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EU member states national perspectives on the “Ukraine Crisis:”

Introductory Remarks

The “Ukraine Crisis,” the catch-all term for the “Revolution of Dignity,” the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas since 2014, has become the most profound challenge for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU since at least the war in Kosovo. Not surprisingly, carving out a common position on what is happening in Ukraine and formulating a respective policy has become a very difficult, at times divisive and until now a cumbersome process. Most observers would agree that this is due to the particularly low level of integration in the CFSP and the respective lack of autonomy of the EU as a foreign policy actor, but also to the traditionally highly divergent national perspectives on Eastern Europe and Russia in particular. However, despite much criticism, the EU member states have, over the last three years, not only agreed on a still functioning and comprehensive sanctions regime against the Russians, but also Brussels considerably augmented its material and ideational support for Ukrainian state-building and democratization.

This special issue of «Politics & Ideology» will present the development of select national perspectives and investigate the effect this crisis had on the foreign policies of EU member states in general and towards Ukraine, in particular. Its leading questions are: In what way has the image of Ukraine changed in EU capitals and what importance is given

to Ukrainian sovereignty in national foreign policy discourses? Has Russia's bellicose behavior led to a significant reassessment of national interests and policies vis-à-vis its Eastern neighbors, or are the changes of a symbolic and therefore temporary nature? And finally, do we see greater convergence of national perspectives due to the Ukraine crisis, implying a further growth of a common European strategic culture, and does this constitute a broader basis for common European action and policies in the region? Every article is structured along the following main aspects:

- 1) an outline of the respective country's national foreign policy towards the Eastern Neighborhood and Russia before the crisis;
- 2) an assessment of the possibly changed image(s) of Ukraine and its place in Europe's security architecture among national foreign policy-makers over the last two years;
- 3) an analysis of the development of national foreign policy since the outbreak of the crisis with a focus on possible policy changes;
- 4) an evaluation of the relationship between the respective country's position and overall EU policy (convergence, divergence), together with brief scenarios for future developments.

The articles assembled here were first presented at a workshop entitled «National Perspectives on the Ukraine Crisis: Image Transformation, Foreign Policy Change, and Consequences for European Foreign Policy» which took place in December 2015 at the National University of Kyiv Mohyla-Academy (NaUKMA) in Ukraine. The workshop was organized by the joint program «Germany and European Studies» between Friedrich-

Schiller-University Jena (Germany) and NaUKMA, and funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). Rounding out our picture of external perspectives on the conflict in Ukraine beyond EU member states, papers on US, Canadian and «Western» policies were also presented. The paper on “Canada’s Response to the Ukraine Crisis: a Turn to Middlepowerhood” finally became part of this special issue.

In sum, the presentations and papers have found that the image of Ukraine in EU states and the wider «West» has indeed experienced a remarkable transformation during these last few years. While Ukraine and the still so-called “Post-soviet space” have long been a source of “othering”-strategies especially in European foreign policy discourses, the Euromaidan and the subsequent “Revolution of Dignity,” have not only brought so far peripheral Ukraine into the view of European policy-makers and publics alike, they have led to a gradual perception of Ukraine as a European country sharing core values such as democracy, freedom and the rule of the law. However, the analysis also shows that Ukraine is, despite all the positive changes, not regarded as a completely independent actor in international relations as yet, and in many states, both elites and publics seem to grant Russia a special role in the post-Soviet region and therefore view Ukraine’s European aspirations skeptically.

As far as foreign policies are concerned we have witnessed the full range of possible developments, from turmoil (Finland, partly Baltics) over gradual change (Germany) to consistency (Italy, Greece) or even prioritization (e.g. Sweden, which developed into a “champion” of related EU policies). Geopolitical factors, historical legacies and the role of

personalities have been especially named here as key explanatory factors by the authors. In Germany, for example, the role of chancellor Angela Merkel has been pivotal in convincing a mostly Russia-friendly public and well-invested economy in the necessity of political and economic sanctions for the sake of international law and stability. On the other hand, where Russian energy dependency is strong and/or close historical-cultural ties with Moscow exist, such as in Greece, the agreement of these states to the sanctions regime and to increased support for Ukraine (such as in the form of the Association Agreement) has been lukewarm at best. In between, there are countries such as Slovakia, who could be named «verbal challengers» of the EU's sanctions regime against the Russians, but who otherwise have avoided any steps that would have undermined EU unity and even—such as in Bratislava's case—provided geoeconomic support to Ukraine.

Finally, on the surface, the EU's policy on Ukraine since 2014 seems to be the result of a pro-Ukrainian consensus. Indeed, the EU has been learning from past crises and has been re-evaluating both the nature of Russian foreign policy and its own mistakes in not calculating in Moscow's interests while dealing with the EaP. The upholding of the sanctions regime for more than three years by now and the considerable investment in Ukraine as both an economic and security partner is a noteworthy departure from earlier CFSP-policies.

However, one would be naive to think that the diversity of national reactions presented here has no impact on the EU's approach. What we see therefore is a largely re-active policy without a clear strategy, especially in

regard to future relations with Russia or the final place of Ukraine in European and Atlantic structures. What is more, this policy rests—as any policy developed in the intergovernmental realm of the European institutions—on a fine-tuned coalition of member states. Those coalitions, be it through domestic elections, new found geopolitical priorities or a waning confidence in Ukraine's potential for sustained reforms, can always crumble.

In my capacity as editor of this special issue I want to thank Mykhailo Minakov and Isaac Webb for making this publication possible and taking over so much editorial work. My special gratitude also goes to my employer, the National University of “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy”, which provided its historical buildings for the workshop, and to the DAAD, which is regularly funding the conferences we need to improve the environment for high-standard social science in Ukraine. Last but not least, I thank all the authors for their outstanding contributions and patience.

André Härtel

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BALTIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE UKRAINE CRISIS: EUROPEANIZATION IN THE SHADOW OF INSECURITY

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Abstract: *This article reviews the policy positions of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania with respect to the Ukraine crisis – the biggest foreign policy challenge for the Baltic states since they regained independence. Ukraine dominated the Baltic foreign policy agenda from the outbreak of the crisis, because it touched upon a dimension of existential threat for the Baltic countries. While giving an overview of the main policy domains where the effect of the Ukraine crisis could be observed, this article demonstrates that the three Baltic countries adopted a comprehensive approach to security and foreign policymaking, underlining cooperation both at a national and European level. In light of this, the Ukraine crisis can be seen as a maturity test for post-independence Baltic foreign policy.*

Key words: *foreign policy; Baltic states; Ukraine; security; European Union*

Introduction

The outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine at the end of November 2013, which led to the annexation of Crimea and military conflict in Donbas, caused disarray and marked a radical change not only in Ukraine but on the international scene in Europe and beyond. These events resonated particularly strongly in the countries sharing geographical and historical proximity to Ukraine and Russia, and these countries were especially alarmed by Russia's aggression. According to some analysts, the three Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – were considered “the most likely next potential victims of Russian intervention” (Giles, 2016:47). Given the environment of political and physical instability that emerged in Europe in its wake, the Ukraine crisis could be seen as the biggest foreign policy challenge for the Baltic states since regaining independence. Therefore, this article aims to provide a general, yet comprehensive, overview of the Baltic states' reactions to the Ukraine crisis. It shows that, despite assurances received from international partners – especially from NATO Allies – the Baltic states made sure that they had done everything in their power to sustain international support in this security situation. By maintaining a vigilant foreign policy, the Baltic countries mobilized all of their policy experience from the past 25 years in order to reinforce their international position against a potential threat from Russia.

As will be outlined below, the Baltic states reacted quickly to the Ukraine crisis and not only pursued strong domestic and foreign policies encompassing various policy domains, but they also made extensive use of

the European Union (EU) policy framework and NATO collective defense guarantees. They came to view the EU as a key platform for pursuing relations with Russia. They also came to favor the common European response to Russia, as illustrated by the adoption and continuous extension of sanctions and EU foreign policy discussions. At the same time, all three countries observed with concern the rapprochement of Russia and the West in the case of Syria and in the fight against the Islamic State. Despite the repercussions of international terrorism and the migration crisis that culminated in Europe in 2015-2016, the Baltic states, along with like-minded countries, successfully managed to keep Ukraine high up on the EU agenda.

The article begins by explaining the role and relevance of the Eastern European dimension in Baltic foreign policy prior to the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine—these serve as a basis for understanding the following sections on Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian reactions to the events in Ukraine. More specifically, the article outlines the main domestic and foreign policy messages communicated in and by the Baltic states shortly after the crisis began; it then goes on to review the main policy domains that received heightened attention at the time. These domains include domestic politics, the issue of Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia, the effects of Russia's disinformation campaign, the economy (including the effect of sanctions), and military security. Finally, the article offers some suggestions regarding the evolution of the relationship between the Baltic states and the EU during the Ukraine crisis. It argues that the crisis increased the European dimension in Baltic foreign policy,

which, in turn, may pave the way for a more Europeanized national foreign policy.

Eastern Europe in Baltic foreign policy before the crisis

Integration with the West has been the main foreign policy goal of the Baltic states since the restoration of independence in the beginning of 1990s. With the accession to the EU and NATO in 2004, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania took a significant step towards achieving this aim, and full-scale involvement in international fora gave a new perspective to Baltic policy-makers. When immediate security was perceived as guaranteed through NATO and the EU, the focus of national foreign policy was expanded: it now centered on the EU's Eastern neighborhood and Eastern Partnership initiative¹ (Galbreath et al, 2008; Jakniūnaitė, 2009; Kesa, 2011). The motivation for this was two-fold. First, with their transition experiences fresh in mind, the Baltic states argued that, among EU countries, they had special expertise both in supporting other post-Soviet countries with the tearing down of the remnants of the Soviet legacy in their political and economic systems, and in offering these states assistance with achieving full democracy and market economy. The Baltic transformation was perceived as an undeniable success story, wherein the former targets of democracy promotion and beneficiaries of development aid became the advocates and donors for those countries next in line. Second, this enabled the Baltic states to edge closer to EU decision-making processes and to

¹ Eastern Partnership (established in 2009) is an EU policy aimed at engaging with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.

influence the EU's relations with its neighborhood – including Russia – in correspondence with their interests.

In the years before the Ukraine crisis, the Eastern Partnership maintained its lead position in the foreign policy of the Baltic states (Kasekamp, 2013; Vilpišauskas, 2013). For example, all six countries were considered to be development cooperation priorities (with particular focus on Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine), and the Eastern Partnership was one of the key issues for the Lithuanian and Latvian EU Presidencies in the second half of 2013 and first half of 2015, respectively. The Baltic states supported giving Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine a long-term prospective path to EU membership, while also fully realizing the enlargement fatigue, economic crisis, and other more pressing issues prevailing in the EU.

Regarding another central dimension of Baltic foreign policy after EU and NATO accession (i.e., Russia), there were few signs of progress for various reasons, despite some attempts at normalizing relations. Bilateral trade relations with Russia may have been on the rise for most of the 2000s, but past legacies and mutual distrust, combined with Russia's resistance to the Baltic states' EU and NATO accession on the one hand, and Baltic observations about domestic political developments in Russia on the other hand, loomed over the relations. Antagonistic historical truths about World War II were amplified by Russia's renewed compatriot policy and the Bronze Soldier crisis in Estonia (see Berg & Ehin, 2009). As well, concerns regarding the insufficiently integrated Russian-speaking

minorities in Estonia and Latvia² shaped both the (lack of) contact between interethnic groups in these countries and Baltic-Russian bilateral relations.

The broader security dilemmas in the Baltic region were augmented rather than diminished with EU and NATO enlargement (Lašas & Galbreath, 2013). For example, despite extensive EU-facilitated cross-border cooperation, border issues on the political level took a long time to move forward. Of the three countries, only Lithuania had a ratified border with Russia (completed in 1992) before EU accession. The Latvian-Russian border treaty was finalized in 2007, whereas Estonia and Russia signed the treaty in 2014 and have kept it shelved since. NATO did not bring immediate changes on the ground in the Baltic region; for example, there was no detailed NATO regional defense plan until the beginning of the Ukraine crisis, despite constant Baltic pressure. The temporary rapprochement in US-Russia relations that resulted from Obama's reset policy made the Baltic states anxious. From their perspective, joint defense projects between NATO and Russia were "naïve and misguided" (Lašas & Galbreath, 2013:155).

With this legacy of national experience, the Baltic states struggled to influence EU's Russia policy, as some EU institutions and member states saw the Baltic states as "unhealthily focused" on Russia (Kuus 2011: 279). Ever since the Bronze Soldier crisis and subsequent cyberattacks in Estonia (2007), the Russian-Georgian War (2008), various trade disputes between Russia and the Baltic states (food exports, energy), and Russian-Ukrainian gas disputes (e.g. 2006, 2009, 2014), the political efforts of the Baltic states

² See the section on Russian-speaking minorities below.

mainly focused on maintaining relations with Russia on a very pragmatic level.

The Baltic states and the crisis in Ukraine

The Baltic states perceived the events of the Ukraine crisis as a confirmation of their previous foreign policy choices regarding Russia. Baltic decisionmakers felt that they had been signaling to the EU – and the entire West, for that matter – to be more cautious regarding the developments in its Eastern neighborhood for a long time, or at least since the war in Georgia in 2008. Ukraine was a “wake up call” for Europe, while the Baltic states had “said so” all along. It was the wider international community that had “kept pressing the snooze button... to postpone awakening” (Ilves, 2014a). The annexation of Crimea, subsequent military conflict, and the inability of the West to influence the situation came as a shock to many in Europe and realized the worst fears of Baltic decisionmakers. The Ukraine crisis was seen as a collapse of the European security system: a war, in which Russia sought to “redraw the post-[WWII] war map of Europe” (Dalia Grybauskaitė, in Easton, 2014). This was reflected in the statements of many Baltic political figures. Toomas Hendrik Ilves, President of Estonia at the time, saw the Ukraine crisis as a “conflict of values” and a “battle between Europe and non-Europe” (Ilves, 2014b). Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of Lithuania and one of the staunchest critics of Russia, caused strong diplomatic and political reactions by calling Russia “a terrorist state” (Weymouth, 2014) and warning of a “prelude to [a] ‘New Cold War’” (BBC, 2014b). Edgars Rinkēvičs, Foreign Minister of Latvia,

referred to Russia as “a revisionist super-power prepared to use military force to satisfy its ambitions” (LSM, 2016a), while also referring to its actions as “a return to 19[th]-century politics” (Gotev, 2015).

The Baltic states have continued to be outspoken supporters of Ukrainian sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity. They refused to recognize the results of the contentious referendum and the subsequent annexation of Crimea, insisting on the violation of the principles of international law. The Baltic reactions did not stay at the rhetorical level and were observable in various dimensions. At the outbreak of the crisis, the political support of the Baltic states concentrated on the Ukrainian opposition. A number of high-ranking officials visited Kyiv at the time of the protests, and the Baltic states officially recognized the new government led by Arseniy Yatsenyuk. Baltic assistance to Ukraine included providing financial aid, project support, expertise on conducting reforms, and government-provided humanitarian aid; this was complemented by strong engagement from civil society organizations in all three countries, and especially in Lithuania. A number of rallies and protests against Russia’s actions took place in Vilnius. Lithuania was also the only one out of the three countries to agree to send military aid to Ukraine.

At the same time, genuine Baltic support for Ukraine must be seen in the context of their own security. The fact that analogous arguments used by Russia during the annexation of Crimea could also be applied to the Baltic states, coupled with Russia’s readiness to use military force while blurring the boundaries of international law, made the threat appear more realistic than ever. As summed up by the security policy adviser to the

President of Estonia, “the scope of the crisis extends beyond Ukraine to the security of the Baltic region itself” (Maigre, 2015:17). Thus, in addition to the fact that Ukraine was a foreign policy priority, the crisis had an existential dimension for the Baltic states. Since many policy positions of the Baltic states overlapped, they will be considered here in bulk, with attention to differences in individual approaches. Unsurprisingly, security emerged as a very strong trend in the official discourses of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. Taking into account the fact that the Baltic interpretation of national security is broad and comprehensive, the analysis below will focus on a select number of soft and hard security aspects. In what follows, the main Baltic political discourses pertaining to the Ukraine crisis and Russia, both at the domestic and international level, will be discussed: Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic region, Russian disinformation campaigns, the effect of sanctions (both the EU and Russian counter-sanctions), and military security. The dimensions have been chosen because they have often been considered as vulnerabilities in the case of a potential threat to the Baltic region.

Foreign and domestic policy discourses

Upon the outbreak of the crisis, the Baltic countries mobilized in support of Ukraine, as is evident from the fact that Ukraine clearly emerged as the single most prevalent topic in both the bi- and multilateral foreign relations of all three states. The Ukraine crisis could be considered the biggest foreign policy challenge for the Baltic states since regaining independence: it put to test all previous policy choices, from EU and NATO accession to a cautious Russia-policy, and from participation at

international military operations and peacekeeping missions to domestic social and economic policies.

The events in Ukraine overshadowed the Baltic states' national foreign policy priority of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) both on the EU and national level. The failure of the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November 2013 – where the then President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich withdrew from signing the Association Agreement (AA) with the EU, contrary to domestic and European expectations – was a clear disappointment to the Baltic states. This was also revealed by their critique of the policy, which called for the EU to be “more strategic, resolute and united with regard to the Eastern Partnership” (MFA of Lithuania, 2013), as well as for the modernization of the EaP (ERR, 2013; MFA of Latvia, 2014a). As most of the limited EU attention was directed at Ukraine, the Baltic states understood the need to uphold close contacts with other EaP countries, as well. The Latvian Presidency, for which EaP was also a Presidency priority, made efforts to keep Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus engaged with the EU in light of the Association Agreements with Georgia and Moldova. In the face of the Riga summit in May 2015 and concurring events in the EU and Ukraine, the future of the EaP was already appearing bleak. Even the Latvian presidency saw this as “a survival summit” (Gotev, 2015), posing a question of “to be or not to be” for the policy in the future (MFA of Latvia, 2015).

Two very clear and contradictory messages could be distinguished in the official Baltic discourses regarding their own countries. First and foremost, all three governments kept reassuring their domestic audiences

on the topic of national security, insisting that what happened in Ukraine could not happen in the Baltic states due to the latter's NATO and EU membership. For example, President Ilves of Estonia dismissed in a straightforward manner the possibility that Russia's actions in Ukraine could be repeated in the Baltic region, saying such actions would be "a very foolish thing [for Russia] to do" (The Guardian, 2014a). However, in reality, there were grave concerns among the Baltic politicians about the threat of a potential military confrontation. This leads to the second message: while domestic audiences were being convinced of NATO security guarantees, the policymakers started to pressure (openly, as well as behind closed doors) the Allies for increased military presence in the Baltic states. Above all, this was aimed at the United States as a strategic partner. For example, Estonia announced that security issues were most important in Estonia's relations with the US (MFA of Estonia, 2014); Latvia emphasized the strong Euro-Atlantic orientation and "harmonizing the security and defense interests of the EU and NATO" (MFA of Latvia, 2014c; 2014d); while Lithuania's President explicitly urged NATO to deploy troops in the Baltic region, to avoid repeating a "Crimea-style scenario" in Lithuania (The Moscow Times, 2014). In response to this, President Obama's visit to Tallinn in the beginning of September 2014 was a visible reassurance from the US that paved the way for intense negotiations between Baltic and US officials regarding defense cooperation.

At the same time, while the Baltic publics were putting pressure on NATO, several incidents directly involving Russia took place, further exacerbating the uneasiness of the situation. Shortly after Obama's visit to

Tallinn, Estonian Internal Security Service (*KaPo*) officer Eston Kohver was detained by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) on the Estonian-Russian border and was later sentenced to 15 years in prison for espionage and related charges. Although the Estonian state institutions handled the case professionally and Kohver was later traded for former *KaPo* officer Aleksei Dressen, convicted of espionage in Estonia, it took a year until Kohver was released, during which the incident caught widespread domestic and international attention. This was not an isolated incident: in a spy scandal in Lithuania in May 2015, Russian citizen Nikolai Filipchenko was detained and sentenced to 10 years in prison (Delfi, 2017). On a more bizarre note, Russia caught some attention in the media by opening two Baltic-related cases for legal review. One concerned the Soviet recognition of the Baltic states' independence in 1991—a case initiated by the Prosecutor General's Office (which had previously ruled the transfer of Crimea to Ukraine in 1954 illegal) due to the alleged argument that the decision may have been illegal (BBC, 2015). Another case concerned reopening investigations against Lithuanian conscripts who had refused to serve in the Soviet army after Lithuania had declared independence in 1990; these conscripts were therefore now facing criminal charges from Russia (Delfi, 2014). As was aptly summarized by Marko Mihkelson, the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Estonian Parliament at the time, the Baltic states “...have been dealing with difficult issues with Russia for years” (The Guardian, 2014b), implying that there was nothing new about the incidents.

Overall political support to Baltic governments remained high in the context of heightened economic and security concerns. Due to events in Ukraine, the trend of downplaying the domestic impact other international issues of – such as the European debt crisis or the influx of refugees to the EU – was observable, especially during the election periods. This, in turn, can provide an explanation for the sharp reactions of Baltic publics to the refugee quotas proposed on the EU level: the concerns about existing and potential new minorities – as well as their prospects for integration – were already amplified. In the case of Estonia, there was a general consensus among the public, as well as among the majority of political parties, regarding Russia's actions in Ukraine, and the debate therefore focused more on the possible courses of action rather than on the threat perception. However, there were significant gaps between the levels of support from Estonian- and Russian-speakers for political parties. This led *Keskerakond* – the main opposition party at the time, which has also often been considered pro-Russian – to collect the votes of Russian-speakers and thereby lose votes from the Estonian-speaking population. In the Latvian parliamentary elections of 2014, security concerns were more central, since the opposition party *Harmony*, enjoying the biggest support from ethnic Russians, openly refused to condemn the annexation of Crimea (The Guardian, 2014c). In 2015, Raimonds Vējonis, a vehement NATO supporter and a critic of Russia, was elected President of Latvia. However, despite strong criticism towards Russia regarding its actions in Ukraine, Latvia followed quite a pragmatic foreign policy, prompted by extensive business ties and economic dependence between Latvia and Russia (Potjomkina & Vizgunova, 2014). In Lithuania, it was resolute rhetoric towards Russia and

messages focused on national security that played a significant part in the campaign that brought Grybauskaitė – dubbed the “Iron Lady” – her second term in office (BBC, 2014a). In the local elections in Lithuania in 2015, changes in the political landscape, such as the local Polish minority party with pro-Kremlin reputation joining forces with the ethnic Russian representatives and gaining new mandates in several municipalities (Tracevskis, 2015), were seen as preparation for the parliamentary elections of 2016.

Russian-speaking minorities in the Baltic region

After the “little green men scenario” in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, it became rather common in the West to ask if Narva or Latgale – i.e., the overwhelmingly Russian-populated areas in Estonia and Latvia – could be next in line. Concerns about Russian-speaking populations in the three countries³ were grave because, resorting to oversimplification, Russia’s arguments for its presence in Ukraine included defending the rights of Russian-speakers abroad and responding to favorable public opinion regarding closer ties to Russia among the local population—all of which were also seen as potentially applicable in the Baltic cases. Russia’s policies regarding its Baltic diaspora have strained bilateral relations ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but the issue was increasingly politicized after the Baltic states gained EU membership. Russia has since referred to human rights violations due to the large

³ The number of ethnic Russians in Estonia is approx. 24.8% of the population, in Latvia approx. 26.2% and in Lithuania approx. 5.8%, however, other minorities increase the number of Russian-speakers to roughly 30% of the population in Estonia, 42% in Latvia, and about 12% in Lithuania (Estonian Population and Housing Census, 2011; McGuinness, 2014; Lithuanian Population and Housing Census, 2011).

number of Russian-speaking non-citizens in Estonia and Latvia, the refusal of the two countries to recognize Russian as an official language, and the reduction of the number of Russian schools. Estonia and Latvia, on the other hand, have emphasized the opportunities to obtain citizenship via naturalization and the necessity of learning the official language in order to adapt to the society in general.⁴

Although a lengthier analysis is not possible in the framework of this article, it must be pointed out that, while the spectrum of attitudes among Baltic Russian-speakers was wide⁵, there was reason for concern, since the majority often lived in separate communities and continued to receive information through Russian TV channels—meaning, their worldview was being shaped by official Russian discourses. The Russian compatriot policy was designed for Baltic Russian-speakers to maintain close ties with the Motherland via various cultural and political means, and this, in turn, inevitably undermined the Baltic governments' progress in facilitating the building of social cohesion. At the same time, the majority of Baltic Russian-speakers in all three countries held, in general, favorable attitudes towards their respective countries of residence and its state institutions. Despite the shortcomings in the ethnic integration process, the Crimea scenario was considered unlikely in the case of the Baltic region,

⁴ The multi-faceted issue of Russian-speaking minorities has been analyzed extensively, with ample data available. See, for example, the Monitoring of Integration in Estonian Society and other analyses at the Institute of Baltic Studies' website: <https://www.ibs.ee/en/publications/social-cohesion/>; and analyses on the Latvian Centre for Human Rights' website: <http://cilvektiesibas.org.lv/en/social-integration/>.

