

## **A Comparative Study of the Role of Buffer Geopolitical Location in the Foreign Policy of Countries (Case Study: Switzerland, Ukraine)**

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### **Abstract**

Foreign policy of the states is always influenced by various factors. The geopolitical location of countries has always been one of the most important variables of political, economic, and social mutual relations between countries. The geopolitical location of buffer states has compelled them to make various decisions in terms of both domestic and foreign policy areas. Some of buffer countries have successfully used this situation to achieve their national goals and interests. In some cases, the geopolitical location of the buffer faces the states with different kinds of international pressures and threats. Some of the buffer states have also been impacted by the military actions of the buffered states. But we should not neglect the fact that the behavior of the politicians of the buffer countries affects the attitude and decisions of the buffered countries. Therefore, in this article, political and economic relations and mutual relations of two countries, namely Switzerland and Ukraine, with buffered countries will be investigated. The research method is descriptive-analytic and the data and information are gathered using library and internet methods.

**Keywords:** Geopolitical Location, Foreign Policy, Buffer States.

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## **1. Introduction**

Some countries have served as buffer states since the state concept has been formed in the humans' recorded history. Of course, where and why this concept was formed is within the scope of geography; however, some geographers have published studies allocated to some of these states. Most references regarding geographical research contain brief discussions such as border studies (Chay,1986:11).

Geographical location plays a major role in the buffer situation. Superpowers compete with each other at a global scale to control the world and geopolitical regions and seek to infiltrate the geographical spaces (Ahmadi,2012:2). Factors that are effective in geopolitics are divided into two general categories, namely fixed (constant) factors and variable factors (Pir,1971). The fixed factors are in fact the natural and geographical phenomena and the variable factors, some of which may also have a physical origin. Geographical location as one of the fixed factors and the humans as one of the variable factors play a key role in geopolitical analyses. The fixed geopolitical factors include geographical location (e.g., sea location, coastal location, land location and strategic location), space and its divisions, territory area, topographic situation (e.g., borders, water network, and the country shape). The variable geopolitical factors also include population, natural resources, political and social institutions (Ezati,1991:76-104). In fact, countries try to coordinate their foreign affairs based on the above-mentioned fixed and variable geopolitical factors.

The geopolitical understanding of countries' foreign policy requires a realistic analysis of the geographical space surrounding a political unit, and because of this, geopolitics can determine the foreign policy of countries and its basic priorities (Ghalibaf and Pormosavi,2007). Buffer states are scattered in Asia, Europe, North America, South and Africa, each with different political, economic, military and geopolitical situations, and their politicians try to coordinate their foreign policy with the geopolitical location of their buffer state. However, some of these states become successful in doing so and some others are unsuccessful in achieving their goals. Some buffer states such as North Korea are facing extensive international sanctions and states such as Finland is one of the most developed countries in the world, and Afghanistan as a buffer state has always been invaded by the world powers such as the US and Soviet Union. In this research, two European buffer states and the policies

of world powers towards each of them were investigated. To this end, two European states, namely Switzerland in the center of Europe and Ukraine in Eastern Europe, were studied and the political and economic interactions of each of these two states with their buffered states were investigated. Also, the formation of the interactions and foreign policy views of each of these states will be investigated. Now in 2023, Switzerland is one of the safest places in the world, and Ukraine is a country that does not have control over many parts of its country, and since 2022, it has witnessed the all-out attack of Russia. Certainly, one of the important parameters of the foreign policy of Ukraine and Switzerland is its geopolitical location.

Switzerland, as one of the buffer states with which the world powers have engaged in a policy of tolerance and interaction in the last century has high political and economic connections with the regional and supra-regional buffered powers. Ukraine is also a country where the rivalry amongst the buffered powers is very high and each of them tries to expand their influence. This country is the scene of war, and parts of this country are occupied by one of the buffered powers, i.e., Russia.

## **2. Research Methodology**

The current study aims at investigating the subject by adopting an interdisciplinary approach and using library and internet resources, researches and studies undertaken in the fields of geopolitics, international law, international relations, international trade, political science, and so on. The study also proceeds with the statistics of the results by extracting a conceptual model and adopting the descriptive analytic method.

## **3. Literature Review**

Few comprehensive and complete research studies have been conducted in this field. Most of the research studies have investigated only one variable, for instance, the impact of energy geopolitics upon foreign policy, and other variables have not been investigated, or many research studies have been carried out on foreign policy, without taking the geopolitical dimensions into account. The most important research studies related to this topic are as follows:

1. Ahmadi Nohdani, Sirous (2012). Typology of geographical buffer spaces, case of study: Iran. Doctoral dissertation in the field of political geography under the supervisory of Dr. Mohammad Reza Hafeznia, Tehran, Tarbiat Modares University.

In this research, for the first time, the buffer location and its characteristics have been discussed and it has been explained that Iran has been in a buffer location during the last two hundred years. The buffer location is one of the types of geopolitical locations which play a very important role in the foreign policy orientation of states.

2. Pedi, Rebecca (2020). *Small states in Europe as a buffer between East and West*; Handbook on the Politics of Small States, Edward Elgar Publishing.

One of the chapters of this book deals with Ukraine as a buffer state between the East and the West. It is explained that small states that played the buffer role in the past have now become the topic of competition between great powers and their integration projects. It concludes that states, such as Ukraine, which are located between great powers, are vulnerable to the pressure of their neighbors, but in any case, their decisions are still important at home and abroad.

3. Chay, John and Thomas, E. Ross (edited by); (1986); *Buffer States in World Politics*; Westview Press, inc. U.S.A.

John Chay and Thomas Ross have published a book titled: "Buffer States in the World Politics", which includes a collection of articles about buffer states collected in 1986. In this book, a comprehensive and accurate definition of the buffer state is not provided, and some regions such as Tibet, which is not an independent country, today, are investigated. Also, some countries that had a buffer location in the past centuries have not been mentioned as buffer states. Furthermore, since the book is related to the Cold War period and the Soviet Union had not yet collapsed, some countries, which have been a buffer after the Cold War, have not been mentioned as buffer states.

4. Poast, Paul, (2012); *Can Issue Linkage Improve Treaty Credibility?: Buffer State Alliances as a "Hard Case"* *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 57, 5: pp. 739-764. , First Published July 10, 2012.

In this article, which was published in 2012 in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, the author refers to the alliance relations of buffer states or states located between two rivals. The author also points out that buffer states are not safe even in the case of agreements and treaties with big countries due to their position, and also points to the collective unity of the countries that have a buffer position.

