correlational study and we cannot conclude with certainty that they would be replicated when using different research designs and methods. Second, the data were collected by a single EU country, Greece and it is not certain that we would obtain similar results if different countries had participated. For instance, Greece has traditionally tried to keep good relationships with Russia, and shares similar cultural values with it (Van der Ploeg, 2022) which might have influenced the current results. To test the generalizability of the current results, future research should try to replicate this study by approaching populations from multiple nations. Besides the importance of replicating these results among other EU countries, future research should further investigate the role of culture in EU countries' response to EU directives when their instrumental goals are in jeopardy. It is likely that collectivistic countries like Greece (see Hofstede et al., 2010), are more focused on their core group's interests and are therefore more likely to put the interests of the superordinate EU

identity second if the need arises. Indeed, collectivism has been linked to increased favouritism towards ingroup members (Fischer & Derham, 2016; Hinkle & Brown, 1990). This ingroup bias may lead to prioritisation of the interests and objectives of the core subgroup over those of the larger superordinate group in cases of conflict between the two. However, further research is needed to explore this hypothesis in collectivistic and individualistic countries. Moreover, the current findings are specific to the Russia–Ukraine war and we cannot generalise them to other conflicts where different geopolitical interests might interfere. Finally, the current study did not include any explanatory mechanisms that could possibly mediate the observed effects and therefore we are not able to provide any possible theoretical explanations for the investigated relationships. Future research might further investigate the possible explanatory mechanisms that underlie the observed effects.

### Concluding remarks

Despite the above limitations, this research addresses an important gap in the literature: the role of instrumental reasons to cooperate with Russia in EU citizen's responses to violent intergroup conflicts over time. Specifically, the present findings point out the role of instrumental concerns, such as economic losses associated to the EU (but also NATO) directives, in predicting identification with EU and NATO superordinate groups and support for the Russian invasion (i.e., a condemned action of an outgroup) over time. Apparently, material incentives do influence whether groups identify with their superordinate categories and support a war as it unfolds.

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### SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

**Data S1** Supporting Information

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