⁵ In the analysis of Monitoring of Integration in Estonian Society (2011), different groups of Russian-speakers are identified, based on their likelihood of level of integration into the Estonian society: successfully integrated, Russian speaking patriot of Estonia, Estonian-speaking active and critical, Little integrated, Unintegrated passive.

not only because of NATO membership, but also because of higher living standards, social security, and other advantages (including travel and employment opportunities) stemming from EU member-state status (Kasekamp, 2016). As attention to the level of integration of Russian-speakers resurfaced (not least due to the Russian disinformation campaign), Baltic politicians mainly sought to address some of the concerns with several short- and long-term measures ranging from providing more language courses to creating alternative channels of information, as will be discussed below.

Russian disinformation campaign

The disinformation campaign launched by Russia during the Ukraine crisis in Europe was the largest since Soviet times. The campaign had many targets, including general publics in the West, like-minded (anti-systemic) groups all over the world, Russian domestic audiences, and the (Russian-speaking) communities in Russia's "near abroad" (Wilson, 2015). There were a number of Russian media platforms such as internet portals, TV stations (PBK, RTR, NTV Mir, etc.), print media outlets, etc., available in the Baltic states. Aside from TV channels, the new Russian media outlet Sputnik – an online news platform and radio station in more than 30 languages, including many official EU languages – also opened its website in Latvian (first in 2014, later shut down and reopened), in Lithuanian (2015) and in Estonian (2016). Russian-speaking minorities and other groups located solely in the Russian information space in the Baltic region were therefore a direct target group for the campaign. In the early phases of the Ukraine conflict, Baltic governments were already seeking to adopt several

countermeasures to this campaign, on both the national and the EU level. Latvia and Lithuania opted for legal measures such as fining and/or banning Russian media providers for short periods, having accused them of “inciting hatred”. This led to the shutdown of Sputnik by the Latvian authorities in March 2016, after an investigation established a “clear link” between Sputnik and Dmitry Kiselev, the Director of Russia’s RT media empire who was facing targeted EU sanctions after Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea. Although the issue was considered controversial, Latvian Foreign Minister Rinkēvičs called upon other EU member-states to follow suit (LSM, 2016b). Estonia chose not to ban the Russian media: instead, as a more substantial move, a Russian-language TV channel was launched in September 2015, in an attempt to engage the local Russian-speaking community and provide an “adequate picture of Estonian society” (ERR, 2015). The decision was disputed, since the channel had to compete with already existing media platforms while having a very limited budget. According to public surveys, however, the channel managed to establish itself with permanent viewership, albeit small⁶.

The Baltic states also took initiative on the EU level. Estonia and Lithuania belonged to a four-member group (along with Denmark and the UK) that sent a non-paper to EU High Representative/ Vice President Federica Mogherini in January 2015, lobbying for an EU response to the Russian disinformation campaign. The undersigned called for a response consisting of four aspects: raising public awareness about disinformation and the proper response to it (e.g., by establishing a web platform for

⁶ The channel had a steady daily share at 0.5% in spring 2016 which amounts to approx. 200,000 viewers per week, more than half of these were Estonian-speakers (TNS Emor, 2016).

deconstructing disinformation); taking an assertive or proactive approach to increasing EU visibility both by preparing a strategic communication Action Plan and providing alternative sources of information to Russian-speakers, and by supporting independent international and national media platforms in Russian language; ensuring accountability among media providers regarding any violations of rules of broadcasting and public information in the EU (EU Strategic Communication..., 2015). As a result, the East StratCom Task Force⁷ was established in April 2015 under the European External Action Service (EEAS) and was composed of nine representatives from various member states, including, among others, an Estonian and a Latvian. The central functions of the Task Force were to explain EU policies to the audiences in EaP countries by communicating key policy areas, providing *ad hoc* information about topical issues, myth-busting, and supporting the EU in strengthening the media in its Eastern neighborhood. Although the Baltic states lobbied for a cross-European TV channel, there was not enough political interest and will among the member states to pursue this (LSM, 2015). In another initiative, Latvia pressured for a stronger European stance by leading the review of the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (AVMSD) during its EU Presidency. In the autumn of 2015, Latvia disseminated a “green card” proposal for the revision of the directive regarding the regulation of hate speech, with the aim of checking Russian media channels registered in other EU countries but broadcasting in the Baltic states. It argued that the EU is “increasingly witnessing a worrying trend of mass media becoming a powerful tool for spreading hate speech, intolerance and propaganda,” and this should not

⁷ For more information on the Task Force, see EEAS website: <http://bit.ly/1Snzome>

be disregarded during the review process (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, 2015a). The debates on this have continued into 2017.

Baltic economies during the first years of sanctions

The EU first imposed economic sanctions against Russia in July 2014, targeting sectoral cooperation and exchanges with Russia. The Baltic economies were affected both by EU sanctions aimed at Russia and Russian counter sanctions on Baltic meat, dairy, and vegetable products, although more precise impact has remained debatable. Despite the effect of sanctions on these economies, which were demonstrating slow economic growth anyway, all Baltic states strongly favored EU sanctions against Russia, as well as their repeated extensions until the Minsk agreements would be fully enforced. Politicians in all three countries generally supported sanctions against Russia, with more vocal exceptions from Latvia. For example, the leader of pro-Russian *Harmony* called the attempt to use trade sanctions against Russia to stop the aggression in Ukraine a “nightmarish idea” (LSM, 2014), and Andris Bērziņš, President of Latvia at the time, stressed the need for a more pragmatic approach that would maintain balanced and neighborly ties (Eglitis & Langley, 2015). Public opinion in the Baltic states was supportive of sanctions, and the sanctions’ effects – as far as there were any on the level of everyday life – were considered an inevitability.

At the time the sanctions were passed, the main trading partners of the Baltic states were their closest neighbors, with more trade moving in the EU direction than in the Russian direction (Zvaigzne, 2015). However, Baltic businesses with markets in Russia struggled, as reorientation to new

markets was complicated, especially given the economic situation and the absence of compensations for the sanctions' effects. As the Baltic states had suffered from Russia's import bans on several occasions before the crisis in Ukraine, some businesses had already adapted their markets and moved away from Russia, in search of new and more predictable trading partners. Nevertheless, compared with other EU member-states, the Baltic states were clearly harder hit by the Russian sanctions; the direct effect on the export of goods varied in 2013 from 2.6% of GDP in Lithuania, 0.4% in Estonia, and 0.3% in Latvia (Oja, 2015). Of the three countries, Lithuania suffered most from the sanctions. While 21.6% of all Lithuanian exports went to Russia (the second biggest export partner) in 2014, the share had fallen to 13.7% in 2015 and 13.5% in 2016, even though Russia remained their biggest export partner (Statistics Lithuania, 2017). For Latvia, Russia remained the third biggest export partner, despite significant decrease due to the sanctions: total exports were at 10.71% in 2014, 8.07% in 2015, and 7.62% in 2016 (Statistics Latvia, 2017). In the case of Estonia in 2014, Russia was the 4th biggest trading partner with 10% of all exports; by 2015, Russia's share in foreign trade exports had fallen to 7% and maintained this position in 2016 (Statistics Estonia, 2017). At the same time, it must be emphasized that the Baltic export of agricultural products to Russia dropped not only due to the sanctions but also as a result of the decrease of exports not covered by the embargo, which were the result of unstable market conditions, the decrease of demand in Russia due to low value of the ruble, and the economic crisis (Szczepanski, 2015:7).

Military security and defense cooperation

Compared to the areas discussed above, as well as to the situation before the Ukraine crisis, changes in terms of military security in the Baltic states were the most explicit. In a clear response to Russia's actions in Crimea, as well as its military build-up and provocations in the Baltic Sea region, the defense expenses in the Baltic region skyrocketed, NATO military presence increased, bilateral and multilateral defense cooperation soared, and numerous local and regional military exercises and trainings were carried out. All three capitals were established as hosts of a NATO Centre of Excellence (COE) – Cooperative Cyber Defence COE in Tallinn (established in 2008), Strategic Communication COE in Riga (2015), and NATO Energy Security COE in Vilnius (2012).

Before the Ukraine crisis, Estonia was the only Baltic country and one of only four NATO members (along with the US, the UK and Greece) to meet the NATO defense spending requirement of 2% of GDP for member states. In 2016, the Estonian defense budget already exceeded the threshold, reaching 2.07% (MOD of Estonia, 2015c). As a result of the Ukraine crisis, Latvia and Lithuania also set out to achieve the 2% threshold. Latvia started from as low as 0.90% of GDP in 2012, and the budget was increased significantly to 1.02% (2015) and 1.41% (2016) (Sargs.lv, 2016). Lithuania's budget was at 0.77% (2013), but a sharp increase to 1.15% (2015) and 1.48% (2016) of GDP was subsequently achieved (Delfi, 2015). The largest share of defense expenses was spent on the development of capabilities and special projects.

In addition to increasing the defense budget, Lithuania also reinstated conscription (abolished in 2008), leaving Latvia as the only one

of the three Baltic states with professional armed forces. All three countries reformed both their military structures and legislation. In Estonia, a new National Defense Act was adopted (enforced on 1 January 2016), wherein peace- and wartime defense regulations, as well as international military co-operation, were merged into one, to specify and facilitate decisionmaking processes, organize mobilization, and reserve service (Riigi Teataja, 2016). Lithuania conducted several reforms regarding the structure of their intelligence and counter-intelligence systems (Lithuanian State Security Department, 2015). Along with Poland and Ukraine, Lithuania signed an agreement to launch a joint brigade, LITPOLUKRBRIG. Latvia adopted a new Law on National Security that requires the President to request help from NATO in case of a military attack (Sargs.lv, 2014). The new National Security Concept, adopted in 2015, outlined priorities in eight threat areas and analyzed the changed international security environment as a result of the crisis in Ukraine (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia 2015b).

Increased Russian maritime and airspace activity in the Baltic Sea region, as well as recurring violations of Baltic airspace, led to an increase in NATO air policing missions (although later cut) and the creation of a second Baltic air base (in addition to Šiauliai, Lithuania) established at Ämari, Estonia. Deterrence measures agreed upon at the 2014 NATO Wales summit were welcomed by the Baltic states as positive developments. However, Baltic governments continued negotiations with Allied states to establish permanent troop presence in the former, and, at the NATO Warsaw Summit in 2016, the Alliance took on the obligation of deploying battalions to all three Baltic countries, as well as Poland. The Baltic states

also sought to increase regional cooperation with Nordic countries through arrangements such as the Danish-Baltic bilateral defense agreements, which focused on joint training and exercises (see, e.g. Embassy of Denmark in Estonia 2015).

According to public opinion surveys conducted at the height of the crisis in Ukraine, attention to security rose among the citizens of all three Baltic countries. For example, defense willingness among Estonian citizens was at a record high in spring 2015 (85%) (MOD of Estonia, 2015a), while the same statistic was 41.7% in Latvia in autumn 2015 (SKDS, 2015: 39). While no comparable data was found on defense willingness in Lithuania, public approval regarding NATO and increasing the defense budget was relatively high in 2015 (56% and 47%, respectively) (MOD of Lithuania, 2016). Similar sentiments were also reflected in the fact that interest in joining volunteer defense formations (*Kaitseliit* in Estonia, *Zemessardze* in Latvia, and *KASP* in Lithuania) spiked in all three countries.

Throughout the polls, a sharp gap in perceptions can be observed along ethnic lines. For example, in Estonia, 46% of Estonian-speakers and 11% of non-Estonian (i.e. Russian-) speakers were proud of NATO membership in 2015; further, the confidence of Estonians in Defense Forces was 91%, compared to 51% of non-Estonians. When it came to “Russian activities in restoring its authority”, 7% of non-Estonian speakers and 53% of Estonian-speakers saw this as a threat (MOD of Estonia, 2015b). In Latvia, 81% of Latvian-speakers and 59% of Russian-speakers expressed concern about the military security of Latvia, and 48.5% of Latvian-speakers and 27.8% of Russian-speakers were willing to defend their

country militarily in 2015, while 32.7% could not answer the question at all. Russian-speakers' trust in NATO in 2015 was 23.5%, whereas the figure for Latvian-speakers was 59.8%. (SKDS 2015: 44).

The issues discussed above effectively demonstrate the complex interdependence across various policy fields on which the Ukraine crisis touched—many of these fields had both a domestic as well as a foreign policy dimension. The support of the Baltic public and elites for Ukraine was firm and, in most cases, there was little political debate on the matter. Russian-speaking minorities and integration challenges in the Baltic region returned to the center of attention due to the extensive Russian disinformation campaign. Although the effect of economic sanctions on the Baltic economies was relatively low, it still influenced businesses, which were operating in an environment of slow economic growth. Security and defense issues resurfaced sharply and were addressed more intensely than ever before. Although bilateral relations with EaP countries could not compensate for decreased EU attention to its neighbors, the Ukraine crisis also managed to keep Eastern Europe on the agenda. How did these issues play out at the European level? In many ways, the Baltic states combined domestic- and European-level strategies during the crisis, in search of the best policy responses.

Baltic states and the EU: Uploading and complementing preferences

Looking back at the development of policy positions between the Baltic states and the EU since the accession of the former to the latter, the Baltic states have been supportive of further EU expansion, of the EU speaking

with “one voice”, and, on several occasions, of favoring a community approach over a bilateral one (Galbreath et al, 2008:125; Made, 2011:69; Kasekamp, 2013:103-105). During the accession process and the early years of EU membership, the relationship between the Baltic states and the EU was clearly more about downloading EU policies rather than uploading their own preferences to the EU level. As all three countries saw NATO as the main security provider, the “dilemma of dual loyalty” (Budrytė, 2005) influenced their foreign policy, which relied on “hard” security provided by the transatlantic cooperation and NATO, as well as relying on the broader economic, societal, and even military security (in terms of CSDP) provided by EU policies (Galbreath & Lamoreaux, 2013:115). With an active role in the Eastern Partnership and other policies, the Baltic states could also channel their own foreign policy preferences to the EU and expand their foreign policy networks through the platform provided by the EU. It is therefore not unusual that the position of the Baltic states with respect to the crisis in Ukraine converged with the overall EU policy, but diverged from it when it came to the degree of the EU’s response.

The Baltic states were generally satisfied with the EU’s ability to achieve a common position with respect to both Russia and Ukraine, with the adoption and extension of targeted sanctions, and the prompt and encouraging reaction to finalizing the Association Agreement with Ukraine in 2014. However, many politicians in the Baltic states were nevertheless disappointed with the EU, claiming that, whatever actions the EU agreed on, they came too little and too late. For example, President Ilves of Estonia declared that the EU was “sitting and watching” while Russia

annexed Crimea, and that the EU blacklist of Russian officials was “a minor slap on the wrist” (Pop, 2014). The degree of EU sanctions imposed on Russia came to meet the Baltic expectations only in the second and third round of adoption (Vilson, 2015). With respect to security and defense, all three states clearly based their emphasis not on the Common Security and Defense Policy but on transatlantic relations and NATO. This policy choice reflected, firstly, an understanding of the limits of the EU when it came to hard security. Although the Baltic states favored strengthening EU defense capabilities in the field of cyberattacks, hybrid warfare, strategic communication, and energy security, the overwhelming consensus was that a joint EU army would overlap with NATO and serve only to weaken it in the contemporary security situation (Potjomkina, 2015). At the same time, this was indicative of the Baltic states privileging relations with the US, which all three countries regard as the main security provider in the region.

In all three countries, the relevance of the EU as a platform for interactions with and about Ukraine increased in comparison to the time before the crisis. It is interesting to examine these tendencies further and discuss their potential significance. The EU foreign policy strategy towards Ukraine was utilized considerably in national foreign policymaking. At the same time, a strong, bilateral, Baltic foreign policy existed side by side with the EU's policy. When comparing the three countries' use of the EU platform and policy in their national foreign policymaking, the country whose positions were most in line with the EU was Latvia. On the one hand, officials and decisionmakers of Latvia advocated stronger EU engagement in the transformation of Ukraine and in relations with Russia

(MFA of Latvia, 2014b); on the other hand, Latvian officials also sought to maintain pragmatic cooperation with Russia. Despite the fact that the Russian threat was discernibly felt in all three countries, Latvia's deep ties to Russia led to this threat being less vocalized in the former's foreign policy discourse (Bērziņa, 2015). The EU's foreign policy thus aligned well with Latvian preferences. While the EU was an important foreign policy platform also for both Estonia and Lithuania, the former placed a slightly stronger and more resolute emphasis on the security issues and, therefore, on bilateral relations with the US. Lithuania, which held the EU Presidency right before the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine, demonstrated its recently mastered negotiation and lobbying skills in EU structures, while simultaneously burning a lot of credit earned during the Presidency in order to push for a stronger EU response regarding Ukraine (Vilson, 2015). Additionally, Lithuania made extensive use of other multilateral platforms to further its policy preferences, as it was a member of the UN Security Council and very active in the OSCE and the Council of Europe at the time. With the combination of various bi- and multilateral foreign policy avenues and an outspoken President, Lithuania clearly emerged as a leader among the Baltic states both in and outside the EU. Perhaps the biggest struggles for the Baltic states during the second and third year of the crisis focused more on keeping Ukraine high on the EU agenda, in light of international terrorism and the refugee crisis, which both somewhat began to overshadow the recent Russian aggression. The Baltic states continued to advocate for greater EU engagement in the Eastern neighborhood, including an ambitious neighborhood policy and further EU enlargement.

As regards policy towards Russia, the Baltic states remained among the more critical and cautious member-states in the EU during the second and third year of the Ukraine crisis. The development of the confrontation in Ukraine solidified a long-term crisis in Baltic-Russian relations. The political dialogue with Russia focused only on very pragmatic issues, such as cross-border cooperation, trade, or cultural diplomacy. The confrontation continued in the military domain, as measures adopted by NATO to increase deterrence in the Baltic states offered reassurances to its Allies but were interpreted by Russia as a military build-up on its borders and a signal for a possible long-term standoff in Western-Russian relations. At the same time, the security of the Baltic region did not exist in a vacuum, and it was significantly influenced by the developments in the international arena.

By way of conclusion

This overview of the development of the Baltic policy positions during the first years of the Ukraine crisis has highlighted several crucial elements in their national foreign policy. First of all, as an Eastern Partnership country, Ukraine already had been a priority for the Baltic states before the outbreak of the crisis in 2013. The Baltic states emphasized an ambitious EU approach towards the Eastern neighborhood and were guided by this principle also on the national level. As such, providing support and assistance to Ukraine to ensure a democratic transition was a major task for foreign policymaking on the national level after the regime change in 2014.

Secondly, and more importantly, the crisis in Ukraine was not only about Ukraine. For the Baltic states, it rapidly escalated the concerns about their own security, as Russian aggression highlighted several weak spots in the security environment and domestic political situation in several Central and Eastern European countries. As the article describes, there were several crucial differences between Ukraine and the Baltic states that did not allow the Ukrainian situation to be easily compared to the situation in the Baltic region; to many, the Crimea scenario was not seen as applicable to the Baltic states. However, the crisis did alarm Baltic decisionmakers and accentuate the weaknesses of the Baltic states, whether they be shortcomings in the integration of local Russian-speaking minorities, energy reliance on Russia, trade and business dependencies, or the need to invest more in defense. This, in turn, could be seen as a testament to the prudent choice of the Baltic states to focus on a comprehensive approach to security.

Thirdly, implications of the Ukraine crisis were also interpreted at the regional and international level. The primary discourse in the Baltic states emphasized the collapse of the post-Cold War international security system as a result of Russian aggression. The vague situation wherein, despite this breach of international law, the territorial integrity of a sovereign country could not be restored, opened up a Pandora's Box for similar ventures in the future. On the regional level, this spurred extended cooperation between Nordic and Baltic countries, with and without the NATO dimension. On the international level, this raised debate over NATO's Article 5 and the collective defense clause in any NATO member-state

territory. Should NATO be unable to initiate Art. 5 in case of a military attack against one of its members, this would render the alliance defunct. This is relevant also in the context of debates around the development of EU defense capabilities. The relations between the EU and its Baltic member-states in light of the Ukraine crisis demonstrates the importance of the EU for the Baltic region. Despite the fact that the expectations of the three Baltic countries surpassed the deliverables of the EU, the former successfully managed to upload their foreign policy concerns to the EU level and extensively downloaded EU policies (EaP in particular) and positions towards the Eastern neighborhood to their national foreign policies. This relationship shows that, in the case of a key foreign policy issue, the EU dimension grew and became more important than simply serving as another avenue for pursuing national foreign policy.

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CANADA'S RESPONSE TO THE UKRAINE CRISIS: A TURN TO MIDDLEPOWERHOOD?

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Abstract. *The Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine and the following Russian annexation of Crimea and intervention in Eastern Ukraine led to the world community facing the a new type of crisis. Providing its tight bilateral links with both Ukraine and Russia, the article investigates the ramifications of the Ukraine crisis on Canada's foreign policy and its relations with the above states. The theoretical framework of the study is constituted by the concept of a "Middle Power" that has been broadly used to address Canada's foreign policy of the Cold War era. In empirical terms the study focuses on multiple aspects of Canada's foreign policy toward Ukraine and Russia before the crisis and the crisis-driven changes in these policies. Subsequently, the dynamics of Canada's response to Ukraine crisis is compared with that of EU. The analysis demonstrates that initially Canada was one of the most vocal supporters of Ukraine, actively condemning Russia's violent actions in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine. However, the change of government in Canada and the emergence of a 'rapprochement' trend in Europe led to the softening of Canada's stance toward the crisis and its move to 'speak to Russia'. It is argued that Canada did not pursue its unique Middle Power track with regard to the crisis, acting in convergence with the EU and USA rather than on its own. Furthermore, the Ukraine crisis was found to demonstrate the impracticability of Great Power's rivalry in the era of ever growing mutual interdependencies and common challenges.*

Keywords: *Ukraine, Canada, war, crisis, middle power, Crimea, Donbas.*

The Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine, followed by the Russian annexation of Crimea and its military intervention in Eastern Ukraine, has posed a number of challenges to the world community. First, Russia's violation of Ukrainian territorial integrity undermines the international consensus on the territorial integrity of states⁸ that has contributed to the decrease in the number of interstate wars over the last fifty years⁹. Second, the international community's inability to effectively respond to Russia's "hybrid war"¹⁰-strategy reveals crucial shortcomings within the international humanitarian legal framework. Third, the crisis demonstrates an extent to which force remains important in international relations and inhibits the global nuclear disarmament process.

Despite their seeming diversity, all the above challenges testify to the instability of the current international order and the need for a new *modus vivendi*. The Ukraine crisis has uniquely affected the foreign policies of specific states, as well as influenced several third states' bilateral relations with Ukraine and Russia. Thus, identifying the challenges these states faced, when responding to Russian policy vis-à-vis Ukraine, is crucial for determining the direction and focus in which modern international relations and law need to be revisited to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

⁸The principle of "territorial integrity" of states represents a crucial part of the Westphalian State system, as provided in the Charter of the United Nations, the Helsinki Accords and the UN 1974 Definition of Aggression. The principle is tightly interconnected with the inviolability of frontiers, the prohibition of the use of force and the right to self-determination.

⁹ The decline in the number of international wars since the 1970s is associated with the end of colonial era and Cold War, as well as a growing acceptance of international law.