5. Baly, j, Martin, (2014); *Emperial ontological (in)security: 'Buffer states', International Relations and the case of Anglo-Afghan relations, 1808-1878.*

This article was published by Martin J. Baly for the first time in 2014. In this article, the relationship between the British government and Afghanistan as a buffer state is investigated from 1808 to 1878. The article provides a new perspective on "buffer states". It argues that the geographical buffer spaces have been analyzed through a structuralist and functionalist lens. We can understand from the case study due to the ambiguity about accepting a country such as Afghanistan as a state and the failure of Britain to establish a conventional policy and interaction with this country, the relations between Britain and Afghanistan have created a feeling of insecurity for Britain.

6. Chand, Bibek, (2023); *Reframing the Buffer State in Contemporary International Relations: Nepal's Relations with India and China*, Publisher: Routledge May 2023.

This book was published by Routledge in 2023. The author provides a new conceptual framework for the buffer states by analyzing 21 political events. The author deals with the case study of Nepal between the two powers of India and China in Asia and the competition of these countries in buffer states such as Nepal. Also, the policies of the Nepalese government are examined according to the geopolitical location in which it is located and how to create a balance between the bigger powers.

#### **4. The Key Concepts and Theories**

##### **4-1. Geopolitics**

The term geopolitics was first used by Rudolph Kjellén, a member of the Swedish parliament and a professor at Uppsala University, who was influenced by geopolitical ideas, in 1899 (Glassner,1993:224). Kjellén believed that the military, political, and economic characteristics of nations are affected by the physical and environmental forms of their country (Agnew,1998). In fact, Kjellén expanded Ratzel's ideas.

Geopolitics expanded in the first half of the 20th century with several theories, which mainly focused on the role of geographical space in global power and strategies (Hafeznia,2004:24). The vast developments and transformations that took place in Europe affected England before any country because its geopolitical issues were always outside its borders (Ezati,1991:10). After Germany failed in the First World War and the Treaty of Versailles was imposed on this country, the idea of geographic determinism along with the thoughts of "Ratzel and Haushofer" led to the beginning of German geopolitics. The theory of geographic determinism that based on Darwinism

in the context of the principle of "survival of fittest" was established on the idea of naturalness of the political expansion of strong states at the expense of the destruction of weaker states, led to the destruction of geopolitics in universities after the Second World War. Well-known geopoliticians such as "Kissinger" introduced the word geopolitics (Mojtahedzade,2009:195) and now, in the third decade of the 21st century, this academic discipline is studied in different universities with different subdisciplines such as the geopolitics of minorities, the environment, criticism, resistance, sports, drugs, energy, and hydrogeopolitics.

#### **4-2.Foreign Policy**

Valerie Hudson believes that foreign policy is a strategy or approach chosen by national governments so that they can achieve their desired goals in their relations with other countries. Foreign policy means specific actions to influence others that are outside the political realm and under the rule of governments. Various factors and foundations are involved in the behavior and actions of governments beyond their own territories. Since geopolitics deals with the discussion of power and politics in territorial spaces, and we also observe that the element of power exists in a hidden form in foreign policy, so foreign policy can be examined as a factor that can be influenced by geopolitical foundations. This is because without taking geopolitical factors into account, one cannot expect the actions and behaviors of a country to be accepted and legitimized by other nations and countries.

The concept of foreign policy in a country is related to the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of decisions that have an extraterritorial aspect from the specific point of view of that country, the national goals that countries are trying to achieve, and the means to achieve them (Dehghani Firoozabadi,2009:183). In other words, foreign policy is a strategy or a series of actions pre-designed by government decision-makers with the purpose of achieving certain goals in the general framework and in the global and international environments. Although the decision-makers play a key role in the foreign policy process, it should not be assumed that national goals and interests permeate the minds of policy makers. In many cases, these decisions are the product of historical experiences, political and ideological beliefs, geopolitical situation, and needs arising from internal structures, and they are also based on various perceptions of the conditions and international events (Qavam,2010:148).

Several tools are necessary for the maximum exploitation of foreign policy, one of which is diplomacy, which is defined as the art of managing foreign policy or regulating international relations, and resolving international disputes through peaceful means. There are other tools such as military power, geographical and geopolitical location of the country, cultural and media tools and economic power.

#### **4-3.Geopolitical Location**

The geopolitical location of any country, along with the geographical values of that country, show its position and positioning in relation to the global and regional power centers, the structure of global politics, and the political divisions of the world. In fact, the geographical location becomes a geopolitical location when it comes to assessing the power of countries. Geopolitical factors affecting the foreign policy of countries can be divided into eight factors, namely territorial factors, demographic factors, cultural factors, political factors, economic factors, defense and security factors, international factors and scientific/program factors. Each of which is divided into subsets.

#### **4-4.The Geopolitical Location of Buffer States**

In order to avoid the possibility of contact and direct conflict between competing powers, some geographical regions are created sometimes by the mutual agreements of the powers or one of them, and they function as buffer spaces. Buffers have existed as a geographical phenomenon since the first eras of human history. The competition of two great powers and the existence of a weaker space between them, which is of strategic importance for both powers, has caused the powers to pay attention to this space, and a tough competition emerges between them to take over this space or at least keep it neutral. At the same time, these spaces become the open and hidden places for the competition of these powers.

#### **4-5.Definitions of Buffer States**

The buffer states created by the great European powers in the 19th century led to the management of competition between these powers in Europe, Asia and Africa, as colonial powers. As such, it helped prevent direct conflict between these powers and led to long periods of peace between the rivals. Afghanistan, Belgium, Siam and Switzerland are examples of buffer states.

Later, countries such as Holland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Austria and Yugoslavia also joined them.

**Table (1): Definitions of Buffer States**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Definition of Buffer State</b>
Menon & Snyder (2017)	A country or territory lying between the spheres of influence of two or more powerful states, but either not allied with them, or dominated by, any of them.
Ahmadi&Hafeznia & Hokard (2012)	A geographical space with an independent but neutral political unit or units located between two or more powerful and competing powers or between the spheres of influence of two powers or two blocs of superior and competing powers, separating these two powers from each other and reducing the possibility of confrontation and conflict between them and these powers have agreed on the presence of this space.
Spykman & Rollins (1939);Valerian & Benthuisen (2012)	A state lying between a pair of rivals, where at least one of the rivals shares a land or water boundary.
Hafeznia (2008)	A geographical space with a power vacuum or weakness between two powers.
Michael G. Partem	A small or weak and neutral state in terms of capability and foreign policy towards two rival states. This definition is rather broad and vague, but serves as a starting point.
Fazal (2004)	A state that is physically located between two rivals, unless an ocean separates the rivals. The ocean exception only affects US-Russia and US-China rivalries.
Rondeli ( 2003)	A buffer state is probably a stable neutral zone created by one or more powerful states in the space between them, to separate the warring parties from each other and reduce the possibility of conflict.
De Spiegeleire (1997)	A state that is located between buffered actors; its relative power is noticeably smaller than the relative power of either of the buffered actors; and has to be a truly independent sovereign actor within the international system.
Chay (1986)	According to John Chay, the identity of the buffer states is very complex. A small power must be neutral and

	independent in order to play the role of a real buffer in the competition between the big powers.
Spykman (1938)	A relatively weak state that is geographically located between two strong states.

