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Game Materials

Simulation Game "EU Resilience in 2035"

Part A: Shock Cards · Part B: Instrument Cards · Part C: Game Sheet

How the Game Works

Participants are divided into groups of around 8-10 people. Each group receives **one shock card**. All shocks take place in 2035. The groups are then split in two: one half plays the **Resilient Union**, the other the **Stagnating Union**.

After a short internal discussion each subgroup chooses **exactly three instrument cards** available in its vision and uses the game sheet to think through what these cards achieve against the shock – and what they do not. The Resilient Union can choose from all twelve cards, the Stagnating Union from only seven. At the end, both subgroups present their solutions to the shock.

There are twelve instrument cards in four areas. One set per subgroup. Before the game starts, the Stagnating Union group puts the cards that are blocked for it aside – but they remain visible on the table, because the game sheet asks which of them were missing.

All shocks are fictional. They draw on real lines of conflict, places and precedents, but they are not forecasts of the behavior of the states mentioned.

Each shock card refers to two central political dimensions (Security; Politics and Society; Accession; Monetary Incentives).

Part A – Shock Cards

All shocks are fictional. They draw on real lines of conflict, places and precedents, but they are not forecasts of the behaviour of the states mentioned.

Shock 1 · Darkness on the Dniester	**Moldova · January 2035**
What happens	A cyberattack paralyses the control center of Moldova's power grid. Two-thirds of the country are without electricity for three days in freezing temperatures. On the third day, armed men without insignia occupy the most important bridge across the Dniester. The leadership in Tiraspol demands a special status; Russia denies any involvement. The government in Chișinău asks the EU for help.
Dimensions	Security · Politics and Society
Key question	How does the EU protect a small country on its border when it is not clear who carried out the attack?
Escalation *(optional)*	One week later, a substation in Romania is sabotaged.

Shock 2 · Without Protection	**Ukraine · May 2035**
What happens	A ceasefire has held along the front line since 2031. The US government announces that it will withdraw its air defense systems it delivered to Ukraine and intelligence support within 60 days – Europe should take care of its own security. Two weeks later, the heaviest wave of missile and drone attacks in years hits power plants and the port of Odesa. Grain exports stop, and the price of wheat in the global market rises by a fifth within a month. Kyiv asks for air defense and money for reconstruction.
Dimensions	Security · Monetary Incentives
Key question	Can the EU fill the gap left by the United States – and who pays for it?
Escalation *(optional)*	One member state announces it will block any new support for Ukraine as long as energy prices remain high.

Shock 3 · Shots in Zvečan	**Kosovo and Serbia · August 2035**
What happens	Around 40 armed men occupy the municipal building of Zvečan in northern Kosovo. Two Kosovo police officers are killed in an exchange of fire. Investigations show that the weapons come from Serbian army stocks. Belgrade denies any connection but moves troops to the border. Priština declares a state of emergency; NATO reinforces its presence. Tens of thousands demonstrate in both capitals.
Dimensions	Politics and Society · Accession
Key question	Does the EU use financial support and potentially accession as leverage against Serbia – even at the risk of pushing Belgrade towards Moscow?
Escalation *(optional)*	Serbian civilians are killed during a raid by the Kosovo police.

Shock 4 · No from The Hague	**Netherlands · October 2035**
What happens	In a consultative referendum, 58 percent of Dutch voters reject further EU accessions, with a turnout of 39 percent. The campaign was hardly about the candidate countries but about the housing shortage, agricultural subsidies and the costs of aid to Ukraine. The government declares that it will respect the vote and considers bocking any further financial support for candidate countries and the eastern neighborhood. Parties in Austria and Denmark are planning similar votes.
Dimensions	Politics and Society · Accession
Key question	How does the EU respond to a democratic no to enlargement that actually expresses quite different concerns?
Escalation *(optional)*	In Albania, support for EU accession drops by 20 percentage points within weeks.