¹⁰ For a detailed review of the "hybrid war" concept, see: Lanoszka A 2016, 'Russian hybrid warfare and extended deterrence in Eastern Europe', vol.92, no.1, pp.175-195.

In view of the above, this paper aims to investigate the Ukraine crisis' implications for Canadian foreign policy and its bilateral relations with the EU and Russia. The choice for the case of Canada was determined by several factors: Foremost, Canada and Ukraine have historically developed tight bilateral links due to the size and activeness of the Ukrainian Diaspora in Canada. As it was put by O. Naumenko (2014), "Canada is the second largest Ukrainian country outside Ukraine"¹¹. Canada has played a significant role in upholding the rule of law and democracy in Ukraine, and has actively supported Ukraine since the outbreak of the Euromaidan Revolution. At the same time, Canada shares its Northern border with Russia, and its interests in the Arctic require comprehensive and profound bilateral relations with the Russian Federation.¹² Finally, as "the relations between Ottawa and Moscow have traditionally been shaped by the developments elsewhere in the international system" (Sarty 1994, p.11), it is worth analyzing the steps Canada takes to remain a Middle Power¹³ in light of an ongoing crisis. The concept of a "Middle Power" is used to address Canada's unique foreign policy that was developed as a response to the Cold War, focusing on promoting peace, multilateral solutions and the rapprochement between the conflicting parties.

The aims of the paper suggest the following framework for analyzing Canada's response to the Ukraine crisis and the resulting changes in its relations with the EU and Russia: First, an outline of Canada's pre-crisis foreign policy with Ukraine and Russia is presented. The the central part of the paper focuses on the changes in Canada's foreign policies vis-à-vis

¹¹On the history and current state of the Canadian-Ukrainian links, please visit: <http://euromaidancanada.ca/about-euromaidan-canada/>

¹²On Canada-Russia cooperation in the Arctic, see Studin, I 2015, 'Arctic futures and the Russia-Ukraine-West conflict', *The Institute for 21st century questions*.

¹³On different approaches to conceptualizing Middle Powers, see: David, C.P & Roussel, S 2009, "Middle Power blues": Canadian policy and international security after the Cold War', *American Review of Canadian Studies*, vol.28, no 1, pp.131-156.

Russia and Ukraine, bearing in mind that the crisis is ongoing. Subsequently, the aforementioned changes are analyzed in comparison with the EU response to the Ukraine crisis within the context of the “Middle Power” concept.

Canada’s Russian and Ukrainian Foreign Policy before the Euromaidan Revolution

Canadian foreign policy towards the Soviet Union: a historical view

Analyzing modern Canada-Russia and Canada-Ukraine relations requires an insight into the major factors, shaping the traditions and peculiarities of Canada’s foreign policy toward the USSR. It may be argued that the diplomatic record of 1917 to 1991 is irrelevant at least due to the collapse of the USSR and subsequent changes in the international system. However, a historical study of the dynamics of Canada’s interests in the region and established foreign policy traditions thereto can help a researcher understand the logic of Canada’s modern foreign policy toward the former Soviet states. Thus, a historical understanding of Canadian-Soviet foreign policy is a prerequisite for understanding some concepts that still influence Canada’s policy towards the region.

Canada’s first interactions with the Soviets were far from friendly due to the fact that Canada refused to recognizing the Bolshevik government and participated in the Allied Intervention in Siberia (1918-1919), aimed at supporting the White Army against the newly formed Bolshevik government (Canada’s Siberian Expedition 2015). Convinced that the Soviet government would collapse, Canada established the Canadian Siberian Economic Commission to “develop markets for Canada’s manufactured goods” (Murby 1969, p.374). However, in 1920 the Allies withdrew their forces from Siberia, and, driven by trade interests, Canada de-facto

recognized the Soviet government by joining the Anglo-Soviet Trade Agreement (Sarty 1994, p.22). Seven years later Ottawa suspended relations with the USSR due to the Moscow's alleged intervention in British politics. After a range of reciprocal embargoes in the interwar period, the relations between Canada and the USSR started warming under the Liberal administration of Mackenzie King (1935-48). Nevertheless, the official reestablishment of bilateral relations took place in 1942, determined by the need to unite in the struggle against Nazi Germany.

Canada's interwar opposition to Bolshevism, the postwar "communist paranoia", and strong ties with the U.S. led to a Canadian anti-Soviet position during the Cold War. Bordering both superpowers of the bipolar world, Canada faced the challenge of being "a modest power being sandwiched between a powerful neighbor and ally to the south and a hostile Soviet Union to the north (that) produced a distinctive approach to East-West issues" (Sarty 1994, p.13). A new sense of vulnerability, stemming from the breakdown of the multipolar world, and a fear to "be relegated to the same rank as the Dominican Republic or El Salvador" urged Canada to develop a unique "Middle Power" approach to foreign policy in the postwar era (David & Roussel 2009, p.134).

Despite being used to address Canadian-Soviet relations in the Cold War era and beyond, the "Middle Power" concept remains problematic. From the standpoint of neorealism, distinguishing them between Great Powers and others, Middle Powers are viewed as "mere objects, shaped by power politics among Great Powers" (Waltz 1979, p.131). However, an empirical analysis of the role that Middle Powers play in international relations, suggests that Middle Powers are states that do not possess the resources of Great Powers, but still manage to play a significant role in the international arena (David & Roussel 2009, p. 134). The self-assertive nature of the Middle Power position and an inclination to exert impact via

group participation and international institutions are underlined in the behavioral studies of “Middle Power” diplomacy (Cooper, Higgot and Nossal, 1993, p.7).

Based on a critical reconsideration of the above conceptual approaches and a historical study of Soviet-Canada relations, David & Roussel (2009) distinguish several important traits of “Middle-powerhood”: First, Middle Powers do not aim to change the international balance of power, but seek to play an “order-building and –sustaining role”(Hayes 1994) in the international system. In this view, Middle Powers tend to be diplomatically active and serve as the advocates of rapprochement between conflicting Great Powers. Second, Middle Powers “rely on their credibility and take advantage of their technical expertise and national resources at their disposal” (David & Roussel 2009, p.137). In other words, Middle Powers can be distinguished, based on their “technical and entrepreneurial capacities” (Cooper, Higgot and Nossal, 1993, p.19). Last but not least, Middle Powers tend to exercise active diplomacy via coalitions comprised of international actors and multilateral organizations.

All the above patterns are manifest in Canadian Cold War foreign policy. Aiming to promote stability and reduce East-West tensions, Canada made best use of the first modest rapprochement between the Great Powers following the Geneva Summit of 1955¹⁴. However, the renewed optimism about improving East-West relations and creating a collective security system was destroyed by the Soviet suppression of a popular uprising in Hungary in 1956¹⁵ and the Suez crisis¹⁶. Following a decade of

¹⁴ The Geneva Summit of 1955 was a Cold War-era meeting of the leaders of “Big Four” (the USA, Britain, the USSR and France), concentrating on a range of issues, such as global security, disarmament, the unification of Germany and strong East-West ties. The concentration on common issues (including the opportunities to build up a new system of collective security) led to the softening of East-West tensions, commonly addressed as “a spirit of Geneva”.

¹⁵ The Hungarian Uprising of 1956 was a nation-wide protest, directed against the government of the Hungarian People’s Republic, supported by the USSR. On 4 November 1956 Soviet troops

“maturation” (Waltz 1979, p.203) of the bipolar world, the weakened position of the U.S. in the international arena and a trend towards the “diversification” of Canadian foreign policy led to Canada’s next attempt to rekindle relations with the USSR. The conceptual basis for this development was Trudeau’s intention to create “a mutually acceptable code of behavior for international relations”, whereby the leading role would be played by the “compatibility of interests between the U.S and USSR” (Kinsman 2002/2003, p.115).

The warming of Canadian-Soviet relations seems paradoxical in light of a range of events in the beginning of 1980s, such as the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Soviet tacit support of the imposition of martial law in Poland, and the shooting down of a Korean Airlines flight by Soviet aircraft (Nossal 1994, p.28). However, the shift can be considered a desperate attempt by Canada to preserve peace and international stability in an era of revived U.S.-USSR tensions, while viewing the USSR as a key security threat. To support this, one can pay heed to the fact that Canada was one of the last Western states to adapt to the reality of Gorbachev’s “new thinking”¹⁷ and shift the focus of its security agenda.

A brief survey of Canadian-Soviet relations demonstrates that Canada viewed conflict aversion between Great Powers as a key aim of its foreign policy, as it continuously adapted to the changing balance of U.S.-USSR

invaded Budapest and a range of other regions of the country. Following the week-long resistance, a new Soviet-installed government began operation, leading to a strengthened Soviet position in the East.

¹⁶ The Suez crisis was created by an Israeli invasion of Egypt in 1956, followed thereafter by France and the UK. In 1957, the joint efforts of the USA, UN and the USSR forced the belligerents withdrawal. The crisis sharpened the relations within the Western bloc, while strengthening the role of the UN in the international arena.

¹⁷ “New thinking” can be addressed as a course of action, introduced by the new Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev following his rise to power. The new thinking included “glasnost” (publicity), freedom of expression and press, democratic elections, transfer to the market economy. Profound internal transformation in the USSR led to the end of communist dominance in the East and, subsequently, the Cold War.

relations and often acted as conciliator and mediator. To pursue these aims, Canada positioned itself as “a loyal, but non-threatening member of the Western alliance” (Sarty 1994, p.15) and acted as a leading proponent of multilateral solutions, especially in the security sphere¹⁸.

While the bipolar system of international relations ceased to exist following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the question remains whether the concept of “Middle Power” still shapes Canadian foreign policy and can it be used as an analytical framework for further research. Skeptics claim that “the kind of diplomacy conducted by such classical Middle Powers as Canada arose from circumstances which no longer exist” (Hayes 1994, p.12), and argue that the “Middlepowermanship” strategy will change in the multipolar world.

At the same time, globalization, the evolution of multilateral institutions and the expansion of peacekeeping missions continue to provide a variety of opportunities for Middle Powers to promote international stability. Moreover, the growing role of international developmental aid and the promotion of fundamental democratic values provide Middle Powers avenues to apply their experience and technical expertise thereby enhancing their role in the international arena. Finally, the Middle Power concept is still topical due to the fact that both the USA and Russia remain Great Powers, and that the collapse of the USSR did not bring an end to East-West tensions¹⁹. Last, but not least, the “Middle

¹⁸ Canada has played an active role in the UN peacekeeping missions since their emergence following the Suez crisis in 1956 (e.g., UN Emergency Force (1956-1957), UN Operation in Congo (1960-1964), UN Emergency Force in the Middle East (1973-1979) etc). Canada was one of the key founders of NATO in 1949, and has taken part in a range of UN-sanctioned operations through NATO (e.g., Kosovo Force, 1999- present).

¹⁹NATO Eastern enlargement is a major issue, characterized with significant potential to generate East-West tensions. On the role the prospect of NATO Eastern enlargement played in the East-West relations before the 1999, see: David, C.P.& Levesque, J. 1999, *Future of NATO: enlargement, Russia and European security*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal&Kingston. For the comprehensive analysis of the role NATO enlargement debate may have played in

Power” concept is frequently used to describe the involvement of particular states in both regional and global contexts²⁰. In view of the above, it is important to bear in mind the Canadian Middle Power foreign policy tradition, when analyzing its policies vis-à-vis Russia²¹ and Ukraine.

Canada's foreign policy towards Russia (1991-2013)

The purpose of this sub-chapter is to provide an overview of Canada-Russia relations, prerequisite for the subsequent analysis of Canada's response to the Ukraine crisis. The rationale for the analysis can be formulated as follows: First, an area-by-area study of Canada-Russia relations identifies the domains of Canadian cooperation and confrontation with Russia, whose importance and relevance for Canada determine the design of the response to the Ukraine crisis. Second, the prior assessment of the Canada's foreign policy to Russia constitutes a threshold when assessing the intensity of Canada's response to the Ukraine crisis and the applicability of the “Middle Power” concept to such response. Last, but not least, creating portfolios of Canada's relations with Russia and Ukraine (see the following subchapter) respectively provides a context for comparing the network of relations Canada has with these countries, and finally for

determining the crisis in Ukraine, see: Mearsheimer, J 2013/2014 ‘Why the Ukraine's crisis is the West's fault. The Liberal decision that provoked Putin’, *Foreign Affairs Review*.

²⁰ On the examples of the application of the Middle Power concept, see: Öniz, Z 2013, ‘Turkey and the Arab revolutions: boundaries of the Middle Power influence in a turbulent Middle East’, *Mediterranean Politics*, 19 (2), pp.203-219; Öniz, Z.& Kulay, M, 2016, ‘The dynamics of emerging Middle Power influence in regional and global governance: the paradoxical case of Turkey’, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*; Carr, A 2014, Is Australia a Middle Power? A systemic impact approach, *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, 68(1), pp.70-84.

²¹Canada's foreign policy to Russia is explored first, because Russia is broadly considered as the “continuator state” of the Soviet Union, whose relations with Canada are explored first in this chapter. The major arguments in favor of this approach are concerned with the transfer of the USSR property from third states to Russia; the mode of transfer of the Red Army parts, stationed abroad, as well as the Russia's taking over the seat of the USSR in the UN and its Security Council (Boczek, 2005, p.131).

developing a comprehensive picture of the Canadian response to the Ukraine crisis.

The areas of Canada-Russia relations to be analyzed include political dialogue and security, trade and investment, development policy, as well as Northern development.

Political dialogue and security

Canada and Russia work together in multilateral and bilateral terms. The multilateral cooperation takes place within the framework of international organizations, such as the UN, G8, G20 and the NATO-Russia Council. High-level meetings between Russian and Canadian leaders also occur on a regular basis, especially at G8 summits. Important bilateral cooperation topics include the struggle against global security threats, such as terrorism and the spread of weapons and materials of mass destruction. The above data substantiates Canada's continuing preference for the multilateral solutions (usual for Middle Powers), as it is also underlined in secondary sources (Keating, 2002) (Lui, 2012, p.129).

The first decade of the new millennium was marked by intense contact between foreign affairs and defense ministers of both countries, allowing Canada and Russia to facilitate bilateral cooperation and address global threats. In 2000, the parties signed an agreement, enabling and facilitating interregional cooperation (the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Canada 2014). In 2008, political dialogue between the parties was impeded by the hostilities of the Russo-Georgian War and Russia's "encroachment of Georgia's territorial integrity" (the Government of Canada, 2008)

Trade and investment

Cooperation in the field of trade and investment represents the cornerstone of bilateral relations.

According to the Canada-Russia Agreement on economic cooperation, the major sectors of cooperation include energy (including safety issues related to nuclear power), agriculture, conversion of defense industry, mining and metallurgy, aerospace industry, construction, environmental protection etc. (The Government of Canada 2014a). Importantly, the agreement provides for the institutionalization of cooperation by launching a Canadian-Russian Intergovernmental Economic Commission (IEC) that includes a range of sector-specific groups.

From 1992 to 2012 the volume of Canada-Russia trade demonstrated significant growth (despite decreases in 2002, 2007 and 2009) (Gauthier 2013). In 2012 Russia was Canada's 18th largest export destination, while Canada ranked 43rd for Russia in terms of export value. While Canadian foreign direct investment in Russia grew rapidly between 2009 and 2012, Russian FDI to Canada remained insignificant (Gauthier 2013).

Development policy

The beginning of the 1990s was characterized by the intense donor involvement in the democratization of the former Communist bloc countries, including Russia (Henderson 2003, pp.3-5). Major Canadian institutions that implemented development policy in Russia include the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Canada-Russia Partnership Fund. Both focused on promoting security and stability in Russia by supporting democracy, good governance and adherence to international norms, and the transition to a market economy. In the 2000s a highly limited number of Canadian development projects in Russia dealt with supporting select local initiatives (Global Affairs Canada 2012).

Northern development

The history of Canadian Arctic policy dates back to 1880, when Great Britain, Canada's former colonial power, ceded the Arctic islands to Canada (Dolata-Kreutzkamp 2009, p.2). While during the Cold War Canada and the U.S. were intensely cooperating in the Arctic to prevent a potential Soviet military intervention, the 1990s were marked by the emergence of truly multilateral cooperation in the Arctic²².

The legal framework for Canada-Russia bilateral cooperation in the Arctic is manifested by the Agreement on Cooperation in the Arctic and the North (1992), the Joint Russian-Canadian Statement on Cooperation in the Arctic and the North (2000), as well as a number of sectorial agreements (2007)²³. In institutional terms, the cooperation is facilitated through the Intergovernmental Economic Commission (Sergunin&Konyshev 2015, p.101). From 2006 to 2009 the Canadian International Development Agency implemented a range of development projects in the Russian North, dedicated to institution building and the empowerment of Aboriginal people (The Embassy of the Russian Federation in Canada 2015). Moreover, Canada-Russia joint efforts in the Arctic include the implementation of investments²⁴, as well as scientific and technological cooperation projects.

While Arctic and Northern development represents a domain of unlimited developmental cooperation opportunities for Canada and Russia, as well as multilateral solutions, unresolved territorial disputes (aggravated by the oil-richness of the region)²⁵ serve as a source of confrontation.

²²The crucial step in the formation of multilateral Northern cooperation was the signing of the Arctic Environmental Protection Strategy (AEPS), leading to the adoption of the 1996 Ottawa Declaration, establishing the Arctic Council as an intergovernmental forum for Arctic states to cooperate and coordinate their activities.

²³The agreements concerned the use of atomic energy, agriculture, fishery, veterinary and phytosanitary control etc.

²⁴On the most ambitious Canada-Russia joint investment projects in the Arctic, see Sergunin&Konyshev 2015, p.99.

²⁵ The major Canada-Russia unresolved territorial disputes deal with the Lomonosov Ridge, located in the Arctic Ocean.

Canadian confrontation with other Arctic states (including Russia) became especially visible under the Harper administration, promoting the “Arctic is Ours” policy (Dolata-Kreutzkamp 2009).

Canada's foreign policy to Ukraine (1991-2013)

The following sub-chapter aims to analyze the pre-crisis state of Canada-Ukraine relations. As it was mentioned, developing a portfolio of Canada's relations with the countries involved in the Ukraine crisis is needed to understand the rationale for Canada's response to the Ukraine crisis, as well as the intensity of such response. Drawing parallels between Canada-Russia and Canada-Ukraine relations prior to the crisis appears especially useful, especially when conceptualizing the whole picture of Canada's crisis response.

To start, Canada was the first Western state to establish diplomatic ties with Ukraine. Unlike the case with Russia, the strong Ukrainian-Canadian community significantly influences Canada's foreign policy towards Ukraine. The major areas of Canada-Ukraine cooperation include political dialogue, security cooperation, trade and investment, development, as well as education, and cultural exchange programs.

Political dialogue

The Joint Declaration on Special Partnership, signed in Kyiv in 1994, constitutes the key legal framework for Canada-Ukraine relations. From 1994-2013 a range of high-level and ministerial meetings between Ukrainian and Canadian officials took place (the Embassy of Ukraine in Canada 2015). The bilateral links between Canada and Ukraine became especially strong following the success of the Orange Revolution and the launch of multiple Western democratization projects in Ukraine (Ukraine Weekly, 2005).

Security and defense cooperation

According to the Roadmap “Priorities for Canada-Ukraine Relations”, security is a crucial domain for Canada-Ukraine cooperation (the Government of Canada 2009). Special emphasis is made on supporting Ukraine’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The framework for cooperation is constituted by the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between NATO and Ukraine of 2009 and the Annual National Program of NATO-Ukraine cooperation, which encompass a broad range of political, economic and defense-related reforms (the Government of Canada 2009).

Importantly, the process of NATO expansion has been viewed as a crucial security concern in Russia since the end of the Cold War²⁶. Therefore Canada’s outspoken support for Ukraine-NATO cooperation contains an important potential for conflict with Russia – a Russia that seems determined to “reclaim its old sphere of influence” (Merand et al. 2013, p.1)

Trade and investment

The legal basis for economic relations between Canada and Ukraine is constituted by the Declaration on Special Partnership (2004), the Agreement on economic cooperation (1994) and the Agreement on promotion and protection of investments.

In 2011 Ukraine was Canada’s 63rd most important export destination and the 82nd most important source of imported goods. From 1993 to 2006 the value of both exports and imports between Canada and Ukraine demonstrated a steady growth. However, since 2006 respective rates have been continually declining. The volume of trade in services and foreign direct investment were insignificant before 1993 and 2013. It is broadly recognized that there is considerable room for the expansion of Canada-Ukraine economic relations, especially with regard to food import

²⁶See fn 12.

and export, exchange in services, and FDI (the Government of Canada 2016).

Development policy

Ukraine is one of the 25 states that receive Canadian development assistance. From 2000 to 2012 the CIDA implemented a range of projects in Ukraine, dedicated to the promotion of liberal-democratic governance, capacity-building in governmental institutions and the electoral system, as well as countering corruption. Apart from tackling governance-related issues, the CIDA also promoted sector development and the assistance to vulnerable population groups. The Canada Fund for Local Initiatives supports the development of civil society and grassroots democratic initiatives.

People-to-people ties

Canada and Ukraine enjoy viable cooperation in such fields as education, culture and people-to-people relations. Courses in Ukrainian studies are available at a range of universities across Canada (Ottawa, Toronto, Alberta etc.). Ukrainian students are also eligible for a range of scholarships at Canadian universities. Cultural exchange programs between Canada and Ukraine and warm people-to-people ties are facilitated by numerous NGOs (e.g, Ukrainian Canadian Congress, the Canada-Ukraine Foundation and the Canadian Ethnocultural Council)

Summary

The logic of Canada's pre-crisis relations with modern Russia and Ukraine is to a significant extent determined by historical factors and Canada's foreign policy traditions.

During the first decade of the new millennium Canada managed to significantly advance its level of cooperation with the Russian Federation in a range of domains, such as political dialogue and security, trade and investment, and Northern development. The state of Canada-Russia relations in the sectors of security and Northern development is characterized by an emphasis on multilateral solutions and technical expertise. Despite successful Canada-Russia cooperation in many sectors, a range of potential areas of conflict significantly impeded the dynamics of Canada-Russia relations prior to the Ukraine crisis. Amongst others, the Canadian governmental support for NATO's Eastern enlargement (David&Levesque 1999, pp.119-120) and upgrading Ukraine-NATO relations, as well as unresolved territorial disputes in the Arctic are of mention.

In contrast, Canada-Ukraine relations were found to be oriented on promoting people-to-people links, the democratization of Ukraine, and its integration into the Euro-Atlantic security architecture, rather than economic and strategic cooperation.

To sum it up, the Ukraine crisis presented Canada with the dilemma of supporting its important ideational partner in face of a military aggression – a the risk of conflict with Russia - on the one hand, and sustaining promising Canada-Russia private sector cooperation and playing a constructive role in Russia's integration into the world community, on the other.

The Ukraine Crisis and the Changing Security Landscape

The following chapter is directed to developing an understanding of the major security concerns, associated with the Ukraine crisis and exerting

significant impact on the design of the Euro-Atlantic community's and Canada's response to the Ukraine crisis.

The “Revolution of Dignity”, followed by the Russian annexation of Crimea and Moscow's subsequent attempts to destabilize the situation in Eastern Ukraine has significantly changed the existing balance of power in the region, and brought new challenges to the surface.

Unlike a variety of regional and local crises of the new millennium, the events in Ukraine did not allow the West to ignore the obvious: the “Westphalian order” can no longer serve as an effective foundation of world security matters (Nichols 2014; Boyle, 2016). In other words, the West faced the need to influence a state that committed numerous breaches of the basic principles of international law (e.g., peaceful settlement of disputes, inviolability of frontiers etc.)²⁷. In turn, such a need reflects a number of security concerns.

Foremost, Russia's attempt to destabilize Eastern Ukraine “made Poland and the Baltic countries very nervous and prompted calls for NATO to station combat forces in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states” (Larrabee et al 2015, p.viii). The NATO Reassurance Measure, led by the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), was conducted to demonstrate the commitment of the Alliance to security in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, in June 2015 NATO announced a plan to increase its current rapid response force in Europe tenfold to reach 40,000 individuals (Meilhan & Almasi 2015).