### 5. Research Findings

Group 1: The buffer states with which the buffered powers have engaged in an interactive foreign and economic policy based on mutual friendly relations based on cooperation and understanding.

#### 5-1.Switzerland

##### The Geopolitical Location of Switzerland

Switzerland is the highest and most mountainous country in Europe, with an area of approximately 41,290 square kilometers, and it is located in Central Europe. This country has three geographically distinct regions, including the Alps, the Central Plateau, and the Jura. Mountains cover approximately 70% of its territory. But they only house a quarter of the population, which is approximately 8.8 million people, 75% of which are Swiss and 25% of other nationalities.



**Figure (1): The Geopolitical Map of Switzerland**

Switzerland is a landlocked country bordered by France, Germany, Italy and Austria, without any important mineral resources. Bordering the three colonial countries of the 20th century has never turned this small and buffer state into a place of conflict between rival powers in recent centuries.

**Table(2): Social and Economic Indicators of Switzerland**

Indicator	Rank in the World	Number
Population	101	8,8 Million People
Area	134	41290
GDP	20	681, Billion Dollars
Income	4	92000\$
Economic Freedom Score	2	83.5

**The Foreign Policy of Switzerland**

The foreign policy of this country aims at preserving its independence and prosperity. The most important goals of its foreign policy are respect for human rights and democracy, peaceful coexistence between the people, protection of natural resources, and the protection of Switzerland's economic interests abroad.

**Neutrality Policy**

Permanent neutrality is a principle of Swiss foreign policy. According to the law of neutrality, Switzerland must not participate in wars between states. The Swiss federal constitution stipulates that the Federal Council and the Federal Assembly must take measures to safeguard Switzerland's neutrality. This law was codified in the Hague Conventions of 18 October 1907, which is a part of international customary law. This law defines the rights and obligations of a neutral state, and the most important principle of this law is the inviolability of the territory of a neutral state. The main obligations of this law are as follows: 1. Refrain from engaging in war, 2. Ensure its own defense, 3. Ensure equal treatment for belligerent states in respect of the exportation of war materials, 4. not supply mercenary troops to belligerent states, 5. not allow belligerent states to use its territory.

In the 1900s, Switzerland developed a positive self-image as a neutral small state that renounced any colonial claims, yet became intertwined in the global economy and colonial structures. Additionally, Switzerland became the site for international peace efforts (Jacob Tanner,2019), and the powerful European countries have tried to make Switzerland continue its neutrality policy.

Even when fascist countries became increasingly aggressive, the Swiss federal government sought good foreign relations with its dictatorial

neighbors. In fact, Switzerland was one of the first countries to recognize the conquest of Ethiopia by Italy under Benito Mussolini and Austria by Germany in 1938. Joining the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Western alliance led by the United States, was never a serious option for a country that believed armed neutrality was the best defense against Nazism and would also save the country from Communism. The Cold War allowed Switzerland to become a respectable member of the international community again. Its neutrality enabled it to act as a mediator between the two warring camps, but as a capitalist democracy with a strong citizen's army, it was a tacit member of the non-communist world and one of its key defenders, an interesting and complex combination of neutrality, isolationism, solidarity, anti-communism and militarism (Aubrey Diem Thomas Maissen).

After the end of the Cold War, Switzerland has steadily reduced its neutrality policies and since 1990, the country has regularly participated in UN economic sanctions. Switzerland became a member of the United Nations in 2002. Switzerland officially declared its neutrality in wars such as the US invasion of Iraq, which were without the consent of the United Nations. Neutral governments are traditionally seen as very suitable to act as international mediators. This assessment is based on the fact that both concepts, i.e., neutrality and mediation, are rooted in efforts to contain violent conflicts and thus combine realism and idealistic dimensions of international relations. But, regarding these normative commonalities, the increased influence of norms in mediation may be considered in favor of the role of neutral states as mediators (Laurent Goetschel, 2020). One of the most important international roles of Switzerland is also the role of mediator and reducing tensions between the world states.

Switzerland's neutrality is historically rooted in the past two centuries, when it helped the country to maintain its independence in a Europe torn by major wars. This also contributed to national cohesion in the country, especially when parts of the population were pro-French, pro-German, or pro-Italian. Over the years, neutrality became part of the Swiss national identity. Currently, it still shows the main direction of the country's foreign policy.

**Table (3): Switzerland's Foreign Policy Positions in Major World Events after the First World War**

<b>Before 1919</b>	The First World War and the strong involvement of powerful neighboring states and the development of nationalism. Switzerland, because of its cultural and linguistic diversity, was able to prevent disunity and divisions within the country with its policy of neutrality, thus preventing the country's disintegration.
<b>1919-1938</b>	After the new order following the war and the defeat of one of its powerful neighbors and the victory of another colonial neighbor, France, and after the Treaty of Versailles, it joined the League of Nations as a neutral country in 1920, and Geneva was chosen as its headquarters.
<b>1938-1945</b>	With the start of hostilities and military engagement and the beginning of World War II in 1939, Switzerland was able to maintain its neutrality in spite of the intense pressure from the warring parties, and Switzerland's neutrality was also accepted by the states involved in the war. Although some sources have stated that Nazi Germany had planned an attack on Switzerland
<b>1945-1990</b>	After the Second World War and the start of the Cold War led by the US and the Soviet Union, Switzerland did not join any of these alliances, and although all the powerful neighbors of this state, such as France, West Germany, and Italy, were on the Western Front and the US, Switzerland maintained its neutrality and even did not join the UN. Of course, this country signed the European Security Cooperation in 1963 in the Council of Europe and in 1975 in the Helsinki Conference of Finland.
<b>From 1990 to 2002</b>	The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War provided Switzerland a new opportunity to change its neutrality policy and in 1993, it adopted a new neutrality policy. Switzerland also maintained its neutrality in the Balkan War, the American invasion of Iraq and the first Persian Gulf War, and the invasion of Afghanistan by its allies in 2001.
<b>From 2002</b>	Joining the United Nations in 2002, maintaining neutrality in the second US attack on Iraq and Russia's attack to Ukraine in 2014 and 2022.

**Switzerland in International Organizations**

After membership in the UN in 2002, Switzerland has increased its presence in international organizations.