Shock 6 · Tbilisi Closes the Door	**Northern Macedonia · November 2035**
What happens	After a disputed parliamentary election, the government has the three largest opposition parties banned by the Constitutional Court and closes the last independent television channels. Hundreds of thousands protest in Skopje. The police respond with force; two people die and hundreds are arrested. The government accuses the EU of interference and signs a major loan agreement with China.
Dimensions	Accession · Monetary Incentives
Key question	How does the EU support the protesters without handing the government the argument of “interference from outside”?
Escalation *(optional)*	The government announces a referendum on stopping the accession process.

Part B – Instrument Cards

Twelve cards in four areas. One set per half-group. Before the game starts, the Stagnating Union half puts the cards that are blocked for it aside – but they remain visible on the table, because the game sheet asks which of them were missing.

Overview

Card	Area	Resilient Union	Stagnating Union
S1 Mutual assistance clause	Security	available	blocked
S2 EU military aid	Security	available	blocked
S3 Crisis assistance	Security	available	available
F1 Sanctions	Monetary Incentives	available	blocked
F2 Freezing or redirecting EU funds	Monetary Incentives	available	available
F3 Financial aid	Monetary Incentives	available	blocked
A1 Accelerating accession	Accession	available	blocked
A2 Freezing the accession process	Accession	available	available
A3 Partial integration	Accession	available	available
P1 EU as mediator	Politics and Society	available	blocked
P2 Coalition of the willing	Politics and Society	available	available
P3 Winning over citizens	Politics and Society	available	available

The rule of thumb behind the allocation: in the Stagnating Union, anything that all member states must decide jointly or that requires credibility is blocked. What remains available is what the Commission can do on its own or what individual member states undertake without the others.

Area: Security

S1 · Mutual Assistance Clause	Security
What it does	If a member state is attacked, all others must assist it "by all the means in their power" (Art. 42(7) TEU). Invoked once so far: by France after the Paris attacks of 2015.
Who decides	The attacked state invokes it; each member state decides for itself how to help.
The catch	Applies to members only. What "assistance" means in concrete terms is open – and neutral states such as Ireland or Austria are not obliged to provide military assistance.
Resilient Union	available – for countries that are full member and those that are associate members
Stagnating Union	available – but only for countries that are already members (hence effectively blocked for WB and EN)

S2 · EU Military Aid	Security
What it does	The EU finances weapons, ammunition and training for partner countries from a common pot. This is how Ukraine has been supported since 2022.
Who decides	The Council, so far unanimously. In the Resilient Union by majority.
The catch	Expensive and slow in procurement. In the past, a single state was able to block disbursements for a long time.
Resilient Union	available
Stagnating Union	blocked (one veto is enough)

S3 · Crisis Assistance	Security
What it does	Rapid civilian assistance via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism: generators, emergency shelters, medical supplies, plus teams against cyberattacks.
Who decides	The Commission coordinates at the request of the affected country; member states contribute voluntarily.
The catch	Alleviates consequences but does not remove causes. It is of no help against armed men or missiles.
Resilient Union	available
Stagnating Union	available

Area: Pressure and Funding

F1 · Sanctions	Pressure and Funding
What it does	Entry bans, frozen accounts, trade restrictions against states, companies or individuals. Precedent: the sanctions against Russia since 2014 and 2022.
Who decides	The Council, unanimously today. In the Resilient Union by majority.
The catch	They work slowly, often also hit the population and harm the EU's own companies. Those affected turn to other partners.
Resilient Union	available
Stagnating Union	blocked (one veto is enough)

F2 · Freezing or Redirecting EU Funds	Pressure and Funding
What it does	The EU withholds funds already committed or redirects them – away from the government, towards municipalities, civil society or reconstruction. Precedent: in 2023 the EU suspended funds for Kosovo; the Western Balkans Growth Facility only pays out in return for reforms.
Who decides	Commission proposal, EP and Council need to agree with majority
The catch	Often hits whole people of a country. Governments use it to portray themselves as victims of Brussels.
Resilient Union	available
Stagnating Union	available