Second, the annexation of Crimea significantly increased Russian maritime power and sharpened the conflict of interests in the Black Sea region (Blockmans 2015, p.187). Major geostrategic concerns in this regard relate to the security of Moldova (especially, given the realm of the Transnistrian conflict), a possible toughening of the historical rivalry

²⁷On the breaches of international law, committed by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, see: Zadorozhny, O 2014, *Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity and international law*, K.I.S, Kyiv.

between Russia and Turkey, as well as Russia's increased capacity to influence events in the Western Balkans and the Middle East. (Larrabee et al 2015, p. vii).

Third, an important challenge is represented by the Russian "hybrid war" strategy that is seen by the West "as a threatening precedent – even a likely model – for future conflicts in Russia's periphery" (Kofman & Royanski 2015, p.1). Hybrid war combines a range of conventional strategies, such as irregular combat operations, economic retaliatory measures, and massive information campaigns in the shadow of conventional warfare. According to Lanoszka (2016), former Soviet states are vulnerable to the application of the "hybrid war"-model due to a number of reasons. Foremost, the ethnic heterogeneity and political complexity of the region "offer opportunities for the Kremlin to foment local discord to its advantage", especially by sponsoring secessionist movements and positioning itself as "a guarantor of the political rights of self-identifying Russians or Russian-speaking people" (pp.182-183). Furthermore, historical grievances and related symbols may serve as useful means to "divide et impera". Finally, the weakness of civil society as a barrier against dividing impacts makes it easier for Russia to exploit political misunderstandings as a source of conflict (Lanoszka 2016, p.185).

Fourth, the pattern of Russian annexation of Crimea revived the West's fear of a Russian capture of the Arctic, a fear substantiated by Russia's latest military exercises there (Dolata-Kreutzkamp 2009, pp.2-6).

As the West's inability to prevent further escalation of the crisis in Ukraine made the above security threats ever more real, the former employed a range of political, economic and defense measures to support Ukraine. As a result, some scholarly and media sources started to address the Ukraine crisis and the West's response to it as an opening chapter of a

“Cold War II” stand-off²⁸ between the West and Russia, taking place despite a multipolar world order.²⁹

In this view, the Euro-Atlantic community faces an important dilemma with regard to designing its further response to Ukraine crisis. On the one hand, a continued strong stance in relation to Russia’s breaches of international law is a necessary prerequisite for reviving the legitimacy of the post-1991 European order. However, this approach evidently sharpens East-West tensions, prevents parties from intensifying economic cooperation, and still does not guarantee the prevention of future “Crimea scenarios” in former post-Soviet states. On the other hand, weakening the international pressure on Russia equates to acknowledging the West’s inability to protect the principles of international order. Specific suggestions include pursuing “dual-track diplomacy” to combine “a tough credible response to Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine” and engagement with Russia as regards broader issues of shared interests (House of Lords 2015, p.80).

The alleged resumption of the Great Powers’ rivalry and articulated suggestions for long-term East-West rapprochement make it especially interesting to investigate the dynamics of Canada’s response to the Ukraine crisis for two reasons. First, such an investigation allows for a retesting of the traditional Middle Power concept under the current East-West tensions, and contributes to the debate about the role of Middle Powers in the post-Cold War world. Second, an in-depth consideration of the Canadian response to the Ukraine crisis (with a special emphasis on the dynamics)

²⁸ On the examples of a ‘new Cold War’ narrative, see: Mamlyuk, B.N., 2015, ‘The Ukraine Crisis, Cold War II and International Law’, *German Law Journal*, vol. 16, no3, pp.479-487; Monaghan, A., 2015, *A ‘new Cold War’? Abusing history, misunderstanding Russia*; Averre, D., Wolczuk, K 2016, ‘Introduction: the Ukraine Crisis and post-post-Cold War Europe’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol. 68, no4., pp.551-555; Urban, M. 2014, *The Ukraine Crisis: is this Cold War Two?* BBC, 24 March.

²⁹ On the alleged East-West divide in the multipolar world, see: Izhak, O, 2016, ‘The threats and challenges of a multipolar world: a Ukraine Crisis case study’, *Connections: the Quarterly Journal*, pp.32-46.

provides for evaluating the prospects of Canada's exercising "double-track policy" with relation to Russia.

Canada's Response to the Ukraine Crisis

The following chapter provides insight into Canada's response to the Ukraine crisis in diplomatic, economic, defense and development cooperation terms. It is argued that the dynamics of the response were significantly influenced by the Canadian 2015 federal elections³⁰, changing from an extremely strong stance against Russia's annexation of Crimea and violence in Eastern Ukraine to a rather moderate position, one inspired by the Cold War experience of "Middlepowerhood".

Diplomatic measures

Over the period from November 2013 to November 2015, Canadian officials made a number of important political statements:

On 30 November 2013 Canadian Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird stated that "Canada strongly condemns the deplorable use of force today by Ukrainian authorities against peaceful protesters ..." (Global Affairs Canada 2013).

- On 5 December 2013 John Baird "urged Ukrainian authorities to respect the massive protests gripping the country against the government's decision to freeze ties with the EU and turn to Moscow instead" (CBC 2013).
- In February 2014 Mr. Baird "congratulated the new government and emphasized the need to honor the 1994 Budapest Declaration's commitment to Ukraine's territorial

³⁰ The Canadian federal election took place on October, 19th 2015 to elect members of the House of Commons of the 42nd Parliament of Canada. As a result of the election the Liberals won 184 seats in the Parliament, where 170 seats constitute the majority.

sovereignty and national unity at this critical time” (the Government of Canada 2014b).

- On 1 March 2014 Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper acknowledged “the importance of unity within the international community in support of international law, and the future of Ukraine and its democracy” (the White House 2014). He condemned Russia’s military intervention in Ukraine and urged Vladimir Putin “to immediately withdraw his forces to their bases” (the Canadian Press 2014). In the same statement the Prime Minister announced that Canada was recalling its ambassador from Moscow and refused to participate in the preparations for the 40th G8 Summit, chaired by the Russian Federation (Ibid).

- On 4 March 2014 Mr. Harper announced that Canada would immediately suspend all military activities with Russia, calling the seizure of Crimea an “invasion and occupation” (Chase 2014a).

- On 18 March 2014 Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird issued a statement, highlighting Canada’s refusal to recognize the illegal annexation of Crimea and characterizing the treaty signed to annex Crimea as “*an illegitimate and deliberate violation of the Constitution of the people of Ukraine*” (Jarrin 2014).

Continuing to take an active stance in light of Russian attempts to invade Eastern Ukraine, Stephen Harper told Vladimir Putin “to get out of Ukraine” during the G20-Summit in Brisbane, Australia in November 2014 (Chase 2014b). Commenting on the presence of Russian troops in Eastern Ukraine, John Baird addressed Russia’s actions as “unacceptable,

irresponsible and absolutely reckless”, labeling them an “invasion” (Wingrove 2014). In 2015 Stephen Harper remained one of the world’s most vocal supporters of Ukraine, pushing Canada’s allies towards a more intense diplomatic response to the crisis and tougher sanctions on Russia (Blanchfield 2016).

In 2014 the majority of Canadians supported the government’s approach in handling the crisis in Ukraine, one marked by a combination of diplomatic pressure and economic sanctions on Russia (Angus Reid Global 2015, p.3). While Canadians certainly prefer diplomatic and economic measures to military ones, Canadians (along with Poles) were found to be the most vocal supporters of NATO’s military aid to Ukraine among NATO countries (Poushter 2015). However, there were also voices equating Harper’s support for Ukraine with “compromising Canada’s international standing for the sake of a few votes at home” or seeing “building bridges with Russia” as a way to resolve a conflict (Carment 2015). Given the debate about a “Diaspora-driven” policy as well as the foundational differences³¹ between Conservatives’ and Liberals’ approaches to foreign policy, it was suggested that the new Liberal government³² would take a less active position with regards to the conflict in Ukraine.

The new Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Foreign Affairs Minister Stephane Dion have repeatedly reaffirmed continued Canadian support for Ukraine in its conflict with the Russian Federation (Blanchfield 2016). However, in January 2016 Dion stated that it was time to continue to work with Russia in areas of “common interests”, such as in the Arctic³³.

³¹On the Liberals’ attitudes to Conservatives’ “Hard Power Canada” stance, see Bondy M 2015 ‘Liberal Back in ‘Canadian Foreign Policy’, *Foreign Policy*, 21 October.

³² The 2015 Canadian Federal elections took place on 19 October 2015 and resulted in the victory of the Liberal Party (that won 184 seats out of 338 seats in the House of Commons of the Parliament of Canada).

³³Stephane Dion’s willingness to strengthen Canada-Russia cooperation in the Arctic is a response to Russia expanding its military presence in the Arctic in 2015. On this topic, see:

Explaining his position, Stephane Dion claimed that not talking to Russia would not help Ukraine and referred to the example of other allies, who continued normal diplomatic relations with Russia despite the Ukraine crisis (Zimonjic 2016). Most importantly, Stephen Dion drew a parallel between current East-West tensions and the Cold War, emphasizing Canada's "experience as a mediator" and the need to share it (Ibid).

Thus, the narrative, manifested in the 2016 statements of Canadian leaders, provides for distinguishing the shift from an unambiguously strong support for Ukraine in its confrontation with Russia to a less proactive position, founded on the repercussions of Canada's Cold War experience of "Middlepowerhood".

Support to Ukraine's defense sector

Canada contributed support to Ukraine's defense both in multilateral and bilateral terms. First, Canada deployed military personnel and material in Central and Eastern Europe in order to contribute to the NATO Reassurance operation. Moreover, since summer 2015 Canada has been deploying around 200 Canadian Armed Forces members in the framework of the Multinational Joint Commission's training mission in Ukraine (National Defense and the Canadian Armed Forces 2016). These troops provide the Ukrainian army opportunities for capacity-building and professional development under the bilaterally agreed Military Training and Cooperation Program.

Canada reacted to the Russian military intervention in the East of Ukraine by providing non-lethal military aid. The first supplies were sent to Ukraine in August 2014. In November and December 2014 Canada offered Kyiv further supplies and also sent Canadian military police personnel to conduct training courses for their colleagues in Ukraine (Chase 2014c).

Depledge, D 2015 'How Russia could annex the Arctic', *Defense One*; Labeviere, R 2015, 'Inevitable confrontation in the Arctic', *Valdai Discussion Club*.

In February 2015 it was agreed that Canada would send Ukraine financial aid and provide radio satellite images. At the same time, the idea of sending lethal military aid to Ukraine was first discussed at the highest formal level between Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. However, fearing an escalation of the conflict, the parties reaffirmed their commitment to a diplomatic solution. Importantly, in June 2015 the Canadian Defense Minister proclaimed Canada's readiness to send lethal weapons to Ukraine, but said that the supplies were ultimately contingent upon similar support from other NATO allies (Johnson 2015). In view of the fragile ceasefire in Ukraine and the Liberals' much softer stance on the Ukraine conflict, Canada claims "not being involved in any direct talks with the Ukrainian government on a possible provision of lethal aid to Kyiv" (Levchenko 2016) and "not having the right weapons to help Ukraine" (McKinnon 2015). Instead, Canada's technical assistance capacities and mediation experience are underlined in defense terms.

Economic sanctions

Along with diplomatic pressure, Canadian citizens view economic sanctions against Russian individuals and entities as a crucial element in Canada's response to the Ukraine crisis (Angus Reid Global 2014, p3). An initial package of sanctions related to Russia was imposed by the Special Economic Measures (Russia) Regulations of 17 March 2014 as a response to Russia's annexation of Crimea. The scope of the regulations is manifested by the asset freeze and dealings prohibition with designated individuals and entities, as well as tackling specific sectors and goods (Justice Laws Website 2016a).

In response to the Russian annexation of Crimea Canada also introduced Special Economic Measures (Ukraine) Regulations, providing for assets freezing and dealings prohibition for implicated Ukrainian persons.

The regulations also contain a range of import prohibitions with regard to annexed Crimea (Global Affairs Canada 2016). The Freezing Assets of Corrupt Foreign Officials (Ukraine) Regulations applies to 18 Ukrainians who were politically exposed for their affiliation with the regime of Victor Yanukovich (Justice Laws Website 2016b).

Despite a call for starting “to talk with Russia”, Canada did not lift sanctions and instead introduced an amendment to its Special Economic Measures (Russia) Regulations, in commemoration of the second anniversary of the annexation of Crimea. In addition, Canada’s membership in the Russian-Canadian Intergovernmental Economic Commission has remained suspended since March 2014. As it can be seen from figures illustrating Canada-Russia trade and investment activities, the volume and value of such activities have significantly decreased between 2013 and 2015 (Tremblay 2015).

At the same time, Canada has demonstrated an intention to intensify its economic cooperation with Ukraine by introducing the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement (CUFTA) that was signed by both parties on 11 July 2016. Apart from addressing tariff barriers to trade, CUFTA includes provisions in the areas of sanitary and phytosanitary measures, environment, competition, labor, intellectual property and electronic commerce amongst others. Importantly, CUFTA enables companies to benefit from preferential access to procurement opportunities at the central level in both countries (Global Affairs Canada 2015b). Due to its ambitious scope, CUFTA is perceived an important step forward in Canada-Ukraine bilateral relations, as well as a means to demonstrate Canada’s strong commitment to supporting Ukraine’s integration into the world community.

Enhanced development cooperation with Ukraine

Following the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine Canada has significantly intensified its development cooperation with Ukraine. The development projects, currently implemented by Canada in Ukraine, can be divided into two major groups, such as providing emergency assistance in the short term, and aiming at promoting economic development and democracy in a long-term perspective. The emergency assistance projects merely involve medical assistance in conflict areas, emergency shelter and essential relief items (Global Affairs Canada 2015a).

The economic development-related projects (tackling both public and private sectors) include (but are not limited to):

- “Evidence-based economic development”
- “Engaging the Private Sector for Small and Medium-Sized Farm Business Development”
- “Strengthening Public Financial Management”

As it can be seen from the official list of the Canadian international development projects in Ukraine, the number of operational projects has increased over the period from 2013 to 2015, while the thematic scope of the long-term assistance projects have literally remained the same. Along with the Canada’s emphasis on mediation and technical assistance, manifested in both diplomatic support and defense-related statements, the intensified Canada-Ukraine development cooperation testifies to Canada’s ambition towards the role of a Middle Power in the Ukraine crisis.

Strengthening people-to-people ties

The Ukrainian Canadian Congress (UCC) and a range of other Canadian-Ukrainian civil society organizations have expressed emphatic support for the Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine. The UCC launched the Euromaidan Canada as a part of its Toronto branch. Initially, Euromaidan Canada aimed at spreading information about the “Revolution of Dignity”.

Since 2013 the branch has organized 80 events, such as protests, educational sessions and fundraising actions.

The Foundation Canada-Ukraine also implements a range of important projects to support Ukraine, such as:

- “Ukraine Rebuilding Fund”
- “CUF Medical Mission”
- “Ambulances for Ukraine”

Both organizations are active in social networks and attract attention not only from Canada and Ukraine, but also from far beyond.

Summary

Canada’s response to the Ukraine crisis caused significant changes in Canada-Russia and Canada-Ukraine relations. First, Canada’s initial strong stance as regards the conflict (including Canada’s support for the NATO Reassurance operation) led to a pronounced standoff between Canada and Russia. One of the crucial catalysts for the strained relations was the Russian “Arctic arms race” in the summer of 2015. Canada-Russia political cooperation, trade and investment, as well as common Northern development strategies significantly suffered as well from Canada’s exertion of diplomatic pressure on Russia and the introduction of economic sanctions.

Explicit referrals to Cold War experiences in the political statements of Canada’s leadership following the 2015 elections, the lack of forthcoming initiatives to support Ukraine’s defense sector, as well as an emphasis on development cooperation in Ukraine are major factors that testify to Canada’s political turn to a Middle Power stance in context of the Ukraine crisis. While continuing to develop its bilateral relations with Ukraine (especially, in trade, development cooperation and people-to-

people ties domains), the Liberal Government has also sought to “reboot” Canada-Russia relations by “speaking with Russia”. Resembling its Middle Power-style inclination to multilateral solutions, Canada is looking forward by relying on “a myriad of agencies” to re-engage with Russia, such as the Arctic Council, the NATO-Russia Council, and the OSCE (Westdal, 2016).

Despite the evolution of the post-Cold War narrative in relation to the crisis in Ukraine³⁴, the evident multi-polar state of the international order, the spirit of the recent USA-Russia consultations on the Donbas settlement in Kaliningrad (Garanich 2016), as well as ongoing discussions on EU-Russia and EU-Eurasian Economic Union cooperation make it difficult to claim that the geopolitical preconditions surrounding Canada’s response to the Ukraine crisis clearly resemble those from the Cold War. However, the presence of multiple features of Middle Power diplomacy in Canada’s post-election response to the crisis in Ukraine (e.g., emphasis on mediation, technical assistance and developmental cooperation), as well as the proven applicability of the Middle Power concept to states’ post-Cold War foreign policies³⁵, legitimize the application of this concept to the case study of the Canadian Ukraine crisis response.

The Convergence of Canadian and EU Responses to the Ukraine Crisis

The aim of this chapter is to compare the dynamics of Canada’s response to the Ukraine crisis with that of EU in order to see whether the intent to “re-engage” with Russia, currently manifested in Canada’s foreign policy, can be also traced in the dynamics of the EU’s crisis response.

³⁴ See fn. 21.

³⁵ See fn.13.

Given the scale of the Ukraine crisis and its multiple security implications, the EU has been significantly involved in attempting to resolve the crisis since the beginning.

Evidently, the EU welcomed the Euromaidan Revolution in Kyiv, triggered by the former President Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. For instance, on 26th November 2013 the EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Füle stated that he was happy that

“[d]emocracy in Ukraine has reached the moment, where the people are free to assemble and express their opinion, particularly on the issue which is so relevant for their own future, the future of Ukraine” (Beketov 2013).

Since 2014, the EU has been employing a range of diplomatic counter measures in response to Russia's actions in Ukraine. These measures included *inter alia*:

- issuance of multiple political statements³⁶
- suspending the negotiations concerning Russia's membership in the OECD and International Energy Agency
- canceling the 2014 EU-Russia Summit and the Member States' planned bilateral meetings with Russia
- France and Germany's significant contribution to the arrangement of and conduct in the Minsk process and monitoring the fulfillment of the Minsk Agreements³⁷.

³⁶ For instance, see: European Union Delegation to the UN 2014, *EU Council condemns the illegal referendum in Crimea*; European Union External Action Service 2015, *Statement by the Spokesperson on the recent escalation of fighting in eastern Ukraine*.

³⁷ On the 5 September 2014 the representatives of Ukraine, the Russian Federation, as well as the Lugansk People Republic and Donetsk People Republic signed the Minsk Protocol, aimed to halt the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Following the collapse of the ceasefire in January 2015, an

Addressing the EU's economic sanctions in relation to Russia, it is necessary to mention that the EU visa bans and asset freezes affect 147 individuals and entities, involved with the annexation of Crimea and the following pro-Russian unrest in Eastern Ukraine. Similar to Canada, the EU also introduced substantial restrictions on economic exchange with Crimea and measures targeting EU-Russian private sector cooperation (in financial, energy and defense sectors) (European Union Newsroom 2016). The EU also did not lift sanctions in 2016, extending their enforcement until January 2017 (Robins, 2016).

Similar to Canada, the EU dedicated significant attention to enhancing its bilateral cooperation with Ukraine. The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement³⁸, which included the new Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, was signed on 27 June 2014. In 2014 the EU launched its first Special Measure in favor of Ukraine, aimed to finance the State Building Contract Project and the Ukraine Civil Society Support Program (European Commission 2014). In 2015 the Second Special Measure was introduced to support private sector development in Ukraine (European Commission 2015).

The EU also promoted the development of Ukraine's defensive capabilities by launching the EU Advisory Mission for Civilian Security Sector Reform in Ukraine. In December 2015 the Ukrainian Defense Ministry and the European Defense Agency entered into an agreement providing for EU-Ukraine cooperation in the field of defense. However, the EU played only a limited role in NATO's Reassurance operation and protested against the permanent deployment of NATO troops in Poland,

additional package of measures (Minsk II) was agreed upon by the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, Germany and France at the Minsk Summit in February 2015.

³⁸On the overview of the distinctive traits of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, see: Van der Loo, G 2016 *The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and Comprehensive Free Trade Area: a new legal instrument for EU integration without membership*. BRILL, Leiden.

claiming that such deployment would violate the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act (Speck 2015).

From the overview above, it is clear that the EU has done a lot to respond to Ukraine's crisis, emphasizing a diplomatic solution to the crisis. However, since the Russian annexation of Crimea it has been increasingly difficult for the EU Member States to agree on the scope of economic sanctions to be imposed on Russia and the perspective for EU-Russia dialogue. For instance, both Hungary and Austria, who have long-standing political and economic links with Russia, have repeatedly pushed for the EU to soften its sanctions policy against Russia. Evident pro-Russian sentiments were also expressed by strong nationalist political forces in other member nations, such as National Front in France, Greece's far-right Golden Dawn and the Lega Nord in Italy (Waterfield&Freeman 2014) (Sannikov 2014). Alongside the pressure from internal proponents of EU-Russian re-engagement, a range of important factors started to bring the EU closer to acknowledging the need to elaborate a strategy to increase cooperation with Russia, despite the continued occupation of Crimea and the fragile nature of the ceasefire in Eastern Ukraine. These factors include the fear of a "full-blown" Cold War and regional spillovers of the conflict, the economic impact of sanctions, and a demand for Russia's cooperation on global issues. In light of the above, first calls for a re-engagement with Russia appeared.

In its Report of 10 February 2015 the British House of Lords stated that the "Member States have to live with Russia as a neighbor, as a member of the United Nations Security Council, and as a regional power"(House of Lords 80). The major spheres for reinforcing EU-Russian cooperation, underlined by the House, include collective security, common economic space, as well as cultural and educational exchanges. Irrespective of the way the Ukraine crisis will continue influencing EU-

Russia economic and security relations, it is suggested that “an ongoing cooperation with Russia in the fields of education, culture and science “shall not be sacrificed” (Ibid). Finally, it is claimed that

“it would be a failure of imagination and diplomacy if the crisis in Ukraine were to result in a long-lasting era of colder relations and cooperation not only on the political, but also cultural level” (House of Lords 82).

Aiming to suggest ways to prevent a “new Cold War”, a range of scholars from both the EU and beyond emphasize the need to rebuild trust via a new “long-term strategic perspective” (Forsberg&Haukkala 2016, p. 14). According to Lukyanov (2016), the key aspects of cooperation need to include energy, the movement of people (that is especially topical in light of the massive influx of refugees into the EU) and cross-border cooperation (p.18). It is also recommended to consider perspectives for cooperation between the EU and the Eurasian Union (Korosteleva 2016, p.44). In its policy brief “Eastern Partnership after a deep rethinking” the European Parliament also discusses the prospect of creating a EU-Russia common economic space in order to prevent long-lasting EU-Russia confrontation (Gromadzki&Pasos 2015, p.38). Importantly, the nearly all of authors of the above suggestions recognize the impossibility of rebuilding EU-Russia trust in the short-term, and emphasize the importance of combining short-term crisis response measures with the prerequisites for creating substantial long-term partnership.

The above analyses of the Canadian and EU response to the Ukrainian crisis allow for stating that Canada and the European Union’s positions toward the crisis in Ukraine are to great extent convergent with each other. In general terms, both parties combined diplomatic measures and economic sanctions to counter Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the use of “hybrid war”-strategies in Eastern Ukraine. Furthermore, both the EU

and Canada have strengthened their development efforts in Ukraine, focusing on economic development and the promotion of democracy. While Canada made a larger contribution in the domains of defense and military, the allies agreed on the need to elaborate a diplomatic solution to the conflict.

Importantly, in 2015 the policy discourses in both the EU and Canada experienced a change. Reaffirming their commitment to the security and territorial integrity of Ukraine, European and Canadian policy-makers started to discuss avenues to avoid a “new Cold War” by strengthening the cooperation with Russia in medium- and long-term perspectives in the spheres of common interest. The reasons for such a move doubtlessly include trade and investment, as well as the need to unite efforts against common threats (House of Lords 2015, p.35; 79-80). As for the EU, energy supplies remain an important concern in EU-Russia relations. Both the EU Arctic states (Denmark, Norway) and Canada seek to advance multifaceted cooperation with Russia in the Arctic.