**Table (4): Switzerland's Presence in International Organizations**

United Nations	The Council of Europe and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)
United Nations Commission on International Trade Law	The United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND)
International Telecommunication Union	The Postal Operations Council (POC)
The Universal Postal Union (UPU)	The Executive Board of UNESCO
Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguard of Intangible Cultural Heritage	The United Nations Economic and Social Council
The United Nations Commission on Science and Technology	United Nations Security Council (2023-2024)
World Tourism Organization (WTO)	The International Organization of Francophonie

**International Organizations based in Switzerland**

Switzerland has a history of more than 150 years in hosting international organizations. Today, 40 international organizations are present in this country, and every year approximately 4000 heads of states, governments and high-ranking officials travel to Geneva, Switzerland. Also, more than 175 member states of the UN are represented in Geneva by around 4000 employees.

Switzerland's relations with the buffered states:

**1.The EU Member States**

Switzerland has chosen to remain outside the 27-member bloc, maintaining close ties with the bloc, which is its biggest trading partner. About two-thirds of Switzerland's imports are from the EU member states, and half of its exports are sent to the EU.

An estimated 1.4 million EU citizens live in Switzerland, while 450,000 Swiss citizens reside in the EU states. Over the past decades, more than 120 bilateral agreements from agriculture to police cooperation have been concluded between Brussels and Bern. In 1997 and 2001, approximately three-quarters of Swiss voters declared their opposition to European integration, while all of Switzerland's neighbors are its members. Swiss citizens believe that joining the EU can be in contrast with the neutrality policy of this country. In fact, Switzerland is interested in having extensive

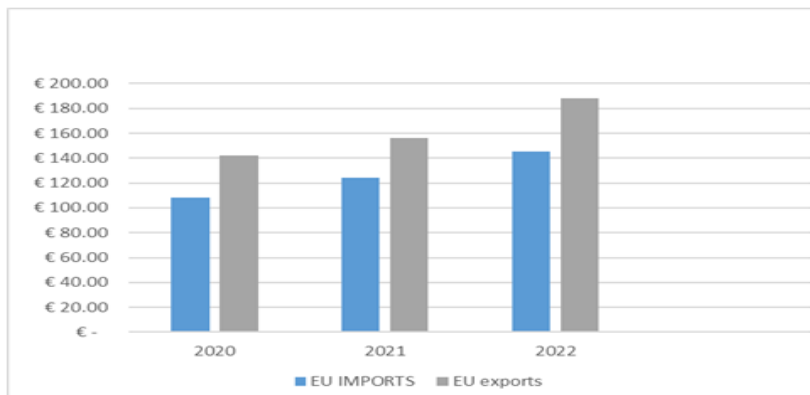
cooperation with the EU, but it is not a member of the EU from a political point of view.

In 1999, Switzerland and the EU signed a package of seven agreements, including the free movement of citizens from both sides. According to this agreement, the citizens of each country have the right to live and work in the EU or Switzerland, providing that they have a job or other source of income. Another set of ad hoc agreements was concluded in 2004 on Switzerland's participation in the EU's borderless Schengen area. These agreements also apply to any state that joins the EU as a new member, with the exception of the free movement agreement, in which Switzerland renegotiates with each new state. Switzerland and the EU each are other major economic partners, and the average value of trade between the two sides is around one billion euros per business day. Switzerland is also the EU's fourth largest trading partner after China, the United States and the United Kingdom.

**2. Switzerland's Relations with Neighboring States**

Switzerland is bordered by the top three economies of the euro zone and by the traditional powers of Europe, namely Germany, France and Italy. German, French and Italian are the three main languages of the Swiss people. However, despite the bloody wars with each other, especially in the 20th century, these three European aggressive and colonial powers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have always tried to recognize the neutral position of Switzerland.

Switzerland has about 460 miles with Italy, 356 miles with France, 208 miles with Germany, 102 miles with Austria and 25 miles with Liechtenstein border lines.



**Figure (2): Switzerland Trade Relations with the EU Members**

**The Status of Switzerland in the Economic Complexity Index (ECI):**

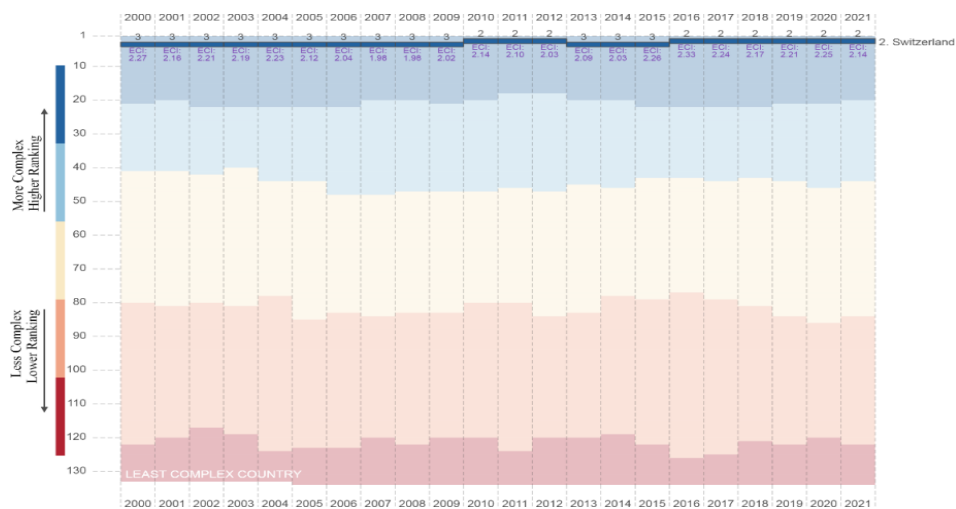
This ranking index of countries is based on the diversity and complexity of their export portfolio. Countries with a large variety of productive knowledge, especially complex specialized knowledge, are able to produce a large variety of complex products.

**Table (5): Ranking and Index of Economic Complexity of Switzerland (2017-2021)**

Year	Global ranking	Index
2017	2	2.44
2018	2	2.17
2019	2	2.21
2020	2	2.25
2021	2	2.14

(Source: <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/rankings>)

Since 2016, Switzerland has always ranked second in the world after Japan in this ranking, which shows the important position of this country in the economy and international trade.



**Figure (3): Ranking and Index of Economic Complexity of Switzerland (2000-2021)**

(Source: <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/rankings>)

### 5-2.Ukraine

Ukraine is the second largest country in Europe after Russia. It borders Russia from the east and northeast, Belarus from the north, Poland and Slovakia from the west, Hungary from the southwest, Romania and Moldova from the south, and the Black and Azov seas in the southeast of this country. Bulgaria, Turkey and Georgia are also the neighbors of this country. The population of Ukraine is approximately 40 million people.



**Figure (4): The Geopolitical Map of Ukraine**

Ukraine got out of the control of its neighbors such as Poland-Lithuania, Russia and the Soviet Union at the end of the 20th century. Ukraine experienced a short period of independence in 1918-1920, but some parts of Ukraine in the west of this country during the period between the two world wars was governed by Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia, and then it became part of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine gained full independence on August 24, 1991, following a referendum.