F3 · Aid Package	Pressure and Funding
What it does	Large-scale new money for reconstruction, energy or budget support. Precedent: the Ukraine Facility of 50 billion euros from 2024.
Who decides	Council and Parliament; additional funds in the EU budget require the consent of all member states.
The catch	Controversial in times of tight budgets. The money is missing elsewhere – for example in agricultural or regional funding.
Resilient Union	available
Stagnating Union	blocked (no agreement on new money)

Area: Accession

A1 · Accelerating Accession	Accession
What it does	The EU brings steps forward: negotiating chapters are opened or closed faster, a country is admitted with the next group. Precedent: Ukraine and Moldova received candidate status within months in 2022.
Who decides	The Council. Intermediate steps by majority in the Resilient Union; the accession treaty itself always unanimously, with ratification in all member states.
The catch	Speed comes at the expense of thoroughness. If reforms are only fulfilled on paper, this will catch up with the EU later.
Resilient Union	available
Stagnating Union	blocked (every step can fail because of a veto)

A2 · Freezing the Accession Process	Accession
What it does	The EU halts negotiations or moves a country back one stage until certain conditions are met. Precedent: Georgia's accession process effectively came to a standstill in 2024. The EU can do so with all steps in all ongoing accession procedures.
Who decides	Commission and Council.
The catch	The strongest lever – but once used, it is spent. The country can turn to other partners.
Resilient Union	available
Stagnating Union	available

A3 · Partial Integration	Accession
What it does	A country takes part in individual EU areas before accession: parts of the single market, energy networks, roaming, research and student programmes. People feel the benefits before membership arrives.
Who decides	The Commission; for larger steps the Council.
The catch	Can be perceived as second-class membership – or as a substitute that puts actual accession on the back burner.
Resilient Union	available
Stagnating Union	available

Area: Politics and Society

P1 · EU as Mediator	Politics and Society
What it does	The EU brings the parties to a conflict to the table and presents its own compromise proposals. Precedent: the EU-facilitated dialogue between Serbia and Kosovo since 2011.
Who decides	The High Representative or an EU Special Representative, backed by the member states.
The catch	Only works if both sides trust the EU and believe it can enforce commitments.
Resilient Union	available
Stagnating Union	Available (but EU might lack credibility)

P2 · Coalition of the Willing	Politics and Society
What it does	A group of member states acts together without waiting for the others: supplies weapons, provides money, sends personnel. Precedent: the Czech ammunition initiative for Ukraine in 2024.
Who decides	The participating governments – each for itself.
The catch	Fast and effective, but it is not “the EU” acting. The Union as a whole might become weaker and more divided in the process.
Resilient Union	available
Stagnating Union	available

P3 · Winning over Citizens	Politics and Society
What it does	Campaigns explaining the benefits and costs of enlargement; support for independent media and civil society groups in the candidate countries; exchange programmes.
Who decides	Commission, Parliament and national governments.
The catch	Takes years to have an effect. In the short term, it can be seen as propaganda or as interference from outside.
Resilient Union	available
Stagnating Union	available

Part C – Game Sheet

Group: _____ **Shock No.:** ____ **Our World:** ☐ Resilient Union ☐ Stagnating Union

Step 1 – Choose three cards. Choose exactly three instrument cards from your world. At least two must come from the areas targeted by the shock.

Card	Intended Impact	Realistic impact	Does the catch materialise?
1.			
2.			
3.			

Step 2 – What is missing. Which card would you have liked to play but could not? What would it have changed?

Missing Card	What it would have changed

Step 3 – The impact traffic light. Rate your response honestly: green, yellow or red – with one sentence of justification (one table for each instrument card).

Question	Light	Justification
Has the acute situation eased after one year?		
Does the EU remain united?		

Question	Light	Justification
Does the promise of accession remain credible?		

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All groups present the results of the simulation. Afterwards, differences in the chosen reactions are discussed.