To sum up, a comparison of the dynamics in Canada and the EU's responses to the crisis in Ukraine shows that both Canada and the EU made a first step to ‘re-engage’ with Russia in the diplomatic domain. At the same time, both emphasized the importance of traditional Middle Power instruments (mediation, multilateralism, development cooperation, technical assistance) to continue supporting Ukraine in an ongoing crisis.

Concluding Remarks

The examination of Canada's response to the Ukrainian crisis allows for formulating the following concluding remarks.

1. A dichotomy of conflict and cooperation has been characterizing Canada-Russia relations since the Cold War, whereby Canada took an active “Middle

Power” stance. Prior to the crisis in Ukraine, Canada’s support for NATO Eastern enlargement, the strengthening of the NATO-Ukraine relations, and unresolved territorial disputes in the Arctic were the major areas of potential disagreement between Canada and Russia. Canada has also enjoyed tight bilateral links with Ukraine, strengthened by active people-to-people ties.

2. Russia’s annexation of Crimea and initiation of unrest in Eastern Ukraine forced the world community face a range of important security concerns, stemming from the obvious crisis of the post-1991 European order. The major identified threats include regional spillovers of the conflict (especially, to Poland and Baltic states), Russia’s continued application of “hybrid war” strategies and an aggravation of existing tensions in the Arctic. In light of the above security threats and rekindled rivalry between Great Powers, the Euro-Atlantic community faced the challenge of developing a dynamic crisis response, both protecting the foundations of existing international law and allowing for the alleviation of the above security threats.

3. Following the outbreak of the conflict, Canada actively opposed Russia’s breaches of international law by combining diplomatic and economic means. It was also one of the most active supporters of Ukraine in the defense domain. Canada’s response to crisis from 2014 to mid-2015 was found to be fully convergent with that of the EU.

4. Later on Canada started to look for opportunities for rapprochement with Russia, despite reaffirming its previous commitment to supporting the security and territorial integrity of Ukraine. While this trend largely stems from the Canadian change of government in autumn 2015, it also goes in line with the current debate on avoiding a “new Cold War” and redesigning EU-Russia relations with a long-term perspective, taking place at both EU level and that of the particular Member States. The reasons for

rapprochement range from trade and investment opportunities to the need for enhanced cooperation in the Arctic. Therefore, both the EU and Canada seem to pursue a double-track policy, aiming to both support Ukraine and create conditions for substantial long-term partnership with Russia.

5. The presence of the key features of Middle Power diplomacy in Canada's response to the Ukraine crisis makes it possible to claim that the new Liberal Government of Canada seeks to play a Middle Power role in the crisis resolution. The experience of applying the Middle Power concept to post-Cold War research in the field of international relations makes it possible to use the Middle Power diplomatic approach, despite the evidently different shape of the international order.

6. In a long-term perspective, the crisis in Ukraine can be viewed as a turning point in East-West relations, demonstrating the impracticability of a rivalry between Great Powers in an era of multi-polarity, ever growing international interdependencies and common challenges, as well as the need for new multilateral solutions. Similar to the post-World War II European Coal and Steel Community project, creating a common economic space between the EU and EEU can be seen as an important basis for enhanced cooperation in political and security domains.

7. In Chinese, the hieroglyph "crisis" combines "a problem" and "an opportunity". The crisis and the West's response to it provided Ukraine with a range of novel opportunities for development and multifaceted integration to European and Euro-Atlantic community. Entering into an ambitious Association Agreement with the EU, joining free trade areas with the EU and Canada, and multiple democracy promotion initiatives can bring a quality change to the internal situation in Ukraine and its role in the international area.

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SEARCHING FOR A POLICY: FINLAND'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE UKRAINE CONFLICT

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Abstract. *The Ukraine conflict has put to a test Finland's foreign policy in its historically seen new capacity as a non-aligned country. This article investigates the conflict's implications on Finland's foreign policy: It focuses on Finland's reactions to the conflict and changes in Finland's foreign policy role, thereby paying attention to the EU's role within foreign policy making, as well as Finnish-Russian relations in a changing security environment. This article covers a period ranging from the onset of the Ukraine conflict in the spring of 2014 until early 2016. The findings suggest that Finland's foreign policy remained embedded with the EU, although the Ukraine conflict challenged Finland's foreign policy role conception as well as Finnish-Russian relations.*

Keywords: *Ukraine, Finland, crisis, war, Russia, security, foreign policy.*

Introduction

The disagreement on Ukraine's future made international headlines during the 2013 Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius, and within months escalated into a conflict that has been compared to a new Cold War (CW). The deteriorating US-Russia relations were soon in the spotlight, along with the conflict resolution capability of major European Union (EU) member states and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The conflict however had implications beyond the central stage of world politics. To Finland, the situation resembled the CW setting when the country was caught between the conflict adversaries, however with the big difference being that Finland now was aligned in its EU member capacity. Thus the Ukraine conflict put to a test Finland's foreign policy and especially the balance between international cooperation and national security.

This article addresses the implications of the Ukraine conflict on Finnish foreign policy. It investigates Finland's reaction to the conflict, thereby paying close attention to the EU's role within Finnish foreign policy. Further, the article studies the Ukraine conflict's effects on Finland's perceived security and especially looks at the development of Finnish-Russian relations. In doing so, it focuses on a period ranging from the escalation of the Ukraine conflict in the spring of 2014 until early 2016. The findings suggest that Finland's foreign policy is firmly embedded in the EU policy. Nevertheless, the Ukraine conflict has revealed ambiguity surrounding Finnish foreign policy roles, and has brought about a reassessment of Finnish national security and the conduct of Finnish-Russian relations.

This article proceeds as follows: First, it outlines Finland's foreign policy identity and discusses the contest between the country's competing

foreign policy roles. Second, it addresses the Europeanization³⁹ of Finnish foreign policy in the post-CW time and the consequences this brought about in Finnish foreign policy making, most notably the multilateralisation of relations with Russia. Third, the article presents Finland's Eastern Policy⁴⁰, including the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) policy and Finland's focus on Russia. Fourth, Finnish reactions to the Ukraine conflict are discussed and analyzed, and are also placed in their historical context. Lastly, the findings are summarized and the article is concluded.

Finland's foreign policy identity

Finnish foreign policy making is plagued by a disagreement on what constitutes the country's role as an international actor. Underlying Finland's consensus-oriented politics is a contest between the ideological strands of realism and liberalism, which manifest themselves in distinct foreign policy roles. Penttilä (2008, p. 9-10; 42-50) distinguishes between the 'lonely wolf' role, representing a realist approach, and the 'apt student' role, which is inspired by liberalist thinking in international relations (IR). The realist approach is characterized by an emphasis on Finland's alleged *sui generis* status, arguing that the country stands out as a 'lonely wolf' in IR due to its unique history and geopolitical position, and thus needs and deserves special treatment. The realist approach advocates national ownership in policy making, which within foreign policy has translated into a focus on bilateral relations and non-alignment. Advocates of this approach support Finnish EU membership, but traditionally argue that Finland stands outside the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)

³⁹ Haukkala and Ojanen (2011, p. 150) understand Europeanization as “a process of foreign policy convergence between the EU institutions and its member states”.

⁴⁰ The concept of 'Eastern policy' (Finnish: Itäpolitiikka) refers to Finland's foreign policy on its Eastern neighbours. It is thus to be distinguished from the European Neighbourhood Policy.

and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) Instead, these issues are preferably dealt with on the national level. As opposed to this, the liberalist approach highlights Finland's belonging to the 'Western' community within the international system. This approach relies on a strong international system, and emphasizes the need for common rules and the rule of law. According to this approach, Finland is a “mainstream country,” a liberal democracy that in no relevant regard differs from other European countries. This translates into the role of the 'apt student' where Finland behaves like a conventional model student in school: Finland is ready to learn without questioning too much, adheres to common rules, and engages in an active and constructive manner in international organizations.

These ideological strands have succeeded each other as the dominant foreign policy approaches throughout modern Finnish history, although the realist approach tends to dominate in the general perception. Both roles date back to the 1800s and the Russian empire, when Finland was simultaneously regarded a special case due to its unique autonomous status and a loyal entity within the empire. Looking at recent history, the realist approach was predominant in the CW period. During this period, Finnish foreign policy relied on the „Paasikivi-Kekkonen policy“, which was guided by the idea of national survival (Penttilä, 2008, p. 10; 48-51). This translated into a cautious and accountable national foreign policy characterized by a low profile in international politics and an appeasing approach towards Russia. Nevertheless, Finland aimed to stay neutral and maintain good relations with both CW blocks (Aunesluoma and Mitzner, 2014, p. 11).

It was only in the post-CW time that the liberal approach became predominant as Finland's international role (Penttilä, 2008, p. 42-45). The dissolution of the Soviet Union opened up for a re-orientation of Finnish

foreign policy towards an internationally oriented approach and more active engagement in international organizations (Forsberg and Vogt, 2008; Paloheimo, 2003, p. 230). This was manifested through Finland's EU membership in 1995, and Finland's adherence to common goals and rules within the Union proved the country's role as an apt student. (Penttilä, 2008, p. 42; Raunio and Tiilikainen, 2003, p. 149). This interpretation has been contested by advocates of the realist approach, who have downplayed the significance of the international orientation and have argued that EU membership merely led to replacing one power center by another. The predominant view has however held that Finland since has embarked on a value-based foreign policy, reflecting a change in foreign policy that led to the adoption of the apt student role (Forsberg and Vogt, 2008). This perception prevailed until the early 2000s when an emerging focus on national affairs was followed by rising support for the „lonely wolf“ role again. Consequently, Finland has adopted neither role, but meanders between the two existing roles (Haukkala and Ojanen, 2011, p. 151; Penttilä, 2008, p. 54; 50-51).

Finnish foreign policy has also been characterized by unclarity regarding foreign policy leadership in terms of the distribution of power between the president and the cabinet. Due to historical reasons, the president has traditionally held a central role in the conduct of Finnish foreign policy. When Finland's constitutional design was agreed upon in wake of the 1918 civil war, a semi-presidential system was established that appeased both parties. This endowed the president with extensive powers, among others in the conduct of foreign policy (Saukkonen, 2008). However from the 1980s onward, changes have been introduced that have reduced the powers of the president and instead strengthened parliamentarism (Nousiainen, 2001; Paloheimo, 2003, p. 219). The introduction of a new Constitution of Finland in 2000 marks the latest milestone in this process

(1999, Chapter 1; 66§, 93§). As of today, the Constitution states that the president directs Finland's foreign policy together with the cabinet, however the cabinet is in charge of EU affairs and the prime minister represents Finland in the EU when representation of the highest level of State is required. This wording has left the power division between the president and the cabinet unclear and caused confusion regarding Finnish foreign policy leadership (Haukkala and Ojanen, 2011, p. 155). The issue is closely linked to Finland's role in international affairs as the realist approach advocates concentration of foreign policy leadership in a strong presidential office, while the liberalist approach generally favors increased competencies for the prime minister and the cabinet (Penttilä, 2008, p. 45; 48). Thus a political power struggle underlies the debate and is reflected in the conduct of foreign policy.

Considering these developments, Finnish foreign policy is best portrayed as a hybrid model that aims at accommodating all strands. The old opposition between a realist and liberalist approach to foreign policy remains, although neither approach seems to dominate in foreign policy making. Further, the once clear division of work in foreign policy leadership is blurred by the constitutional change that left unsettled the issue of foreign policy leadership. Despite its shortcomings, the hybrid model works in times of peace, but Penttilä (2008, p. 12) points out that this might not be the case during a crisis when foreign policy making is put to a test.

Finnish foreign policy during EU membership

Europeanization in the post-CW period

Finnish foreign policy has undergone a process of Europeanization in the post-CW time. Attempts to capture this transformation illustrate the fundamental changes it has brought about in foreign policy: connotations

include a “Westernization” of Finnish politics; a focus-shift “from Moscow to Brussels”; as well as a “going from special to normal” (Forsberg and Vogt, 2008). Europeanization thus refers to an orientation towards European politics in the post-CW time where the EU has become a reference point for politics in general and for foreign affairs in particular (Paloheimo, 2003; Tiilikainen, 2006, p. 77). It reflects a change of foreign policy that stands in contrast to Finland’s post-CW foreign policy that rested on the three principles of neutrality, sovereignty of foreign policy making, as well as the maintenance of good relations with the Soviet Union/Russia (Raunio and Tiilikainen, 2003, p. 2-9, 129-131). Thus the Europeanization also reveals a change in foreign policy roles where the apt student approach has been the predominant one.

Although the shift is often portrayed as abrupt, EU membership is the result of continuity and pragmatism in Finnish foreign policy thinking (Raunio and Wiberg, 2001, p. 79-80; Tiilikainen, 2006, p. 76-77). It represents an adaption of policy to the deepening European integration and concurrent events in Finland’s neighborhood, including Swedish EU membership and the developments in the Soviet Union and later in Russia (Möttölä, 1993). For Finland, EU integration has been an attempt to secure a place in the international community and to promote its national interest through EU decision-making (Raunio and Wiberg, 2001, p. 4). Simultaneously, the orientation has had an underlying aspect of national security. The political developments especially in the early 1990s changed the assessment of Finland’s security environment and room of manoeuvre for policy making. Although security issues were downplayed in the debate preceding the EU membership vote, national security aspects were considered a central argument for membership (Tiilikainen, 2006, p. 77; Jakobson, 1998, p. 111). The national security aspect was however one of the major tumbling stones for EU membership as there were concerns

within the EU that Finland's foreign policy tradition would be hard to streamline with the CFSP and CSDP (Forsberg and Vogt, 2008; Raunio and Tiilikainen, 2003, p. 140). Those early doubts proved groundless since Finland promoted a strengthening of the CFSP (Raunio and Tiilikainen, 2003, p. 132-133) and in general was supportive of EU policy during the early days of its EU membership (Jakobson, 1998, p. 107; Tiilikainen, 2006, p. 82-85).

In the post-CW period, changes to Finnish foreign policy were to be seen both on the domestic and international level. Domestically, Europeanization contributed to blurring the lines between domestic and foreign affairs, and the general public was invited to participate in the foreign policy debate that had previously been considered an issue for the political elite. (Raunio and Wiberg, 2001, p. 65-66). Internationally, the Europeanization of Finland's foreign policy strengthened Finland's international position and enhanced its integration in international institutions. Most importantly, the EU became Finland's main point of reference and an important channel for influence in international affairs for the small state. EU membership also broadened the scope of Finnish foreign policy to embrace new geographical areas (Forsberg and Vogt, 2008; Raunio and Tiilikainen, 2003, p. 136-137). These changes might have come about regardless of EU membership, but the Europeanization of Finnish foreign policy enhanced the integration process and supported Finland's international orientation.

Finland's Eastern Policy

This re-evaluation of foreign policy towards Europe in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union was at first not accompanied by a corresponding assessment of Finland's 'Eastern policy'. The Finnish Eastern policy approaches lacked the forward-looking nature of the policy towards European countries: practices and priorities largely remained the same as

during the late CW period, and the Eastern policy was dominated by assessing risks and potential security threats. Most notably, the policy merely focused on relations with Russia and overlooked the other post-CW states (Saari, 2014, p. 39-40).

The Europeanization of Finnish foreign policy nevertheless brought about changes to the conduct of relations with Russia. Throughout the CW period, Finland's lonely wolf approach was manifested in its relations with Russia: Finnish-Russian relations were characterized by close bilateral ties and high-level meetings with an emphasis on personal relations (Etzold and Haukkala, 2013, p. 137). With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, however, the impediment for Finland to choose sides or facilitate between the CW blocks disappeared (Haukkala and Ojanen, 2011, p. 152; Saari, 2014, p. 39). EU membership has induced a shift in Finnish-Russian relation as they are being dealt with through the EU and Finland can refer to the EU framework when dealing with Russia. European integration has thus both normalized and multilateralized Finnish-Russian relations (Pursiainen and Saari, 2002, p. 22). Despite this, bilateral ties have continued to play an important role in Finnish-Russian relations, and in the post-CW time a 'golden rule' in Finnish foreign policy has been that Finland considers itself in a position of responsibility when there are issues between the former CW adversaries (Etzold and Haukkala, 2013, p. 138).

The changing conduct of Finnish-Russian relations has left unchanged the central position of Russia in Finnish foreign policy, including Finnish policy within the EU. This is evident in Finland's CFSP agenda as Finland has highlighted Russia's central role in European affairs, along with the need for constructive engagement with Russia in order to ensure European stability and security (Forsberg and Vogt, 2008). The mainstay of Finnish EU policy has been the cultivation of a coherent approach on Russia (Haukkala and Ojanen, 2011, p. 158), and a central aim

has been to move beyond the mere 'strategic partnership' towards a EU-Russia relationship based on cooperation and interdependence (Government of Finland, 2009). Towards this end, Finland has actively promoted the 1999 Common Strategy on Russia, as well as the Northern Dimension policy. However, Finnish attempts to upload policies have proven rather unsuccessful, and it has been realized that a joint EU policy on Russia is challenging, or entirely lacking⁴¹. This has led domestic voices to question the Finnish foreign policy orientation, and the liberalist approach has been challenged by the realist approach. Consequently, the issue of bilateral relations has been brought back on the agenda as a viable option to conducting Finnish-Russian relations (Etzold and Haukkala, 2013, p. 138-140), e.g. the Finnish Government's (2009) Russia Action Plan dealt with how to enhance Russia-related activities. It has also been debated to what extent Finland's national policy towards Russia has actually changed with EU membership: while some scholars argue that Finland has had to download a set of rules on EU-Russia cooperation (Haukkala and Ojanen, 2011, p. 157), others claim that Finland has kept its national Russia-policy in principle. Proponents of the latter argument suggest that a parallel conduct of bilateral and multilateral policies has been able to go unnoticed as long as the national one has not been in conflict with the EU policy (Pursiainen and Saari, 2002, p. 22).

The EaP: Ukraine and Russia

Finland's Eastern Policy has however not been restricted to Russia. After the introduction of the EaP in 2009, Finland's foreign policy scope was broadened to include the Eastern partners among the EU and Central Asian countries. Especially the geographical proximity made the area important to Finland, as "relations with the countries in the region are

⁴¹ This can be seen especially in the difficulties to develop a joint EU position on Russia after the 2004/2007 EU enlargements.

guided by Finland's national interests and the common policy of the European Union." Within the EU framework, Finland's main goals for the region have been to enhance economic and political relations, foster stable societal development, engage in conflict prevention, as well as to strengthen cooperation with the European Union (MFAF, 2010, p. 3-4).

During the early years of the EaP, Finland focused on fostering a stable EU neighborhood. This was primarily done through economic integration with the EU (Kantanen, 2009, p. 4) and in addition, Finland's policy emphasized the common values of the rule of law, democracy, and civil society (MFAF, 2010, p. 11-12). These issues remained central on the Finnish EaP agenda (FAC, 2009; Peltokoski, 2012, p. 3-4; Stubb, 2010, p. 5), and were adopted by the new cabinet of Finland in 2011: Prime Minister Jyrki Katainen's⁴² government program explicitly mentioned the role of common values, as well as the more-for-more principle that highlighted Finland's emphasis on each country's individual progress as a condition for further integration (FAC, 2013, 2009; Peltokoski, 2012, p. 3-4). At this stage, Ukraine was recognized a central player within the EaP due to its political and historical characteristics. Despite this, Finnish-Ukrainian relations were largely restricted to the economic field in the time preceding the Ukraine conflict (FAC, 2013). Successive Finnish governments have supported the EaP since its introduction in 2009 (MFAF, 2010, p. 5; 11). However, EaP support has been of a rather principal nature and neither EU nor bilateral relations with the EaP countries seem to have been a political priority to Finland.

In addition to these central issues, relations with third country partners and especially Russia counted to Finnish EaP priorities. Already

⁴² Katainen's Cabinet (June 2011-June 2014) was a coalition government consisting of six out of the eight parties represented in Finnish Parliament: The National Coalition Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Left Alliance, the Green League, the Swedish People's Party, as well as the Christian Democrats.

Finland's 2009 EaP policy statement highlighted the salience of engaging third partner countries in the integration process, and explicitly mentioned the involvement of Russia (Kantanen, 2009, p. 4). Thus despite the unsuccessful uploading of its Russia policy on an EU level, Finland continued to pay attention to EU-Russian relations. The importance of Russia within Finnish Eastern Policy was reflected in Katainen's government program: Although it is supportive of the development of the ENP and strengthening of the EaP, the focus of Finland's Eastern Policy lies with Russia. "Finland will strengthen its close, encompassing, and multilevel bilateral ties with Russia," in addition to actively contributing to the EU's Russia policy and encouraging Russia's European integration (Government of Finland, 2011, p. 18-20). Concerns of deteriorating relations were noted in Finland's 2010 Eastern Policy guideline that recognized on the one hand Russia's aims to maintain its former geopolitical influence in the region, and on the other hand Moscow's perception that the EU and US presence there was counter to Russian interests (MFAF, 2010, p. 7-8). This got clearer over time: In 2013, Finnish policy makers acknowledged growing EU-Russia tensions as well as the risk of Russia perceiving the EaP (by means of the prospects of a free trade agreement) and the Eurasian Customs Union as a zero-sum game. Finland however remained supportive of the EaP as a stable Eastern neighborhood considered crucial to the EU, and the relative geographical proximity made the region important to Finland (FAC, 2013).

The Ukraine conflict

Signs of Europeanization

With the escalation of the Ukraine conflict in early 2014, the EaP and especially Ukraine were placed at the center of Finnish foreign policy. The events unfolding in Ukraine were considered breaches of international law

and international agreements; they constituted a showcase of power politics that challenged what Finland perceived as the pillars of liberal world order and the fundament of the country's national security. Thus from the onset of the conflict, Finland strongly condemned the violations of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty (Tuomioja, 2014a, 2014b).

In doing so, Finland firmly placed itself within the 'Western community'. Especially the EU stood out as the main framework of and channel for Finnish foreign policy: Following the annexation of Crimea in February 2014, Finland adopted the EU policy on Ukraine and promoted a peaceful solution to the conflict within an international framework (Government of Finland, 2014a; MFAF, 2014a). In the wake of the conflict, the fundamentals of Finnish foreign policy remained unchanged, and Finland emphasized the core elements of the EaP: In its early reactions to the conflict, the Government of Finland stressed that the reforms and integration efforts underway in Ukraine be continued, and later favored the signing of EU-Ukraine agreements. Also, the introduction of sanctions towards Russia was supported (Hurtta, 2014, p. 4; Hurtta and Ohls, 2014, p. 3; Pursiainen, 2014a, p. 3; 2014b, p. 3). Finland's reaction could easily be ascribed to the country's apt student role, where Finland would automatically position itself as an EU member and follow the EU's policy. This can however be contested considering that the domestic debate on foreign policy and the official foreign policy emphasized EU unity when dealing with the Ukraine conflict (Pursiainen, 2014a, p. 3; 2014b, p. 3), pointing towards a firmly grounded European and international orientation of Finnish foreign policy. The importance of these shared values and EU unity are captured in a speech given by President Sauli Niinistö (2014a):

"Finland's position regarding the events in Ukraine has been clear ever since the beginning of the crisis. We condemn any and all violations of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of

Ukraine. We have been involved in setting up sanctions imposed by the EU on Russia. We cannot excuse ourselves from responsibility regarding the principles employed in resolving conflicts in Europe. We can also not just look to our own narrow interests when our common values are trespassed upon. We are part of the West and share the Western value base. However, our foreign policy cannot consist solely of declaring our opinions and principles to all and sundry. We also need to think about what practical measures we want to and can undertake. And then we need to try to undertake them.”

The value-based orientation and especially the action-focused approach promoted by Niinistö were evident in Finland's OSCE commitments. The OSCE became the main forum for Finnish engagement in conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Ukraine. Not only did the organization enjoy strong political support (PMO, 2015; Tuomioja, 2014c), but Finland also supported OSCE activities in Ukraine: At the onset of the projects in 2014, Finland was one of the main contributors to both the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and the OSCE Border Observer Mission. Further, Finland supported Ukraine with relatively big contributions within humanitarian assistance and reconstruction, donating 2 million euros to OSCE projects alone in 2014, and providing 12,5 million euros in humanitarian aid and related projects in Ukraine in 2014-2015 (MFAF, 2015b).