#### **Geopolitical Position and Foreign Policy of Ukraine**

Ukraine literally means the end of the territory, margin and border. It seems that this title was given to the country because of its geopolitical location against the Easterners' attacks on Europe (Green Book of Ukraine,2018:31). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, residents of Russian descent in the eastern regions of Ukraine have shown interest in joining these regions to Russia.

**Table (6): Social and Economic Indicators of Ukraine**

Index	Rank in the World	Number
Population	41	40, Million People
Area	45	579000
GDP	58	161
Income	113	4043
Economic freedom Score	125	53.7

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine declared its independence. Until today, this country has been the focus of many developments that have turned Ukraine into one of the important crisis centers for the great powers. The Orange Revolution in 2004 and the fall of the elected government in February 2014 and coming to power pro-Westerns, which Russia referred it as a coup, caused Russia's military intervention and the subsequent occupation of the Crimean Peninsula. In general, there is an obvious asymmetry in the relationship between the two countries and the people (Copley, 2011). On one side, a part of Ukraine wants to join the EU and NATO, and on the other side is Orthodox Russia.

**Table (7): The Timeline of the Most Important Events in the Political History of Ukraine Since 1991 AD**

In the 1991 referendum, they declared independence from the Soviet Union and elected Kravchuk as the president.
Leonid Kuchma's victory over Kravchuk in the 1994 presidential election
Kuchma's re-election in a highly contested election in 1999
Victory of pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich in 2004
Massive demonstrations of Yanukovich's opponents and the annulment of the elections and the re-run of the elections and the victory of Yushchenko, the candidate supported by the West.
The efforts of Ukraine and its Western-oriented president to join NATO in 2008
The victory of pro-Western Yanukovich Bertymoshenko in the 2009 presidential election
Yanukovich's government suspended trade talks and ties with the EU in November, and decided to restore economic ties with Russia in 2013.
Mass demonstrations against Yanukovich and his dismissal and escape to Russia, the annexation of Crimea to Russia in 2014

Declaration of independence by Eastern Donbass region with Russian support in 2014
Election of pro-Western Petro Poroshenko as president in 2014
Poroshenko lost to Vladimir Zelensky in the 2019 presidential election
Zelensky's request to join NATO in 2021 and sanctions against Viktor Medvedchuk, Russia's ally
The gathering of Russian forces around the borders of Ukraine and conducting military exercises
Russia's massive invasion of Ukraine in February 2022

### **Ukraine's Foreign Policy and Actors Influencing it**

#### **5-3.Russia**

Russia considers the countries of Eastern Europe as “far abroad” and the countries separated from the former Soviet Union as “near abroad”. In the meantime, Russia considers the countries of the near abroad to be of strategic and geopolitical importance. Russia considers the countries of the near abroad as a barrier against the expansion of NATO since the American foreign policy is to contain Russia through the membership of Eastern European countries and republics separated from the Soviet Union in NATO. The republics separated from Soviet Union are also looking for a new support umbrella, and they consider it to be NATO, and Russia is not going to remain silent in the face of these movements. In the opinion of the leaders of the Kremlin, the West, and especially the United States are aggressive and arrogant forces that seek to dominate the world at the cost of isolation and marginalization of others (Conel,2016:100).

Many Russians consider Ukraine a part of the territory and even the Russian nation. Russia uses the Orthodox Church and its traditional authority to keep Ukraine in its sphere of influence (Andreas Kappeler,2014).

The President of Russia has repeatedly declared that Russians and Ukrainians are one nation (Putin,2008,2014). These words of Vladimir Putin show that Ukraine does not need to be an independent state. On the other hand, Western-oriented Ukrainian politicians have tried to take steps in recent years to integrate with Western-led organizations, which is considered a betrayal by the Russian political elite (Kuzio,2016)

In 2002, the parliamentary elections of Ukraine have become the turning point of Ukraine in many fields. The inability to form a parliamentary majority, the increase in the confrontation between government officials and opposition

forces, the increase in political pressure on the mass media have led to a decrease in the popularity of the government in public opinion and the intensification of political and social crises. In 2004, the Orange Revolution of Ukraine took place, where the election competition between the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich and the pro-Western and American Viktor Yushchenko became a big challenge in the country. In the first and second stages of the election, the pro-Russian candidate won the election, but Yushchenko and his supporters questioned the validity of the elections and launched massive demonstrations and strikes, which eventually annulled the elections and held re-elections, in which the pro-Western candidate, Yushchenko, won. Yushchenko's victory widened the differences between Russia and Ukraine. Yushchenko Ukraine's NATO accession was at the top of its foreign policy goals, which was definitely accompanied by Russia's strong opposition, and Russia has always tried to force the Ukrainian government to change its policies closer to the West with economic sanctions and threatening actions, but In 2010, with the victory of Viktor Yankovich, the candidate supported by Moscow, Russia again tried to bring Ukraine closer to itself. The close relationship and pressure of the Russian government made the President of Ukraine to suspend the cooperation agreement with the EU, which paved the way for the final accession of Ukraine to the EU, and this victory could be a victory for Moscow. Not signing the political and commercial cooperation agreement with the EU by the president caused massive demonstrations of Western supporters in Ukraine. The demonstrators considered this action of the pro-Russian government in Ukraine as a betrayal of the national interests of Ukraine, and with the spread of the protests, Yankovic was removed from power and fled to Russia. The most important crises between Russia and Ukraine since 2014 are as follows:

### **1. Recognition of the two Provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk in Eastern Ukraine Autonomous Republics**

The conflicts in eastern Ukraine, which started in 2014, were accompanied by the capture of government centers and the declaration of independence by the Russian-speaking people of the Donbass region of Ukraine. The Donbass region in eastern Ukraine was joined to Ukraine in 1922, and this region is now recognized only by Russia and Belarus, facing a negative reaction from the EU, NATO and the United States.

## 2. Occupation of Crimea

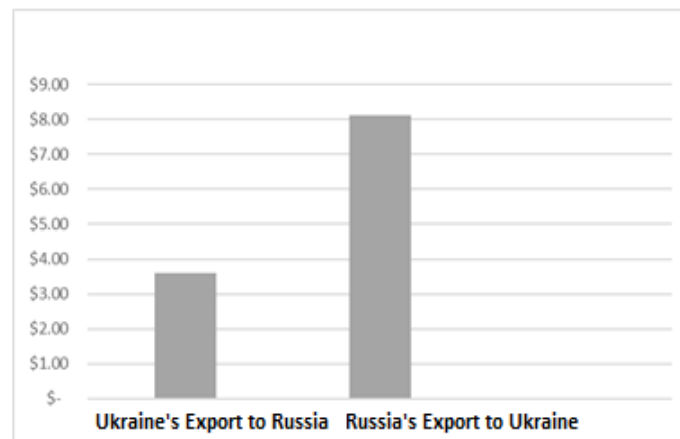
In March 2014, Russia occupied the autonomous peninsula of Crimea under the pretext of protection and defense of Russian speakers and annexed it to its territory.