Finland also engaged in diplomatic efforts and both within the EU and the OSCE advocated a negotiated solution to the conflict. Finland supported the implementation of the Minsk agreement (Government of Finland, 2015a; MFAF, 2014b; PMO, 2015), and emphasized the salience of keeping communication channels open between the actors involved regardless of tensions (Niinistö, 2014a; Government of Finland, 2014b, 2014c; Tuomioja, 2014c). Towards this end, Finland made an effort to

maintain communication with Russia, and President Niinistö repeatedly met with his Russian counterpart to discuss the situation. These efforts reflect the President's stance (quote above) that it is a responsibility to stand up for core European principles and contribute towards finding a solution to the conflict. The engagement can thus be seen in the broader context of Finland's apt student role where Finnish efforts to find a peaceful solution to the Ukraine conflict are in line with the country's peace-building tradition and the aim to maintain rule of law. These attempts, claimed to improve the information flow between the EU and Russia, however became subject of criticism from actors demanding stronger protests against Russian aggression in Ukraine (Niinistö, 2014a). The bilateral meetings resemble Finland's CW policy where these very meetings were a central element of foreign policy making. Thus it can also be argued that the engagement had an underlying aspect of national interests, and was a way to safeguard among others national security. This would indicate a return to the realist thinking that puts national issues in the foreground of foreign policy.

In Russia's shadow

Finland's strong emphasis on international norms and peacebuilding efforts were accompanied by an awareness of growing EU-Russia tensions. As discussed previously, these were acknowledged prior to the Ukraine conflict, as already the 2010 EaP guideline pointed out Russian geopolitical interests in Eastern Europe. At the early stages of the conflict, Finnish policy makers recognized an opposition between Russia and the EU, and highlighted that the Ukraine conflict needs to be situated in its broader context:

“A wider confrontation between the west and Russia underlies the Ukraine conflict. ... Of course, it is natural that we view the issue from our own starting points. But so too do the

Russians. Herein may lie the basic problem (Niinistö, 2015a).”

Finland’s early approach to the conflict built upon the premise that it could not be solved without a thorough understanding of the conflict dimensions. In line with the President’s view, then Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja (2014d) argued that the Ukraine conflict was a showcase of a clash between opposed logics in world politics where the EU’s approach was guided by liberalist ideas and Russia understood the world in realist terms of power politics. According to Tuomioja, this binary opposition however provided a simplified picture of the conflict, and he called for an approach that acknowledged the conflict’s multi-dimensionality: In addition to the bilateral conflict between Ukraine and Russia, the simultaneous domestic issues in Ukraine, as well as the state of EU-Russia relations added to the complexity of the issue. As a solution would only be possible if all elements were addressed, the Finnish approach emphasized the need to restore both EU-Russia and Ukraine-Russia relations (Tuomioja, 2014c).

Thus relations with Russia were early on placed at the heart of Finland’s approach to solving the conflict. Most notably, Finland actively promoted this position on an international level. Finland repeatedly highlighted Russia’s central role for bringing about a solution to the conflict (Government of Finland, 2015a, 2014b, 2014c; MFAF, 2014a, 2014c) and called for a better understanding of the conflict’s context, including an overall deeper insight into Russia’s perspective (Tuomioja, 2014c, 2014d). The pragmatic approach could also be seen in Finland’s stance on EU sanctions on Russia: Sanctions were supported, however reluctantly, and Finland promoted a careful approach that emphasized a gradual implementation of sanctions and a strong legal base to enable their reversal when needed (Autti, 2014, p. 2; Pursiainen, 2014a; p. 3; 2014b, p. 3). In doing so, Finland balanced the interests of on the one hand respect for the international norms, and on the other hand good relations with Russia

on a bilateral and international level.

However, this approach did not turn into the appeasement of Russia or careful balancing of relations that had once been a common element of Finnish foreign policy. Instead, it was accompanied by relatively harsh critique on Russia. From the onset of the conflict, Finland joined the EU in criticizing Russia for its role in the conflict, and domestic critical voices grew stronger over time (Government of Finland, 2014b, 2014c; MFAF, 2015a). In addition, President Niinistö went on to criticize the international community for not strongly enough condemning and reacting to Russian activities in Ukraine (Niinistö, 2014b). Although these reactions might not intuitively appear harsh, they stand out in the context of Finnish foreign policy where open criticism of Russia is an exception rather than a rule (Raik et al., 2015, p. 6). In calling upon the international community to react and stand up for international norms, Finland placed an international orientation at the center of its foreign policy. The reactions thus revealed a strong support for the apt student role in foreign policy.

Changing security outlook

Apart from growing EU-Russia tensions and Russian action in Ukraine, also the state of European security was a cause for concern to Finland. In the spring of 2014, President Niinistö warned that the escalation of the Ukraine conflict had “shaken and undermined the European system” and would threaten European security if not dealt with (Niinistö, 2014c). This frank wording reflected the increasing worries about the future of European cooperation and the European security architecture at large.

Underlying this was amongst other things a concern related to Finland’s precarious national security situation. Finland’s aspirations to integrate in international organizations in the early post-CW period had a security aspect to them as Finland not only tried and adapt to the country’s

changing security environment, but also sought to avoid ending up balancing between two blocks like during the CW. The Europeanization of Finnish foreign policy had brought about a normalization and multilateralization of Finnish-Russian relations, but had not been put to a strong test in the post-CW time, and it is debatable whether the multilateralization of foreign policy had even been institutionalized in favor of the traditional bilateral approach ahead of the Ukraine conflict. In addition to this, Finland lacked security guarantees despite its Western orientation: not being a NATO member country and with the EU not being an established security actor, Finland was left with a political agenda but with little leverage. This placed Finland in a challenging foreign policy situation as the country was expected to take a clear political stance towards Russia, yet had no established mechanism for doing so.

These aspects turned Finnish foreign policy into a balancing act where the security aspect was present early on. Finnish policy makers stressed that Finland was not threatened (Niinistö, 2015b; Tuomioja, 2014d), but nevertheless looked seriously at the security situation: In 2014, President Niinistö explicitly argued that the conflict had implications for Finland, and therefore required action within the EU framework (Niinistö, 2014a). One year later, the President pointed out that “Our Western partnership is one of the pillars of our security. Membership of the EU is an important security solution for Finland, even if it is not a defense solution,” while “Russia is aware that Finland is and will remain part of the West” (Niinistö, 2015b). This assured that Finland was firmly embedded in Western institutions and stayed committed to shared international values and norms. Simultaneously, it reflected an awareness of the changing national security situation and its possible implications for Finland.

After the initial strong support for the EU policy, an ambiguity started to show in Finland’s policy. While it was still in line with EU policy, it grew

more cautious and did not fully side with the EU's dealing of the conflict. Most notably, Finland expressed criticism about the EU's handling of the EaP process, and called for the EU to assess its approach to relations with Russia and the EaP countries (Tuomioja, 2014c, 2014d). As the Ukraine conflict continued, this position translated into a more cautious Finnish EaP approach: In early 2015, Finland clearly distinguished the EaP from EU enlargement (Veikanmaa, 2015, p. 3), and called for a more holistic approach that would take as its starting point the progress made by individual countries, and would better define and communicate the EU's aims (Hurtta et al., 2015, p. 3-4).

While this can be seen as a natural adaption to changing conflict dynamics, it can also be viewed as a consequence of the lack of a coherent and encompassing EU policy towards Russia. Although Finland's early attempts to upload its Russia policy had proven unsuccessful, the reactions to the Ukraine conflict indicate that Finland in the early days of the conflict still wished to form a joint EU foreign policy position and act accordingly. However, disagreement remained within the EU on how to deal with Russia. Thus Finland's initially strong emphasis on shared values was increasingly influenced by a realist approach to foreign policy that relied on strong bilateral relations, resting on the assumption that Finnish-Russian relations were special. Alternatively, it can be argued that Finland's reaction to the conflict shows that the EU policy was never downloaded. Following this line of argument, Finland simply kept its old foreign policy throughout EU membership, which did not openly conflict with the EU policy until the start Ukraine conflict. Either way, it calls into question to what extent the Finnish engagement in the Ukraine conflict sprung from a concern about Ukraine's sovereignty and Finnish peacebuilding efforts, as it seems that Finnish engagement was also aimed at finding a new way to conduct Finnish-Russian relations. Thus at the core, the Ukraine conflict became an issue of

Finnish foreign policy and security, where the engagement for Ukraine seemed secondary.

New government, new policy?

In 2014, Finland experienced two changes of government. In June, Alexander Stubb⁴³ succeeded Katainen as prime minister. No big changes were introduced with regard to Finnish foreign policy, and in terms of the Ukraine conflict, Stubb's government program only noted that "Finland emphasizes the necessity of respecting international law and supports a negotiated solution to the (Ukraine) crisis" (Government of Finland, 2014d, p. 6). Following 2015 parliamentary elections, Sipilä's⁴⁴ cabinet assumed office in June 2015. The cabinet assessed Russian action in Ukraine and EU sanctions on the same ground as its predecessors, and adopted the policy of the Katainen and Stubb governments (MFAF, 2015c). Thus Finland continued to promote a peaceful solution to the conflict that placed at its center the implementation of the Minsk agreement, and repeatedly called for Russia to contribute to the stabilization of the situation in Ukraine (Birkstedt, 2015; MFAF, 2015c; Niinistö, 2015c; Soini, 2015a). In terms of international cooperation, Finland reiterated the salience of EU unity in face of the Ukraine conflict, while the OSCE remained the main framework for action (Birkstedt, 2015; MFAF, 2015d; Soini, 2015b). In addition, forthcoming societal reforms and the humanitarian situation stayed on the agenda (Birkstedt, 2015; MFAF, 2015c; Soini, 2015a).

Although officially Finnish foreign policy remained unchanged, Sipilä's government brought about a focus shift from the international

⁴³ Stubb's cabinet (June 24, 2014 – May 29, 2015) was formed after Katainen resigned as chairperson of the National Coalition party. Apart from the Left Alliance and the Green League leaving government, the constellation of Stubb's coalition government was the same as his predecessor's.

⁴⁴ Sipilä's cabinet (May 29, 2015-) consists of the centrist, agrarian and liberal Centre Party, the right-wing populist Finns Party, and the conservative National Coalition Party.

system to Finnish sovereignty. The government program prioritized domestic issues, while it downplayed EU affairs and described Finnish EU membership as a mere “political choice that connects Finland to the Western community of values” (Finnish Government, 2015, p. 32). Increasingly, European unity was interpreted not as a community, but as form of cooperation that was suitable for dealing with such common issues that cannot be dealt with on a national level only (Soini, 2015c). This shift can be explained by the government constellation, where two out of three parties have a record of EU-skepticism. It is also possible that the changing security environment fostered a narrowing down of Finland’s foreign policy agenda. At this point it is however hard to assess the underlying causes of this change, and whether it represents a permanent shift in foreign policy.

Although the EU’s importance and foreign policy making was downplayed, the EU remained central to Finnish national security. The 2015 government program stated that “the EU is an important security community to Finland” (Finnish Government, 2015, p. 33), and in line with this, Foreign Minister Soini referred to the EU as “a key cooperation forum for Finland and a fundamental choice in terms of security policy” (Soini, 2015a). The weakened European security environment constituted a matter of concern to Finland, and events were increasingly viewed through a lens of security (Government of Finland, 2015b; Soini, 2015a): The ENP and EaP were considered important due to their positive implications for European stability and security (Finnish Government, 2015, p. 33), and also the Ukraine conflict was increasingly considered a security issue and a mere a trigger for both the worsening EU-Russia relations and the Baltic Sea region. Thus while Finland stayed committed on paper to working towards a solution to the conflict, there seems to be a focus shift from the actual conflict to its implications for Finland (Soini, 2015a).

Instead, Finnish policy makers focused more on the security situation

in Finland's immediate neighborhood. Especially, there was an increased awareness of the changing security situation in the Baltic Sea region: A perception of increased insecurity of the Baltic States and a following increase in NATO presence, along with repeated air space violations by Russia all direct attention towards the region. According to Foreign Minister Soini,

“The effects of the Ukraine crisis also extend to the bilateral relations between Finland and Russia and the security situation in the Baltic Sea region. Coordination of the Government's Russian policy is now even more important than before. In these conditions, it is essential to maintain regular dialogue with Russia with regard to not only the international situation but also the neighbouring regions and the Baltic Sea region” (Soini, 2015a).

Thus the national security aspect lay at the heart of Finland's foreign policy. Although this had been on the agenda from the onset of the conflict, the focus on security and Russia in particular became stronger during the early days of the government's tenure. This showed in an eagerness to foster Finnish-Russian relations and find an approach that suited the new political climate, as well as uploading its Russia policy on the EU level and restore EU-Russia relations (Finnish Government, 2015, p. 33; Soini, 2015a). This was accompanied by a waning rhetorical emphasis on international norms and cooperation, and a reluctance to take initiatives on the international stage (Soini, 2015c).

Role confusion

Finland's foreign policy on Ukraine might appear consistent throughout the conflict, but a closer look reveals that foreign policy roles altered and mixed during the period studied. At the onset of the conflict,

the foreign policy of the Katainen and Stubb governments followed the liberal approach: In line with the apt student role, Finnish foreign policy was embedded with EU policy and emphasized international cooperation and the rule of law. While there was awareness of the conflict's potential security implications for Finland, it was not dominating the agenda. Instead, this period was marked by strong international advocacy and a continuation of Finland's peacebuilding tradition. In contrast, Sipilä's government relied on a realist approach to foreign policy. This brought about a fundamental change in foreign policy as it placed at its core national interests. Hence Sipilä's government distinguished itself from its predecessors by taking an approach to foreign policy that placed at its heart Finnish sovereignty and viewed issues through a lens of security. Simultaneously, the role of international cooperation was downplayed on behalf of bilateral ties, and there was reluctance to international engagement. Thus the government deviated from what had been Finland's predominant foreign policy role throughout the post-CW period.

Although the change of foreign policy roles during this period is evident, there were also signs of the hybrid model being at play. It must be recognized that although one role was predominant, there were always elements of the other role present. As a telling example, throughout this period there were challenges to establish a way to deal with Russia in a time when Finland was balancing not between CW blocks, but between a multilateralism embedded with the EU and traditional bilateralism. Hence regardless of foreign policy role, all governments relied on both international settings for cooperation as well as bilateral relations with Russia. This struggle was reflected in the ambiguity regarding Finland's foreign policy role. As pointed out previously, it is also hard to say at this point whether the changing foreign policy roles are due to a change in government constellation, reflect an actual permanent shift in Finland's

foreign policy role, or to what extent this is a consequence of the hybrid model. It must also be recognized that the political and security environment underwent considerable changes in the period studied, and that this in turn might have affected the foreign policy decisions by the governments. Yet it is clear that there was ambiguity regarding Finland's foreign policy role.

In addition to this, the unsettled issue of foreign policy leadership added to the foreign policy role confusion. Although the president and the cabinet coordinated their policies closely, the differences in their policies during the period studied stand out. Throughout the conflict, Niinistö's approach reflected an international orientation in foreign policy that highlighted good relations with Russia and a peaceful, negotiated solution to the conflict (Niinistö, 2015a, 2015c). This was however accompanied by an emphasis on national security implications of the Ukraine conflict as Niinistö repeatedly pointed out Finland's security and sovereignty, as well as the worsening European security situation (Niinistö, 2015a, 2015d). These concerns grew more salient over time, which was reflected in Niinistö's 2015 statement: "Everywhere we look, textbooks on political realism are being re-opened. In Finland, such books were never quite closed. Our history saw to that (Niinistö, 2015a). Niinistö thus situated himself in between the three governments: In terms of international cooperation, his policy was more in line with the liberalist approach of the Katainen and Stubb governments, while his emphasis on security resembled the realist approach of Sipilä's government. Taken together, this adds an element of unclarity to Finnish foreign policy, as the leaders of foreign policy do not seem to have been in agreement. On the one hand, Niinistö brought stability to foreign policy as his policy was clear over time, but on the other hand the differences in the policies confuse the audience and beg the question of who is in charge of Finnish foreign policy. As the governments

played different foreign policy roles and the president played both of them, it is also unclear what foreign policy role tradition Finland aims to follow.

As discussed, Finland's constitution rules that the president is in charge of foreign policy together with the cabinet, although the latter is in charge of EU affairs. The Ukraine conflict thus constituted a delicate situation as it involved both non-EU countries and the EU, and Finnish foreign policy making therefore required involvement of both the president and the cabinet. The Ukraine conflict thus revealed that Finland considered Europe a continent of peace and had not envisaged conflicts in Europe when adopting the Constitution. As Penttilä (2008) pointed out, the hybrid model works during peacetime, but not necessarily during times of crisis. This however puts Finland in a precarious situation, as it indicates that the foreign policy leadership issue might prove an obstacle to Finnish policy on any conflict in Europe.

Against this backdrop, it is evident that the Ukraine conflict has revealed the tensions underlying foreign policy making and the downsides with Finland's foreign policy hybrid model. Finnish foreign policy would gain in credibility and efficiency from settling the issues of Finland's foreign policy role and leadership. This would require an active debate that addresses the issues at their core, instead of meandering and dealing with them as they emerge, as was the case with the Ukraine conflict.

The Ukraine conflict also showed growing ambiguities in Finland's EU relations. Although Finland's policy was in line with EU policy throughout the conflict, the country's future role as an apt student within foreign policy making can be questioned in light of the handling of the Ukraine conflict. Although EU unity was central to Finland during the Ukraine conflict, developments indicated that the EU has not delivered on foreign policy as well as Finland hoped for. Instead, Finland's bilateral ties with Russia were an important compliment to the EU policy throughout the conflict. As future

EU actions largely depend on overall developments within the EU and its neighborhood, it is interesting to ask what will guide Finland's future engagement in the CFSP: will it be a genuine interest for a joint EU foreign policy? Will it be motivated by Finnish sovereignty and national security? Or will future engagement be motivated by the possibility for a small country to gain influence beyond its size internationally? The answer will condition Finnish future engagement in the CFSP and CSDP.

The same questions about the future of Finnish foreign policy roles can be asked outside the EU context. What is Finland's role and ambition in international affairs, and who is in charge of foreign policy? Will Finland continue its peace-building tradition or withdraw from international engagement? What will guide foreign policy making now that the consensus that used to underlie Finnish policy making seems to be absent? Currently, the debate seems to assume that Finland needs to choose either foreign policy role. However, the current hybrid model could be an adequate approach to meet today's political realities where global and local affairs are intertwined. Finland's foreign policy could then be characterized by a strong international orientation and a concurrent focus on bilateral ties, that would however need to be guided by the same principles and rest on a clear policy. Nevertheless, Finland's foreign policy leadership would need to be clarified in order to avoid confusing situations in foreign policy to occur. Regardless of the outcome, these issues need to be addressed and any decisions should be preceded by an open debate on Finland's core foreign policy idea as well as Finland's role and aims within the international community. Ideally, this debate should be anchored not only among key policy makers, but with the general public as well. Otherwise, the lack of a clearly defined foreign policy idea and role will make challenging the future foreign and security policy making, both on a domestic and EU level.

Conclusion

Finnish foreign policy has undergone fundamental changes in the post-CW time. The changing political realities have enabled a Europeanization, an orientation towards “the West” that has brought about a normalization and multilateralization of relations with Russia, but also extended Finnish foreign policy focus to new areas, such as Eastern Europe. Despite this clear international orientation, Finnish foreign policy is today characterized by ambiguity, as there is a lack of clarity regarding Finland’s foreign policy role and its leadership.

The Ukraine conflict makes a peculiar case as it entails all these elements, and has put Finnish foreign policy to its biggest test in the post-CW time. The analysis of Finnish reaction to the conflict has shown a foreign policy supportive of the EU, however with underlying tensions. Most notably, the conflict has revealed ambiguities in Finland’s foreign policy role, as there is disagreement on whether Finland should follow a liberalist “apt student” approach emphasizing international cooperation, or a realist “lonely wolf” approach highlighting national security. Thus, the Finnish reaction has followed the “hybrid model”, which has entailed an unforeseeable mix of both, which can also be seen in the changing level of support for and engagement in EU foreign policy. Further, the unclarity regarding Finnish foreign policy leadership has added to the confusion about the country’s foreign policy role.

Above all, the Ukraine conflict has led Finland to reassess its relations with Russia. Finnish-Russian relations have undergone a multilateralization in the post-CW time, but Finnish attempts to upload a Russia policy within the EU have been rather unsuccessful. Thus Finland’s situation during the Ukraine conflict is delicate, as the country has not established a new way of

dealing with Russia, yet lacks external security guarantees. Simultaneously, Finland's international orientation in the post-CW period makes it impossible to revert to the CW practice of balancing the CW adversaries. Instead, the result seems to be to follow the EU policy but complement it with the traditional, bilateral ties with Russia.

Relations with Russia over time overshadowed the actual conflict. In fact, due to changes in foreign policy roles, Finnish sovereignty and Finnish-Russian relations were at the forefront of Finnish foreign policy, overshadowing conflict resolution in line with Finland's tradition of peacebuilding. It remains to be seen whether this aspect will condition Finland's future engagement in the EU CFSP and CSDP.

Nevertheless, attention needs to be directed towards Finnish foreign policy: As this case has shown, the hybrid model of Finnish foreign policy works during peacetimes, but the underlying tensions cause confusion in times of crisis. Therefore, a thorough discussion is needed on the core idea of Finnish foreign policy. This debate should not limit itself to the current dichotomous ideological division, but open up for a more nuanced foreign policy that accommodates different strands. This could bring about more stability and credibility to Finnish foreign policy.

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RUSSIA AS AN ALTERNATIVE SECURITY PROVIDER: THE GREEK PERSPECTIVE ON THE “UKRAINE CRISIS”

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Abstract. *The article explores the Greek policies with regards to the “Ukraine crisis” through security provider approach. As NATO and EU proved unable to address the entire range of Greece’s security concerns, Athens regularly sought for an alternative security provider, considering that Russia could assume this position after the dissolution of the USSR and provide support to Greek positions on Cyprus, relations with Turkey, Balkan politics, and energy security. This strategy required that Greece support stronger EU-Russia relations, which had direct influence the Greek vision of Ukraine’s place in regional integration processes. To illustrate how this security provider optics influenced Greece’s political choices with regards to the “Ukraine crisis”, policies of the pro-European coalition government of Antonis Samaras and then the “geopolitical turn” by a populist SYRIZA-ANEL coalition of Alexis Tsipras are analyzed.*

Keywords: *Ukraine, Russia, crisis, Greece, NATO, EU, security, Cyprus.*

Introduction

In mid-winter 2015 the remnants of the first Minsk ceasefire⁴⁵ were crumbling under the renewed Russian and separatist attacks in the East of Ukraine. On January 27, 2015, three days after an especially deadly attack on Mariupol, which took lives of 30 civilians and one soldier, the European Council issued a statement, which, *inter alia*, announced:

“We note evidence of continued and growing support given to the separatists by Russia, which underlines Russia’s responsibility. We urge Russia to condemn the separatists’ actions and to implement the Minsk agreements” (European Council, 2015).

In search of a solution, an urgent Council meeting took place on January 29, which centered on the possibility to deepen sanctions on Russia in view of breaking the ceasefire. However, the newly-sworn Greek SYRIZA-ANEL government⁴⁶ began with a double surprise. First, it expressed its post-factum disagreement over the Council statement condemning Russia and accused EU institutions of incorrect procedure. Second, as international media hailed the fact that Greece was forced to accept the prolongation of sanctions against Russia, Foreign Affairs Minister Nikos Kotzias gave a number of interviews, emphasizing his personal input in preventing the third wave of sanctions:

⁴⁵ The original Minsk Protocol, generally known as “Minsk 1” has been signed in Minsk, Belarus on September 5, 2014, and was supplemented on September 11 with Minsk Memorandum, clarifying ceasefire implementation details.

⁴⁶ The first SYRIZA-ANEL government has been formed after the premature election of January 25, 2015. As the “Coalition of the Radical Left SYRIZA” (36.34% of the votes, 149 seats in parliament) lacked 2 seats to form a government, it entered coalition with the radical right party “Independent Greeks” (4.75% and 13 seats). Anti-austerity politics and the pro-Russian turn in foreign policy cemented this otherwise unlikely union.

“I think that, thanks to the policy and tactics we followed, on the instructions of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, we were able – instead of being forced to use our veto – to pass our fundamental line: “We don’t want further sanctions against Russia.” Of course, the previous sanctions agreed on in the past will continue, but not this major wave of sanctions, and in this way we maintained European unity; Europe didn’t split over this issue, and there was also no rift against Russia. That is why we had the invitation from my colleague Mr. Lavrov to visit Moscow” (Interview on AMNA Web TV, 01 February 2015).

Such a strong pro-Russian gesture after an attack on a city, which is home to the bulk of Ukraine’s Greek minority⁴⁷, may seem surprising, and surely it could not be mollified with a vague line in the Council resolution on the need to protect ethnic minorities in Ukraine. Which considerations substantiated such an unlikely policy choice?

The overtly pro-Russian stance of Athens should not be taken for granted, since there is enough of historical, cultural, and religious affinities not only between Greece and Russia, but between Greece and Ukraine as well. A common Orthodox heritage, a long history of Greek presence and cultural influences, and a considerable diaspora of Ukrainians in Greece could provide quite a solid basis⁴⁸. Such a stance functions still on the level of perceptions it does not play any significant role. One could also easily assume that Greece, having experienced a few conflicts with more potent Turkey, most recently the partial occupation of Cyprus and

⁴⁷ According to the 2001 census, the Greek minority of Ukraine amounted to 91 000 people, more than 70% living in Mariupol region of the Donetsk oblast, very close to the “contact line”.

⁴⁸ For a concise description in English of the historical/cultural links between Greece and Ukraine see Iannis Carras, ‘Ukraine and the Ukrainian Crisis as Viewed from Greece’, Institute of World Policy, May 13, 2016, available at <http://iwp.org.ua/eng/public/2054.html>

sovereignty disputes in the Aegean area⁴⁹, would display more sympathy towards Ukraine's problems concerning Russian annexation of Crimea and active military meddling in parts of Eastern Ukraine.

Nevertheless, not only Greek politicians but also expert circles and general public are largely induced to interpret the conflict and to accept Russian arguments. Throughout the "Ukraine crisis"⁵⁰ Greece reluctantly takes sides with the larger EU states, while simultaneously lobbying in favor of removing sanctions and renewing dialogue with Russia. This suggests that similar experiences and historical links do not shape Greek political choices much. Considering the relatively low priority of bilateral relations with Ukraine, the Greek attitudes to the "Ukraine crisis" should be explained via a wider framework of the nature of its relationship with Russia.

While most researchers agree that no matter how intensive Greek-Russian relations are, and that they are almost sure to remain secondary compared Greece's ties with the EU, much ink has been spilled over the nature of current Greek-Russian relations. The range of opinions varies. Whereas some condemn Greece as a Russian "Trojan horse in the EU" (Leonard and Popescu 2007), others praise its strategy aiming to protect national interests, viewing it not as dissimilar to that of other larger EU states (Christou 2011, 2013). Furthermore, there is a clash of interpretations. Some scholars posit that in Greek-Russian relations "aspirations and sentiment have usually been put before pragmatism" (Filis 2017, p. 227), while others suggest that these relations are determined "by

⁴⁹ While Greece recognizes only one Aegean dispute, the one on the continental shelf (for official Greek MFA position see <http://www.mfa.gr/en/issues-of-greek-turkish-relations/relevant-documents/delimitation-of-the-continental-shelf.html>), Turkey in addition raises issues of Aegean air space, demilitarization of Greek Eastern Aegean islands, and islets in the "grey zone" (for official Turkish MFA positions see <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/background-note-on-aegean-disputes.en.mfa>)

⁵⁰ In Greek public discourse, the expressions "Ukrainian crisis" (ουκρανική κρίση) or "crisis in Ukraine" (κρίση στην Ουκρανία) are most widely used for describing the situation.

pragmatic and interest-based considerations and not by cultural or civilizational factors” (Tziampiris 2010, p. 89).

Putting this “values-interests” dichotomy aside for the moment, I would like to stress a security component which often remains underscored in the context of Greek-Russian relations. Specifically, in this article I will show that Greece’s position regarding the “Ukraine crisis” is mostly determined by Russia’s role as an alternative security provider (the primary one being EU/NATO), present both on the level of beliefs and perceptions as well as actual foreign policy decisions. This restricts considerably Greek political options in relations with post-Soviet states, provokes partial blindness on Russian aggression in Ukraine, and complicates choices within EU’s foreign policy on the matter.

In this light, the Greek example also illustrates the wider problem of the EU in its relationship with Russia – a gap in security perceptions between those member-states that do see the security threat from Russia’s challenge to international law and state sovereignty in Europe’s East, and those who put greater weight in the role of Russia as a security provider on a wide range of broadly defined security issues, from Middle Eastern conflicts to energy and economy.

The article begins with developing the argument on a combination of primary and alternative security providers in Greek security visions and practice since the dissolution of the USSR. It further explores the dynamics in Greece-EU-Russia triangle respecting security and its influence on the Greek vision of Ukraine’s place in European integration processes. Finally, to illustrate how security provider optics influences current political choices, I analyze and compare Greek policy with regards to the “Ukraine crisis” conducted first by the pro-European coalition government of Antonis Samaras and then by a populist SYRIZA-ANEL coalition of Aleksis Tsipras.

Greek double play on security providers in the 1990s-2000s

For Greece, an apparently easy answer to the security provider question – the country has been NATO member since 1953 – became rather problematic due to important fallout with Turkey in the 1970s. The partial occupation of Cyprus as well as the Aegean disputes revealed the inability of Western institutions, chiefly NATO, to settle the conflict between two nominal allies and address Greek security concerns. The gap between NATO's and Greek security perceptions became yawning and relations swiftly deteriorated. To the point, a statement that danger to Greece comes from the East, which is from Turkey, and not from the Soviet bloc in the North, had been formally inscribed in Greek military doctrine in the early 1980s, remaining in Greek strategic documents through the 1990s (Tsakonas and Tournikiotis 2003).

Tsakonas and Tournikiotis (2003) rightly note that as a smaller nation Greece seeks to combine internal and external balancing in its quest for security. While internal balancing meant high military expenditure (up to 5-6% of GDP in 1980s – early 1990s was allocated to defense, which contributed greatly to budget deficit), external balancing required another potent player to guarantee Greece's security and sovereignty. As during the Cold War the possibilities of overtures towards the USSR were quite limited, Greek politicians decided that European integration could be such a security provider and stressed the security dimension of the Greek membership in the European communities much more than economic benefits (Kiratli 2012).

Today, the idea of the EU as a security provider for Greece – with a special attention to the soft power of EU – has been theoretically

elaborated (Couloumbis 1994, Economides 2005, Kavakas 2000, Stavridis 2003). Still, these non-military and rather soft-power dimensions of EU security capacities create considerable gaps, which compound Greece's sense of insecurity, for Greek leadership has assessed its security threats primarily in hard security terms. And in this context the EU revealed to be of little help. Thus, in 1990s the rift not only with NATO, but also with EU widened for the number of reasons:

- A. Greece was frustrated at the position of Western European Union (an institutionalized predecessor of EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy) which showed no intention to provide security guarantees against Turkey.
- B. EU disavowed both the Greek reaction to the "Macedonian question", namely non-recognition of the Post-Yugoslav state unless it changed its name and symbols, and the introduction of Greek unilateral embargo.
- C. Neither EU nor NATO were helpful in resolving the 1996 Imia/Kardak crisis, around the sovereignty issue of a small islet in the Aegean Sea, which put Greece and Turkey on the brink of war.
- D. Greece clashed with both NATO and EU regarding the Yugoslavia wars.

While Tsakonas and Tournikiotis acknowledge and describe these important gaps between expectations and reality as to Greece's primary security providers, they stop short of discussing how Greece has tried to amend this gap. I argue that *in the external balancing dimension all these setbacks stimulated rapprochement with Russia, which attained the role of an alternative security provider*. This evolution remains largely overlooked and non-theorized, because this role of Russia has never been formalized or

acknowledged in any Greek strategic documents; furthermore, it developed unevenly in different spheres and in different periods of time including both hard and soft forms of security. In my definition, an *alternative security provider* is a state or an international organization, whose involvement into other state's security affairs is greatly limited due to systemic constraints, but it is occasionally used to counter-balance and compensate security challenges.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a democratizing Russia presented Greece a chance to boost its security agenda with the Russian help. The security focus explains why the interest in developing relations with Russia was shared by the full spectrum of Greek politicians and was not limited to ideological considerations. While a Socialist PASOK with an intransigent A. Papandreu mulled about new security options already in 1980, it was the conservative New Democracy government in 1990s which initiated quick rapprochement with Russia seeking to boost Greek deterrence capacity against Turkey, acquire new leverage in the Cyprus question, and survive the erupting Balkan crises. The two countries had compatible positions on Slobodan Milosevic, NATO bombings of Serbia and the Kosovo question, sharply contrasting with the mainstream in the EU and the US (Michas 2002). This solidified their cooperation to a point, where "[s]ome Greek strategists have tended to see Russia as a geostrategic counterweight to Turkey in the Balkans and have advocated that Greece develop closer ties to Russia" (Lesser 2001, p. 66).

Greece's deep embedment in Western institutions ensured that its relationship with Russia remained subordinated to the conditions of its EU membership. Still, this limited role also corresponded to Russia's interest, which was treating Greece as a bridge to build relations with the EU. Just after Greece and Russia signed a friendship and cooperation agreement in 1993, Greece held the Presidency of the EU in 1994, actively facilitating the

signing of the EU–Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). In return, Russia presented a plan on “Basic Principles for a Cyprus Settlement” advocating Greek-Cypriot arguments in April 1997, and provided Cyprus and Greece with military equipment⁵¹. Thus, Greece became one of the few NATO members who bought arms from Russia, which was helpful for both the external and internal balancing of Greece.

Still, these erratic unilateral actions of the 1990s brought little success to Greek foreign policy both in treating the Macedonian crisis and in attempts to contain Turkey. Therefore, in 1996 Simitis’ socialist government undertook the revolutionary initiative of the ‘europeanization’ of Greek foreign policy. This adopted “modernization strategy” meant greater involvement in EU politics and the alignment of the foreign policy with European principles in order to rid themselves of the black sheep image and become a first-rate EU member by joining the euro zone.

In the security dimension, it also meant trying to reconcile with Turkey and seeking resolution to bilateral problems on negotiations basis. This was substantiated with an innovative idea of removing the Turkish threat via the latter’s maximum engagement into the world of Western values and norms, something what Tsakonas calls a “socialization strategy” (Tsakonas 2010).

This socialization strategy moved beyond Turkey and in a way also stipulated further Europeanization of Greek relations with Russia. Moreover, this trend was hardly detrimental to Greco-Russian cooperation and even made it more orderly. Hence, the Greeks became very attentive to Russia’s interests in EU institutions as they intended to play a role in the framework of the EU-Russia “partnership for modernization”. It was

⁵¹ For Russian account of bilateral trade and military-technical cooperation in 1990s, see Sergei Kandaurov ‘Russian Arms Exports to Greece, Cyprus and Turkey’, *Eksport vooruzheniy* №2, 2001, available at <http://mdb.cast.ru/mdb/2-2001/at/raegct/>

believed that Greece should be a bridge between Russia and EU, a role deemed natural due to its unique geographic position and cultural heritage (Chrystou 2011). A joint Russian-Greek Interaction Committee was henceforth established in October 2002 to advance strategies of cooperation between Russia and the European Union, especially in drafting of a new EU strategy toward Russia, promoting the PCA to new Eastern member-states and preparing the EU-Russia summit in the context of the Greek EU Council presidency in 2003 (Grigoriadis & Iordanidis 2014, INOSMI 2003). According to Filis,

“Greece managed [...] to establish a new platform for joint ventures through the extension of the Partnership Agreement of 1997 to the adoption of the four common economic spaces, which to date is the basis for Brussels–Moscow relations [...]. And this was under unfavorable conditions, given that the competent European commissioner was against any institutional deepening. It was for this reason that the Russian side expressed its gratitude to the Greek side [...]” (Filis 2017, p. 232).

Greece promoted Russian interests in EU institutions on issues ranging from EU involvement in the Eastern neighborhood, regulation of energy markets, to the EU policy on Belarus, the Black Sea region and Georgia (Leonard and Popescu 2007, p. 28). In return, Russia helped the EU accession of the Greek Cyprus by vetoing the UN Security Council resolution on imposing the adoption of the Annan Plan on reunification on Greek-Cypriots in 2004 (Grigoriadis & Iordanidis 2014, p. 7).

With the Karamanlis’ New Democracy administration reassuming power in 2004, Greek-Russian relations intensified even further, reaching a new stage, namely the introduction of energy security issues in strategic cooperation framework. To begin with, the agreements on the Burgas-

Alexandroupolis oil pipeline (2007) and later the South Stream natural gas pipeline (2009) were signed. Both projects aimed to undercut the Turkish Samsun-Ceyhan and Nabucco pipeline projects, which served Greek strategic objectives to become regional energy hub perfectly. It is instructive that these agreements were detrimental to the energy security of both the EU and Ukraine: designed specifically to undermine transit potential of the latter and increase energy dependence of the former. Next, although initially Greece welcomed energy projects that excluded Turkey altogether, the quick development of Russian-Turkish relations made them rethink the strategy: the new idea was not to deter, but preserve a “higher level of relations with Moscow compared to Ankara” (Grigoriadis & Iordanidis 2014, p. 11).

However, after the break of the Russian-Georgian in 2008, Karamanlis’ pro-Russian course encountered serious challenges and had to be re-balanced by the EU allegiance. As the journalist of the weekly *To Vima* wrote a day before the European Council was going to react to Russian aggression:

“The extraordinary EU summit called by President Nicolas Sarkozy tomorrow in Brussels certainly is one of the most difficult for Greece and certainly the most difficult for Mr. Karamanlis in more than four years of his premiership. The EU has, in a climate of general tension and fluidity, to decide on its relations with Russia, a country with which Greece has strategic ties and interests, which the Greek Prime Minister has recognized and promoted” (To Vima 2009, translated by the author).

Although the extremely mild reaction of EU and US to the Russian-Georgian war and subsequent “reset” helped to resolve the initial Greek dilemma, the Georgia crisis has additionally proven that the Greek strategy

of two security providers works best when there are cordial relations between EU and Russia (Grigoriadis and Iordanidis 2014, p. 2).

This interdependency made Athens particularly receptive to the Putin/Medvedev idea of removing dividing lines in Europe and creating an indivisible security space from Vancouver to Vladivostok, based on the OSCE. Thus, Russia, in aspiring to promote this vision of a new European security order, found an important ally during Greece's OSCE presidency in 2009. For this reason, the Greek Foreign affairs minister Dora Bakoyiannis noted that "Greece believes in the usefulness and feasibility of a broad dialogue on European security within the framework of the OSCE" (Bakoyiannis 2009). In 2009-2010, the Corfu process on the inclusive security environment in Europe, based on the enhanced role for OSCE, followed (with no tangible results).

Given the new role of Russia as an alternative security provider, post-Soviet states in general and Ukraine in particular remained largely second-rate partners to Athens. Ukraine's perspectives in the EU met at best a wall of disinterest (Wallace 2009): Greece focused on Cyprus during the 2004 Eastern enlargement and ignored the Orange Revolution's pro-European repercussions. Being more interested in Sarkozy's Union for Mediterranean project as well as in the European integration of the Balkan countries, and being aware of the Russian sensitiveness within its so-called 'near-abroad', Greece maintained a low profile in the discussions over the Eastern Partnership (EaP).

Experts are unanimous that there was virtually no debate as to the Eastern partnership, and Greece here followed the lead of the EU (PISM 2009, Christou 2011). In Greece, the feeble discussion on the EaP touched mostly upon prevention of conflicts mechanisms in the context of the 2008 Georgia war in Georgia, construction of the EU's global position to cooperate with the United States on an equal footing, or just another

instrument of EU influence on its Eastern neighbors, in addition to the ENP and the Black Sea Synergy (PISM 2009, pp. 31-32). Also, energy security issues were occasionally discussed (Karamanlis 2009). Even in this neutrality, the intention to not block or to veto anything was presented as positive trend by analysts (Christou 2011), underlining that Athens diligently followed Common Foreign and Security Policy priorities.

Greek sensitivity to Russia's interest in its "near abroad" made it cautious to the essence of the EaP: the position that the Eastern Partnership should have nothing to do with enlargement and should be balanced with other dimensions of the neighborhood policy remained mainstream for Greek foreign policy for years. As Prime Minister Karamanlis stated at the time:

"Firstly, the Eastern Partnership is intended to help these countries in getting closer to the European mainstream without providing them with accession perspectives. The enlargement process is a completely separate process. Secondly, the Eastern Partnership is a part of the European Neighborhood Policy. Maintaining balance within that policy is important and, for this, our aim is the complementary functioning of the Eastern Partnership with other initiatives of the ENP, namely the Black Sea Synergy and the Union for the Mediterranean" (Karamanlis 2009, translated by the author).

Up to this moment, the Greek MFA website states that in the context of Eastern Partnership "the cultivation of excessive expectations on the European perspective could be counterproductive" (Greek MFA, undated). In this regard, as to neighborhood policy priorities, Greece prefers to include post-Soviet states in the less ambitious neighborhood policy via the Black Sea Economic Cooperation or Black Sea Synergy (since 2007). This was also

the kind of neighborhood Greece promoted in bilateral relations with Ukraine. During his visit to Kyiv in 2011, Greek Foreign Minister Droutsas issued a statement that “Greece sees Ukraine as an invaluable partner in the Black Sea region” and read a lecture at the major Ukrainian university on “Enhancing Greek-Ukrainian co-operation in the wider Black Sea area” (Droutsas 2011)⁵².

In a nutshell, in the situation of a still-unresolved conflict with Turkey, Greek-Russian rapprochement led to the compartmentalization of Greek security providers’ tasks. While the EU provided a general security rules-based framework and made Cyprus’ membership real, Russia was at different points used to constrain Turkey, maintain a stronger stance in Cyprus-related negotiations, and ensure the energy independence of Greece.

This double-edged strategy worked best when Russia and EU were on terms of rapprochement and partnership, which was threatened in case of divergences between the two parties. Greece was following general trends in EU’s foreign policy, but promoted a more accommodating for Russia course in security, economy, and energy cooperation. Thus, Greece was eager to comply with Eastern Partnership as long as it did not entail any integration commitments to Ukraine and guaranteed same intensity of the cooperation to the southern dimension of the neighborhood. In addition, Greece was an early supporter of a new European security order based on OSCE and with participation of Russia. Still lack of interest to this idea from other EU states made this trend obsolete at a time.

⁵² A certain continuity in this regard became clear during the latest visit of Prime minister Alexis Tsipras in February 2017, who *inter alia* explained his engagement in the following terms “Greece is an active country, a member of the OSCE and BSEC. Thus, the situation in the Black Sea region concerns us, for this is the security of the European Union, security of the European region [...], see ‘President: Ukraine is grateful to Greece for the unwavering support’, <http://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/ukrayina-vdyachna-greciyi-za-nezminnu-pidtrimku-prezident-39962>

Greek foreign policy in the wake of colliding crises

The Euromaidan⁵³ and further Russian aggression in Ukraine occurred in a period, when Greece was living through a painful sovereign debt crisis, which influenced profoundly the country's domestic political landscape and foreign policy agenda⁵⁴. Since the beginning of the crisis in 2009, Greece's influence within the EU and in the neighborhood, had been severely affected.

The dependence on the troika of creditors⁵⁵ and major European states increased dramatically and limited maneuverability of the country both in internal and foreign policy. Karamanlis' pro-Russian policy nearly crumbled, undermined both by political rivalry within New Democracy and the pro-Atlanticism of Papandreou's PASOK (Grigoriadis & Iordanidis 2014, p. 16). First the Burgas-Alexandroupolis and later the South Stream projects were cancelled, so that active Greek regional policy in the Balkans wound down. Discussions with Turkey and efforts to resolve the Cyprus problem

⁵³ The "Euromaidan" was the original name of a wave of demonstrations and protest in Kyiv's central Independence Square (in Ukrainian «Майдан незалежності», Maidan Nezalezhnosti), beginning on November 21, 2013. The initial cause of the protest was Ukrainian government's decision to suspend the signing of an Association Agreement and Free Trade Agreement with the European Union, and develop closer ties to Russia instead. The scope of the protests gradually widened, amounting to calls for the resignation of President Yanukovich and his corrupt regime, as well as its nature evolved from peaceful protest to direct clashes with governmental forces. The climax of the protest was reached on February 18-19, 2014, when over a hundred of protesters were killed (known in Ukraine as the "Heavenly hundred"). A posteriori, another name for these events has become more common – the "Revolution of Dignity".

⁵⁴ For detailed analysis of the Greek foreign policy in the crisis years see "Foreign Policy under Austerity: Greece's Return to Normality?" Ed. by Spyridon N. Litsas & Aristotle Tziampiris, Palgrave Macmillan UK.

⁵⁵ "Troika" is the informal common name for representatives of three institutions, responsible for solving the "Greek crisis" on the Western creditors side: the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund. The term is of Russian origin and of quite grim meaning. During Stalinist era, "troikas" were three-person CheKa- NKVD commissions authorized to conduct speedy investigations and serve extrajudicial punishment (killing or imprisonment) of the suspects.

did not make any progress, and Greece's role became minimal in the Middle East (Dokos 2012).

In the circumstances, the country kept a cautious and unambitious stance towards Ukraine and its European perspectives. When the Association Agreement (AA)⁵⁶ with Ukraine was negotiated in 2007-2011, Greece objected to including reference to article 49 of the Treaties in the Agreement, which would refer to the possibility of a future EU membership (UNIAN 2011), and only vague references on Ukraine's European future were agreed in the final text. An interministerial Memorandum of Cooperation on bringing Ukraine closer to the European Union, signed between the MFAs of two countries in 2009 and ratified in 2011, previewed only an exchange of thoughts, experience and trainings (Memorandum 2011). Remarkably, only the advent of a pro-Russian President, Viktor Yanukovich, led to intensified bilateral exchanges to an extent that the first state visit of Ukrainian president to Greece in twenty years of independence took place on October 6-7, 2011.

When protests over Yanukovich decision not to sign the AA broke out in November 2013, the Greek position remained in the traditional vein: a non-ambitious agenda for Eastern Partnership countries and attention to the Russian interests in the post-Soviet space. While in his speech at the Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit Prime Minister Samaras remarked "The EU's door must remain open to a possible signing of an agreement with Ukraine in the future", he also emphasized that the Eastern Partnership was

⁵⁶ Association Agreement between Ukraine and EU, in preparation since 2007, the up-to-date highest level of cooperation between EU and Ukraine, establishes political and economic association (Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement) between the parties. President Yanukovich's refusal to sign the AA triggered Euromaidan protest movement, and AA signing has become the key priority of new Ukrainian government in 2014-2017. Despite numerous difficulties (political and economic provisions signed separately on different occasions, failure of tripartite EU-Russia-Ukraine commission, delays in ratification, provisional application of some chapters, and finally Netherlands referendum in April 2016, which threatened to bury the whole thing), the Association becomes fully functional since September 2017.

"a project for the integration of all and not the establishment of new divisive lines across the map of Europe" (Samaras 2013).

Presenting the priorities of the Greek EU Council presidency for the first half of 2014, Foreign Minister Evangelos Venizelos severely downplayed pro-European motives behind the Euromaidan protests and suggested that "before evaluating the Eastern Partnership, we evaluate and readjust our stance on the EU-Russia partnership." Venizelos noted:

"[T]he political dilemma of 'either with the EU or with Russia' did not bear fruit," because "the real dilemma facing Ukraine at the time of the Vilnius Summit Meeting was not the dilemma between a European course or a return to a close relationship with Russia, but the dilemma, in the face of the threat of fiscal collapse, of whether it would be saved by the IMF or by someone else." In this regard, he made the reminder that the day after the Vilnius Summit, the Russian government decided to buy €15 billion in Ukrainian bonds, saving Ukraine from a fiscal collapse, "with all what that means for international correlations in the region" (Venizelos' presentation of the Hellenic Presidency's priorities to the European Parliament, 2014).