Following the announcement of Ukraine to join NATO, Russia expanded its military activities on the western borders and finally launched its invasion of Ukraine in the spring of 2022, which is the first official war between two European states after World War II. Russia believes that the United States is conducting a proxy war. The Russian Foreign Minister believes that this war is not only Ukraine's war with Russia (ABDULLAH AL FAHIM,2022).

The idea of Finlandization for Ukraine is becoming more and more popular after Russia's invasion of this country, an idea that states Ukraine has to become a neutral buffer between East and West. Columnist Thomas Friedman believes that a neutral Ukraine can take away Vladimir Putin's perception of being "encircled by NATO".

### Economic Relations between Ukraine and Russia

In 2021 and before the Russia's attack on Ukraine, the trade between the two countries amounted to 11 billion dollars, of which Russia's export share was 13.8 billion dollars and that of Ukraine was 3.61 billion dollars to Russia. The three main products exported by Russia to Ukraine were coal (15%), oil (14.7%) and gas (4.7%). Aluminum oxide (17%), iron (9.8%) and steel (3.6%). were also main products exported to Russia by Ukraine.



**Figure (5): Trade between Ukraine and Russia in 2021**

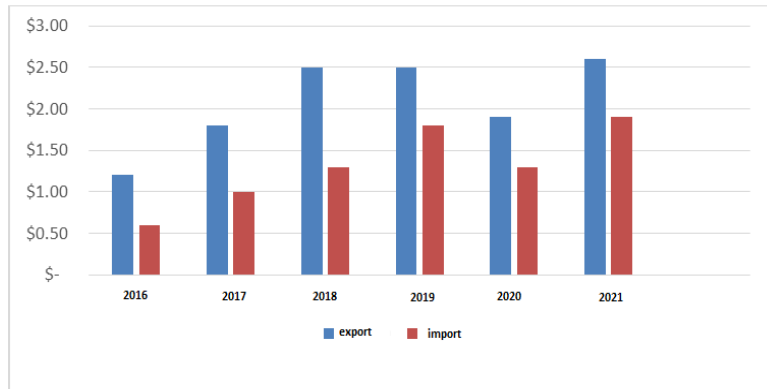
#### **5-4.The US**

Ukraine is a country that is very important for global players, particularly Russia, America and the EU. For a long time, American strategists have mentioned that America should focus its efforts on eliminating the threat of Russia and target Russia from its weak point, which includes some Muslim republics of the North Caucasus, and make the second collapse of Russia practical in this area. But the US has tried to use Ukraine as an important and large European country that declared its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union to put pressure on Russia. America, in addition to trying to have extensive economic and political influence in Ukraine in recent decades, has always raised the issue of Ukraine's membership in NATO, which is considered one of Russia's red lines.

In his book, Brzezinski mentions a region called "Balkan-Eurasia" and the map dedicated for it in 1997 corresponds to the exact circle that describes all the events in the region in the current conflicts. Brzezinski considers Ukraine to be a new and important space on the Eurasian chessboard and a geopolitical axis, and considers the mere existence of Ukraine as an independent country to be the cause of Russia's transformation, and states that in spite of the existence of Ukraine, Russia is no longer a Eurasian empire.

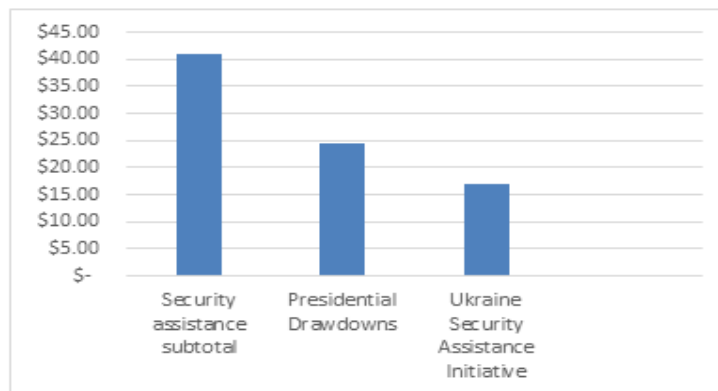
The expansion of NATO towards Eastern Europe has started through the countries of Eastern Europe and the republics separated from the Soviet Union after its collapse. Since 1997, Ukraine has expanded its relationship with NATO, and in 2002, Ukraine announced its request for membership in NATO. NATO's desire to accept the membership of Georgia and Ukraine at the Budapest meeting in April 2008 caused tension in the relations between Russia and NATO, especially the United States. In 2008, Russia threatened to target them if it joins NATO and creates NATO bases in that country (Zibakalam et al.,2014:28).

The Orange Revolution of Ukraine in 2004 was clearly the stage for the United States and Russia to line up in Ukraine, but in 2013, this stage was expanded again and caused the president supported by the Russians to flee to Moscow, and the supporters of NATO and the West in Ukraine to take over the political arena of this country again. The West and the US clearly supported the Euro movement. The US Deputy Secretary of State and the famous US Senator John McCain participated in anti-government demonstrations (Averre,2016:14).



**Figure (6): The US Trade with Ukraine before Russia's Invasion**

After the occupation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, the US and the West strongly condemned this action of Russia and announced their support for Ukraine. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the supports of the US expanded greatly and they have continued in various forms such as financial and military.



**Figure (7): The US Security Assistance to Ukraine by Source, February 2022–September 2023**

### 5-5.Ukraine and the EU

One of the most important countries bordering with the EU after the expansion of the EU and the addition of ten new members in 2004 was Ukraine, and since then, Ukraine as the largest European neighbor of the EU have enjoyed a strategic importance in the EU foreign policy. One of the

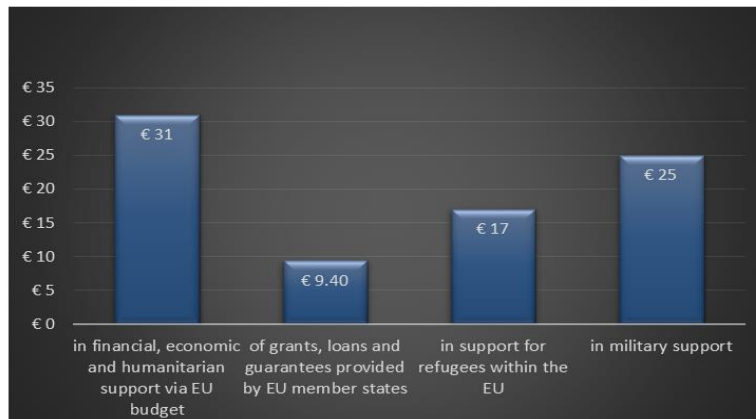
important reasons that caused Ukraine to become very important after the expansion of the EU was the political geography of that country. In fact, Ukraine is considered to be the intersection of Central Europe, Eastern Europe and Eurasia (Hakmatnejad and Ramazani,2014).

But apart from being a neighbor of the EU, Ukraine also shares borders with NATO. Since the powerful European countries and also some of Ukraine's neighbors are part of the NATO, it has increased the geopolitical value of Ukraine for the EU. Four neighboring countries of Ukraine, namely Poland, Slovenia, Hungary and Romania, are simultaneously members of the EU and of NATO.

According to Bukkvoll (1997:71), the EU's policy towards Ukraine covers three different periods, namely the period of ignoring, the period of resentment and the period of appreciation. In the last period, the EU has paved the way for bilateral cooperation through the Union's neighborhood policy.

From the geopolitical perspective, the existence of a country between Central Europe and Russia with a population of over 50 million and a territory that is approximately 10% larger than France is very important for Europe, but just as Russia is the most important obstacle for Ukraine to join NATO, the Russians are a serious obstacle for Ukraine to join and communicate with the EU, although Ukraine's joining the EU seems to be less sensitive than NATO from Russia's point of view. On February 22, 2014, with the escalation of tensions and conflicts in Ukraine and the dismissal of the President of Ukraine, in March 2014, Russia annexed the Crimean Peninsula. The EU strongly condemned this action and threatened Moscow with economic sanctions, which were immediately imposed against Russia. At this stage, the EU chose a three-step approach to support Ukraine, namely the severance of diplomatic relation, the implementation of individual sanctions, and the implementation of economic sanctions. In this same year (2014), the head of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, stated the position of Europe regarding Ukraine as follows: "I think we have debt, a duty of solidarity with that country, and we will work to have them as close as possible to us," (Firoozabadi and Moradi,2016:22-23).

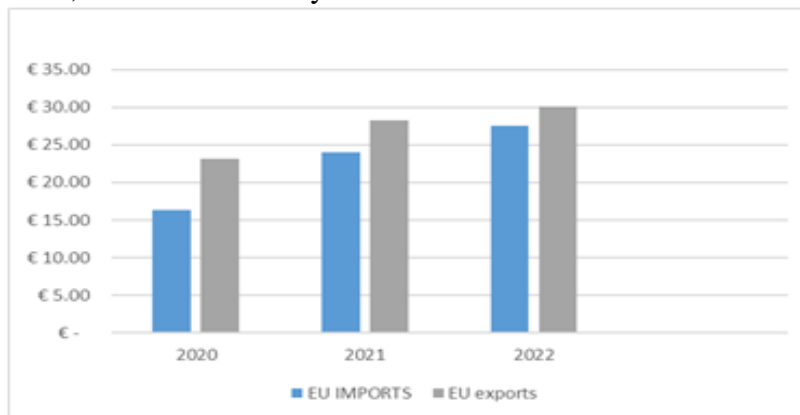
After Russia's attack on Ukraine, the EU's support measures for Ukraine have expanded significantly. These supports include financial, economic, food, humanitarian, defensive, and diplomatic supports, welcoming refugees, and so on.



**Figure (8): The EU Actions to Support Ukraine (to29 September2023)**

**Trade Relations of Ukraine with the EU**

The EU and Ukraine have signed a comprehensive agreement since January 1, 2016, which includes the elimination of a large part of tariffs and free trade. In 2021, the largest exports of Ukraine were to China, Poland, Russia, Italy, and Turkey, amongst which Poland and Italy are members of the EU. Also, this country has had the most imports from China, Germany, Russia, Poland, and Belarus, of which Germany and Poland are the members of the EU.



**Figure (9): Ukraine's Trade Relations with the EU Members**

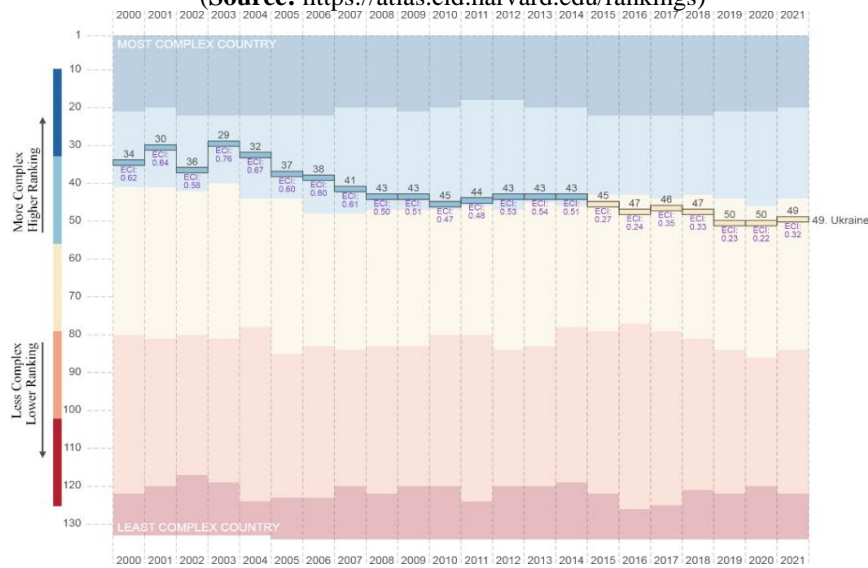
The statistics in the above table figure show that after the start of the war, the trade exchange between the EU and Ukraine has expanded. The EU is the

largest trading partner of Ukraine and shares 55% of the Ukrainian market. Also, Ukraine is the 17<sup>th</sup> partner of the EU.

**Table (8): Ranking and Index of Economic Complexity of Ukraine (2017-2021)**

Year	Rank in the World	Index
2017	46	0.35
2018	47	0.33
2019	50	0.23
2020	50	0.22
2021	49	0.32

(Source: <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/rankings>)



**Figure (10): Ranking and Index of Economic Complexity of Switzerland (2000-2021)**

(Source: <https://atlas.cid.harvard.edu/rankings>)

## 6. The Analysis of Findings

The comparative analysis of the geopolitical location and its role in the foreign policy of Switzerland and Ukraine leads us to opposite results. Switzerland is located in the heart of Europe and its neighbors such as France, Germany and Italy were traditional and colonial powers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the countries never violated Switzerland's neutrality, and even when Hitler's Germany attacked its neighbors in 1939, it did not have a military attack on Switzerland. Now, Switzerland is an important commercial

and political center in the world, and this country has gained significant place by hosting many international and regional political and economic institutions. However, if the Switzerland's relations with its neighbors are considered individually, Germany has the largest share of Swiss exports in 2021 after the United States. Germany has imported a total of approximately 55 billion dollars from Switzerland, which is around 14.5% of the total Switzerland's export. Also, Italy as the Switzerland's neighbor is in fifth place with \$20 billion, France is in sixth place with \$19.2 billion, and Austria is in ninth place with \$10.2 billion in Swiss exports. But in terms of imports, Switzerland's has imported the most from its neighboring country Germany, and the share of Germany's import from Switzerland was more than 19 billion dollars. Italy, France and Austria are the fourth, the sixth and the seventh largest exporter to Switzerland in 2021, respectively.

Examining the statistics and figures of Switzerland's trade with its buffered states clearly reveals that Switzerland and its neighbors have very intertwined economic and trade relations and there is a good relationship in foreign policy between the parties. The people of Switzerland have shown no interest in joining the EU during different periods since they thought that this would put the country's traditional neutrality in trouble. In 2023, in terms of military power, Switzerland ranks 44<sup>th</sup> in the world and with a military budget equal to 5.9 billion dollars ranks thirty-sixth in the world. Amongst its neighboring countries, this country ranks higher than Liechtenstein and Austria, and it ranks lower than Germany, France and Italy. But our findings regarding Ukraine demonstrate that this country, following the declaration of independence in 1991, has always been in a challenge between choosing its powerful eastern neighbor Russia or the western powers, and in various elections, whenever a candidate supported by one of these two parties have won, or sometimes when the election has not been approved, both sides have accused each other of cheating.

With the victory of the supporters of Russia, the pro-Westerns have tried to put pressure on the pro-Russian parties with levers such as economic pressure, and on the contrary, with the victory of the pro-Western parties, Russia has tried to dictate its opinion with military and political-economic threats. With its unique geopolitics, Ukraine is a full-fledged buffer state that always has very difficult choices. Ukraine is now facing many crises because of the military invasion of Russia under the leadership of pro-Western Vladimir

Zelensky. In 2014, Russia separated the island of Crimea from Ukraine, adding it to its territory and removing the eastern parts of Ukraine from the control of this country. Also, there has been a conflict between Ukraine and Russia, which is still going on at the end of 2023, whose end is uncertain. According to international statistics, in 2021, Russia was one of the main partners of Ukraine, and after China and Poland, Ukraine exported the most to Russia. In 2023, Ukraine is the 15<sup>th</sup> largest military power in the world and its military budget is 14<sup>th</sup> in the world with 30 billion dollars, and among its neighbors, only Russia has better situation from Ukraine.

**Table (9): The Political, Military and Economic Situation of Neighboring States of Switzerland**

Economic Complexity Index	The Rank of their Military Power	Military Budget (Billion Dollars) and World Ranking		Rank and GDP (Trillion)		Country
4	25	5	52.3	4.7	4	Germany
16	10	12	37	2b	10	Italy
17	9	9	45.9	2.7	7	France

**Table (10): Buffered States of Ukraine**

Country or Organization	Economic Complexity Index	The Rank of their Military Power	Military Budget (Billion Dollars) and World Ranking		Rank and GDP (Trillion)	
Russia	53	2	3	82.3	2.2	8
The USA	14	1	1	761.6	25.4	1
NATO and the EU	NATO members are 31 countries with a combined budget of 232 billion dollars					

In fact, the buffered states of Switzerland are three important countries of the EU and NATO members, and these countries now have extensive economic and political relations, and as mentioned, the three buffered states of Switzerland are both members of NATO and the EU. However, the buffered powers of Ukraine, unlike those of Switzerland, do not have the same characteristics. Russia, which is the successor of the former Soviet Union, has wide differences with the United States, and on the other hand, the EU is the

third side of this equation, which is aligned with the United States and a competitor against Russia. The United States and the EU still see Russia as a threat and are trying to further expand NATO on Russia's borders, and Russia also considers Ukraine as its red lines, which has caused the current crisis in Ukraine. It also shows that Ukraine has paid more attention to military affairs due to its geopolitical conditions and location. Ukraine is the 15<sup>th</sup> military power in the world and Switzerland is the 44<sup>th</sup> military power in the world in 2023. In fact, Switzerland focuses more on economic issues and Ukraine focuses on military ones.

**Table (11): Comparison of Military Parameters of Switzerland and Ukraine**

Ukrain	Parameter	Switzerland
✓	Manpower	
✓	Air force	
✓	Army	
✓	Navy	
✓	Finance	
✓	logistic	
	Geography	✓

During the years after independence, Ukraine's foreign policy has always been involved in issues such as cooperation or opposition to NATO, the EU, America, and Russia, and this country is politically one of the most turbulent countries in the world. However, Switzerland's foreign policy has mostly sought the development of political, economic and cultural relations, and with its neutrality and acceptance by the buffered powers, it is one of the most peaceful countries in the world.

**7. Conclusions**

The buffer states are the countries that have always enjoyed the attention of their powerful neighbors or world powers. The buffered powers have always been greedy for the buffer states due to the geopolitical and geo-economic competition. The European continent, due to the tough competition of the powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, now contains most of the buffer states. The competition of powers such as Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Russia in this continent caused two major world wars in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and after that continued with the decline of the traditional European powers and competition of the US and the Soviet Union, European states was

facing each other. Western European countries were considered allies of the US and Eastern European countries were considered allies of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the countries that declared independence are now known as buffer states, and in this article, one of these countries, namely Ukraine, is studied along with Switzerland. These two buffer states each have been influenced from their powerful neighbors or the global powers, but what should be noted is that the policy of the powers regarding the buffer states has not always been the same and different policies have been implemented. Although Switzerland has three traditional European powers in its neighborhood, it has always had extensive economic and political interactions with these powers, and these powers did not attack this country at the height of their colonial rivalries, and recognized its neutrality policy and now it is in a wide interactive relationship with its neighbors and world powers. But Ukraine has always been the focus of powers such as Russia, America and the EU. Ukraine is the real scene of world powers competition with each other, where Russia is on one side and America and the EU are on the other side. Ukrainian politicians and society are also have two different tendencies, i.e., some of them seek membership in NATO and the EU, while others want cooperation and alliance with Russia, and this is why in 2013, when the pro-Russian president in Ukraine refused to expand Ukraine's cooperation with the EU faced nationwide protests, leading to the dismissal of the president and his escape to Russia. Russia also occupied the Crimean Peninsula in a reciprocal action and annexed it to its territory. In 2022, Russia claimed that Ukraine is looking for NATO membership and placing NATO bases near its borders, which led to the Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the occupation of the eastern parts of Ukraine, a battle whose end is uncertain.

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