Although neither Eastern Partnership nor Ukraine was among Greek priorities as Head of the Council in the first 6 months of 2014, Greece's ascension to this position happened exactly at the time of Russia's military aggression, Crimea's annexation, as well as the signing of the EU-Ukraine Association agreement. In the first days of March 2014, Foreign Minister Venizelos visited Ukraine, and throughout the rest of the year the Greek Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister supported sanctions, expressed support for the Ukraine's territorial integrity, independence and sovereignty, called for reassessment of the functionality of the UN Security

Council and the OSCE, supported diplomacy and dialogue, as well as a full implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

Thus, in this tumultuous period Greece was firmly aligned with the general European line. But overall, being politically weakened by the debt crisis and generally inactive in the region, Greece did not take significant initiatives in conflict management and resolution, and kept a rather low profile, concentrating on humanitarian issues, and helping wounded civilians and children from affected areas in Donetsk-Luhansk region. Simultaneously, with regards to Russia, Prime and Foreign Affairs Ministers supported maintaining open channels of communication and referred to the Corfu process stressing the need to avoid ‘reappearance of dividing lines in Europe’. With the unfolding of the refugee crisis in 2015, governmental speakers started to further emphasize the importance of Russia for coming to a solution in Syria and establishing security in the volatile Middle Eastern region; thus, they advocated a dialogue.

The reference to Russia as an imminent security threat had been virtually absent. Tellingly, in the White Paper of Greek Armed forces, prepared in 2014 and published in 2015, there is no word of any threat of Russia for Greece, but a creatively neutral comment to describe its aggressive policies: “Russia is on its way to re-establish its position as the second pole of the international power system, with an increasing influence on the European and Asian affairs and a continuous and particularly active military and economic policy (White Paper 2014, p. 19) and that “[o]f particular importance is also the smooth course and development of bilateral defense cooperation with the Russian Federation” (White Paper 2014, p. 86). Defining the threats to national security, the White Paper directly rejected presence of any security threats in the post-Soviet states, and concentrated on international terrorism, weapon trafficking, and migration in Mediterranean and Middle East:

“It is obvious that the everlasting instabilities in SE Europe and the former USSR, although they do linger to a certain extent, cannot be considered traditional and high-risk threats to our national defence and security. On the contrary, the developments in Northern Africa and the Middle East, the imperative to discover and exploit resources in the Eastern Mediterranean basin and the shaping of the regional system of energy transit, give rise to new forms of threats in the broader geographic environment. These threats do not belong to the traditional context of military disputes; they are, however, characterized as asymmetric, or even hybrid threats, and can have a disproportionate result in relation to the assets utilized” (White Paper 2014, p. 26).

The forced exposure of the government to the crisis and the direct implication of Russia induced the Greek expert community to conceptualize the events related to the country that has rarely been in the focus of the mainstream analysis before. Although some earlier reports (Tsakiris 2014a)⁵⁷ turned out to be misleading both in analysis and recommendations, a better example of providing the Greek public with at least introductory knowledge was “Strategic Alphabet on the Crisis in Ukraine”, prepared by the director of a leading Greek think tank ELIAMEP, Thanos Dokos already in March 2014. This “Alphabet” vindicates a version of realist and security-centered logic, in which, surprisingly, the sovereign right of Ukraine to decide about its external policy priorities or alliances is virtually not considered. Probably this is why a data-sparse and bias-rich view of Ukraine as an artificial and deeply divided state is promoted, with

⁵⁷ Interestingly, in his earlier paper, Tsakiris framed Euromaidan as an energy security issue for Greece, treating Ukraine as a source of insecurity and appeasing Russia as a source of European security, thus his main recommendation to Greek European Presidency in the first half of 2014 was to lobby for revival of South Stream Project to ensure Greek and European energy security with the help of Russia (Tsakiris 2014b).

the Euromaidan treated as a path to civil war, only averted by the interference of third parties.

Following this logic, Dokos suggests the need for the EU's "strategic agreement with Russia aimed at mutually beneficial consolidation of relations considering the interests of both sides and the balance of power, but also the principles on which the EU is built" (Dokos 2014, p. 8), and proposes a neutrality solution: "Russia could perhaps accept a 'neutral' Ukraine, but not its integration into the Western sphere of influence. A possible way out of the crisis could be the simultaneous promotion of relations with the EU and the Eurasian Economic Union (Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus), while offering considerable financial assistance from both the EU and Russia." (Dokos 2014, p. 14).

This modest and in many respects traditional position of the grand coalition government came under heavy criticism from the radical and populist opposition – the radical left SYRIZA, Communists (KKE), and radical sovereigntist right (Independent Greeks (ANEL). Regularly bashing the government on its servility to the West and its neglect of Russia, they developed an extremely ideologized, biased and violent discourse centered around the "fascist Kiev junta" and "genocide in the Ukraine's East", while denouncing "NATO warmongering and West's neocolonial bulimia" or "German imperialism". In addition to numerous articles, blogs and statements on the issue, radical Greek politicians were engaged in multiple activities on the international stage.

Suffice it to say, they supported referendums in Crimea and occupied regions in Donbas, sending their observers, and saluted the separatist offensive against governmental forces. They rejected sanctions and travelled to Moscow on several occasions to meet with sanctioned Putin's officials. Furthermore, they provided "no" votes in the European parliament on all Ukrainian and Eastern Partnership issues, starting with the

Association Agreement ratification etc. (Financial Times 2015, Michas 2015, Rettman 2014). The motivations have been diverse: from ideological and historical, up to direct links to Russians, directly implicated in conflict or its informational support (Coalson 2015; Papadopoulos 2015).

Although the Papandreou and Samaras governments did not significantly alter the traditional Greek policies concerning Russia, thus maintaining the delicate balancing between security providers in place, this strategy seemed no longer to work for the Greek populace. The reason behind this was the protracted and painful financial crisis, where the trust in EU as a prime security provider has further diminished, while both the popularity of old parties and the support for conventional strategies vanished. This boosted the popularity of various right and left wing radical parties. In this situation, Vladimir Putin's Russia seemed to be quite attractive in the eyes of a considerable part of Greek population. As Pew Research Center and Gallup surveys showed, the number of those having a positive view on Russia, its president and his political line was high and growing.

In September 2013, 63% of Greeks had a favorable view of Russia, most of all the countries in the survey (Pew Research Center 2013). In 2014 more than one in three Greeks (35%) approved of the Russian leadership, while fewer than one in four (23%) approved of that of the EU (Gallup 2015a). Six months later, a survey over favorability of EU showed 34% of Greeks in favor of the EU (33% in the previous year and 37 in 2012) (Pew Research Center 2014). Thus, when the SYRIZA-ANEL government emerged, it could depend upon popular support for a fundamental change in country's foreign policy.

To summarize, during the sovereign debt crisis, Greece adhered to the classic strategy of finding possibilities to cooperate with Russia within the existing EU structure. But the harsh "troika" policy and the protracted

nature of the debt crisis undermined the belief in the EU, including its security provision capacities. This provoked the arrival of a new government with alternative views not only on fiscal policies, but also on the relations with Russia and Ukraine.

Introducing a geopolitical approach into Greek foreign policy

The “new Greek left” certainly did not invent the idea of cooperation with Russia, but it tried to give it a more prominent role and more solid foundations. SYRIZA, a far-leftist organization, had roots in the bloody defeat of the left in the Greek civil war in 1949 and further suppression of leftist movements up into the 1970s. Antifascism, postcolonial critique and a certain pro-Soviet nostalgia took a prominent place in their political rhetoric and has had some translation into practical politics. In ways less typical of a leftist movement, SYRIZA also moved geopolitical thinking from its traditionally marginal status to the fore of Greek foreign policy.

The dominance of geopolitical over Marxist principles was indirectly confirmed by the unorthodox coalition of SYRIZA with the radical right party ANEL, for Russia-centered geopolitical visions and the rejection of austerity policies were the very few points common for them. Also, a prominent role in conceptualizing the geopolitical shift was played by the later foreign affairs minister, Nikos Kotzias, who in his book on the foreign policy of Greece in the 21st century underlined the need of developing Greece’s relations with the new centers of power – Russia, China, and India (Kotzias 2010). The theoretical elaborations of Kotzias resemble those of the Greek geopolitical thinker Dimitris Kitsikis who defines Greece – together with Turkey, Russia and Syria – as a part of so called Central Region, equal to the West and East. In an interesting coincidence, both

Kitsikis and Kotzias claim that Greek culture is so great that even Chinese accept it as peer (Kitsikis 2001, Kotzias 2010).

In 2014, while teaching courses on contemporary Russia⁵⁸ and China at the Piraeus University, Kotzias defended Russian actions in Crimea and Ukraine as the understandable behavior of a superpower encircled by the US and destabilized by Germany. In his view, the latter was transforming weaker countries like Ukraine and Greece into "colonies of debt" to be dominated (Michas 2015). Kotzias at some point even recognized the legitimacy of the "Donetsk People's Republic" and dismissed the Ukrainian government as a neo-Nazi junta (Kotzias 2014, Michas 2015).

From the first days in office Kotzias in most of his public appearances invoked a "triangle of instability" shaped by Ukraine, Libya, and the Middle East, where Greece is the only stable pillar. This gloomy vision was used as leverage during the debt negotiations: presenting their country as the only stable part, from which emanated the strings of stability, they argued that to let it crumble would bring the catastrophe to the entire region.

While in office, Kotzias multiplied his public expressions on the topic and hardened his approach. While avoiding speaking of aggression, annexation or Ukraine's European future, he stated solidarity not with Ukraine but "with the societies of Ukraine" and defined the role of both Russia and Ukraine as "friends of Europe" (Interview on AMNA Web TV, 1 February 2015). He also stated that Russia is "... a major power that can and

⁵⁸ In the framework of his course "Russian Society and Foreign policy" (where at one time Russian Eurasianist ideologist Aleksandr Dugin gave a lecture) a group of students conducted an opinion poll on Greeks' relation to Russia and wrote a report under his supervision. While the poll showed that younger respondents (18-35) were much less pro-Russian and more skeptical than older ones (55+), the interpretation in the report went as follows: "These data drive us to a conclusion that either younger generations lack sufficient information about Russia's history and culture, or they are unable to form an objective opinion on Russia because of propaganda and disinformation from the West". Report available online at <https://www.des.unipi.gr/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/%CE%94%CE%B7%CE%BC%CE%BF%CF%83%CE%BA%CF%8C%CF%80%CE%B7%CF%83%CE%B7-%CE%A1%CF%89%CF%83%CE%AF%CE%B1%CF%82.pdf>

always played, when possible, a peaceful role in Europe...” (Joint statement of Kotzias and Lavrov, 11 February 2015), reiterating his previous ideas that Russia was forced to do what it did by the Western politics. A few times he expressed his open support “of the democratization of a federal republic of Ukraine” (Joint statement of Kotzias and Lavrov, 11 February 2015) and speculated on how a referendum in Crimea should have been properly organized (Interview in the German magazine *Spiegel*, 9 February 2015). He regularly signaled his intention to abandon the discussion of Ukraine in EU institutions, to draw up a positive agenda with specific positive proposals toward Russia and to pay more attention to the South’s destabilization (Interview with the German television networks ARD and ZDF, 7 March 2015).

Finally, he shifted responsibility for the conflict and referred to his favorite topic: “Europe needs to decide whether it wants to incorporate Russia into its security architecture, or whether Russia is an enemy” (Interview in the German magazine *Spiegel*, 9 February 2015). While eagerly going to Russia on a few occasions, he only first visited Ukraine in February 2017 (although he was invited by the Ukrainian MFA Klimkin immediately after the 2015 election).

With this geopolitical thinking applied to the “Ukraine crisis”, the first bomb exploded as soon as SYRIZA formed a government, full of euro-skeptic and pro-Russian politicians – Kotzias himself, Panos Kammenos, Panayiotis Lafazanis, Nadia Valavani, Kostas Isychos, and others. On January 26, 2015, his first day as prime minister, Tsipras meet with the Russian ambassador to Greece. On January 27, he met the Chinese ambassador and protested an official EU statement condemning Russia for the violence in Eastern Ukraine. On January 28th energy minister Lafazanis declared, “We are against the embargo that has been imposed against Russia” and “We have no differences with Russia and the Russian people.” (Lafazanis 2015)

The apotheosis came on January 29, 2015 during a EU foreign ministers' meeting, where Greece did everything to water down the EU statement so as not to broaden Russian sanctions in the wake of Russian January aggression that, unrestrained, finished with the Second Minsk Package followed by the seizure of Debaltsevo. This was the strongest and most important pro-Russian initiative of the SYRIZA government with the direst consequences.

The SYRIZA government was also very vocal on the questions of unproductivity and need for removal of sanctions against Russia, both at the European level and during meetings with Russian counterparts. As the primary security provider, the EU was deemed responsible for its financial plight. Imposed sanctions were extremely badly perceived in Greek society, although their part was almost insignificant in the whole of country's economic problems (Zerkalo nedeli 2015, Moret et al. 2016). In August 2015 Gallup survey showed that 62% of Greeks were against sanctions against Russia (Gallup 2015 b). Despite intense lobbying, Greece has not been able to ease of Russian countersanctions.

But even more importantly and well beyond sanctions, the SYRIZA government seemed to hope that Russia could provide essential help in assuring economic and financial security of Greece. As *To Vima's* Pavlos Papadopoulos reported, since 2014, Tsipras and his close collaborators envisioned a plan for Russia to politically and financially assist Greece's exit from euro area and return to drachma. Or, alternatively, at least make this threat credible enough to convince Germans to write-off a significant part of the debt and thus deeply challenge the fundamentals of austerity politics (Papadopoulos 2015).

Another *To Vima* report stated that before the July 2015 referendum on memorandum, Tsipras had asked Putin for a \$10 billion loan so that Greece could transition back to the drachma. In return, Russia only floated

the idea of a \$5 billion advance on the construction of the Greek branch of the Turkish Stream. (To Vima 2015) Indeed, despite a series of visits of Greek politicians to Russia, neither loan to repay Greece's debt, nor financial aid to the exit from the eurozone and return to drachma followed. On July 8, European Union Council President Donald Tusk declared: "Seek help among your friends and not among your enemies, especially when they are unable to help you." (Concluding remarks 2015)

The July 5, 2015 referendum on the bailout conditions, proposed jointly by the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund and the European Central Bank on June 25, 2015 proved to be a watershed for SYRIZA. Although the Greek public voted against (61% against and 39% in favor), SYRIZA had no practical possibility to sweep the existing hierarchy of security providers and conduct an independent pro-Russian course and succumbed to demands of the creditors, the results of the vote notwithstanding.

After the September reelection and the dissolution of the most radical Left faction from SYRIZA, Cyprus and later Greece were among the last states which ratified Association Agreements with Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, and returned to the usual policy of the delicate balancing. While presenting the documents for ratification, the deputy foreign minister stressed several times that these were ordinary documents which EU signs in numbers with different neighboring countries regularly. As a consequence, there was practically no discussion of the issue in the Greek parliament (Mardas 2015). Bilateral cooperation with Ukraine intensified slightly for a brief period, when a series of meetings of the Ukrainian ambassador and Greek diplomats and ministers followed in the autumn 2015.

Finally, in February 2017 Tsipras, Kotsias and Quick, who were vehemently critical of the Venizelos visit in March 2014, payed a short visit

to Kyiv, this time heatedly criticized by ever-more leftist opponents. Greece began to concentrate more on migration problems, the reunification of Cyprus, began once again to mull the need to create its own zone of influence in the Balkans, creating a union of Southern European states as opposed to the Northern while becoming a bridge this time between the Middle East and the EU. Radically pro-Russian deputies and ex-deputies, and some heads municipalities regularly visited Crimea or Russia-sponsored conferences and symposiums of radical European right and left without the further influence on country's policy or bilateral relations. With this relative moderation, the traditional stance on Greek-Russian relations came back into play, although Tsipras and Kotsias continued to stress that they were to conduct innovative multidimensional diplomacy.

Thus, the geopolitical turn in Greek foreign policy failed. The alternative security provider either did not want to or was unable to take the lead in country's security, in the critical moment, which, as the SYRIZA government dreamt, could be a revolution and watershed not only for Greece, but also for the whole Europe. Thus, turned even the most staunch and vocal Russia supporters turned into quite pro-European politicians in practice, adopting the reforms demanded by creditors. Instead, the development of the security links to Russia centered around its perceived decisive role in resolving Middle Eastern conflicts and refugee crisis and took usual form of lobbying in EU structures for dialogue and cooperation. In other words, the Russian role in Greek foreign and security policy remained supplementary (Mavraganis 2016).

Conclusions

As this study shows, Russia has been firmly established as a secondary security provider for Greece within the realist framework of deterring

Turkey in the 1990s, creating multilateral frameworks of cooperation and exercising pipeline diplomacy in 2000s, or following the geopolitical logic of realignment after 2015. However,, it managed to imbue this status of alternative security provider with new agenda when the Middle East and ISIS became major security issues for the Mediterranean region. Therefore, it is small wonder that Russia is rarely considered as a source of insecurity in Greece and enjoys high approval ratings in the population.

Still, it is essential that Russia has always been only a secondary security provider for Greece, covering areas unaddressed by EU or NATO, or getting some bargaining chip inside Western institutions. The constraints that keep Greece inside the system of Western institutions have been so strong, that even zealous, ideological affection of SYRIZA for a serious pro-Russian and anti-NATO course have been tamed and a short try of geopolitical realignment came to a very quick halt.

Thus, the only structural way to accommodate both primary and alternative security providers in a systematic way was the pervasive and long-lived idea of common European security architecture including Russia. The majority of post-Cold War Greek governments supported such encompassing mutual security projects and were keen on strengthening and enhancing them. It was also readily supported by the Russia itself. In its article, published in Greek paper *Kathimerini* on May 26, 2016, Russian president Putin underlined that:

“I am convinced that we should draw appropriate conclusions from the events in Ukraine and proceed to establishing, in the vast space stretching between the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans, a zone of economic and humanitarian cooperation based on the architecture of equal and indivisible security” (Putin 2016).

Thus, given the longevity of the trend, any idea of “provoking” an additional security provider in its sphere of interest or redrawing alliances in contested zones is a notion that Greece is unlikely to support. Almost no political force in Greece supports Ukraine’s European integration, enforcement of the Eastern partnership or acknowledges membership perspectives for Ukraine. Ukraine could serve as another bridge, be a neutral country, an area of cooperation between EU and Russia, but no longer Greece has become totally comfortable with Russia playing a role of an informal veto player not only on NATO related issues but in the EU activity in the “near abroad”. Thus, until the common foreign, security and defence policy of the EU becomes indeed common and encompassing, removing any need for the countries to seek for external security providers and harmonizing member-states views on the main problems in the EU neighborhood, this tendency is likely to persist.

Notes

A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the “National Perspectives on the Ukraine Crisis: Image Transformation, Foreign Policy Change, and Consequences for European Foreign Policy” workshop in Kyiv, December 12, 2015.

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TRADING SOLIDARITY FOR SECURITY?

POLAND AND THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CRISIS

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Abstract. *Poland is a strong advocate of Ukraine and seeks its integration into the western institutional framework (first of all EU and NATO). While Poland had a leading negotiating role during the Revolution of Dignity, it became increasingly marginalized in the course of annexation and militarization. This did not lead to a rift between the actors at stake, since a) Berlin satisfied Warsaw's "consultation reflex", b) Poland was able to win on the sidelines of the conflict and garnered support for his security needs, and c) a changing image of Ukraine undermined normative considerations in favor of a more cost-benefit oriented approach. The study shows that Poland's Ukraine policy must be regarded as an extension of the domestic inter-party struggle during election circles. In the course of the takeover of power by PiS, Poland is increasingly inclined to take an assertive stance towards the EU. This leads to Warsaw's structural marginalization and subsequently narrows Poland's aims in the region down to security and regional leadership that has the potential to counterbalance "old Europe".*

Keywords: *Ukraine, Russia, Poland, conflict, war, Donbas, Germany.*

Introduction

On 21 February 2014, after three days of violent clashes between the Maidan protesters and the “Berkut” (special police forces) with more than 100 casualties, representatives of the Yanukovych government and the opposition signed an agreement to de-escalate the conflict that started roughly three months earlier on Kyiv’s central square. The agreement was facilitated by eight rounds of negotiations by the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Poland (Potocki & Parafianowicz 2014). After the last round of negotiations, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski left the negotiation room and dropped the following statement towards a representative of the opposition: “If you don’t support this, you will have martial law, the army, and you will all be dead.” (Traynor 2014).

The statement indicates that the stakes are very high in regards to Poland’s relation with Ukraine. A stable and democratic Ukraine is regarded as the key to a secure environment in Poland’s eastern neighborhood. Poland was the first country that recognized the independence of Ukraine in 1991. The idea of an Eastern dimension for the EU was put on the political agenda as early as 1998, at the beginning of Poland’s accession negotiations (Shapovalova & Kapuśniak 2011: 2).

During the Orange Revolution, taking place in 2004 after massive election fraud in favor of then Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych during the run-off of the presidential election, Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski successfully negotiated between President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma, Yanukovych, and Yushchenko (Lang 2011: 103). In 2009, together with Sweden, Poland initiated the Eastern Partnership (EaP), a

comprehensive EU-framework, designed to bring six post-Soviet republics (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) closer to the *Acquis Communautaire* of the EU. Poland is a vocal advocate for a Ukrainian EU-membership and regards the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (AA) as the main tool for a prospective accession (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 115-117).⁵⁹

Thus, the Polish government had put a lot of political effort into the EaP-Summit in November 2013 and was under much pressure to deliver tangible results. The unexpected refusal of Yanukovych to sign the AA on the eve of the summit and his departure right after the approval of the de-escalation agreement mentioned above constituted a double diplomatic defeat for the Polish side – and provoked Sikorski's harsh statement.

After the Revolution of Dignity, the Russian annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and its unleashing of hybrid warfare in eastern Ukraine, Poland's foreign policy is facing serious challenges in a fundamentally changed regional environment. The post WWII security order, reaffirmed in the Helsinki Final Act 1975, was blatantly violated by Russia and provoked different reactions by EU member states and International Organizations. The main question that will be addressed in this article is the following: how does Poland deal with these challenges and what are the implications for Poland's foreign, economic and security policy? Can the Russian-Ukrainian Crisis⁶⁰ in a way even be regarded as a window of opportunity for certain Polish foreign policy goals? Is the country able to set the political

⁵⁹ Part of the AA are the "Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements" (DCFTA), which can achieve a level of regulatory integration of around 80 percent (Böttger 2014: 96).

⁶⁰ The often used term "Ukrainian Crisis" is not appropriate since it reduces the crisis to a domestic problem and thus neglects the role of Russia in the conflict.

agenda and/or to improve its position on the European or international stage?

The research questions will be addressed against the background of the domestic, regional and international context. On the domestic level, we need to consider the changed political landscape after the coming to power of the right-wing conservative party *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS; Order and Justice). On the regional and international level, EU and NATO constitute the “main governance environments” (Godzimirski et al. 2015: 23) for Poland and form the resonance bodies for the Polish discourse on the crisis (Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 35).

It is an irony of history that the same moment Ukraine’s turn towards Europe is gathering the strongest support since the independence of the country (Kucharczyk & Mesežnikov 2015: 10), Poland as its most important supporter has turned into a Eurosceptic (Kuisz 2016: 206) with a pragmatic and completely disenchanted stance towards an EU that is facing various problems. The removal of the EU flag in the press room after the inauguration of Prime Minister Beata Szydło was regarded as a symbolic change in this regard (Fuksiewicz 2015: 3). PiS regards the EU as an area for power politics of sovereign states rather than a supranational body with far-reaching competencies that delimit this sovereignty (ibid.: 4).

The underlying hypothesis is that while the broad lines and aims of Poland’s foreign policy orientation remain stable, the strategies, instruments and coalitions for achieving the aims change significantly. Whether these changes are limited to the rhetoric/symbolic level or if they have some political implications remains to be seen.

The paper proceeds as follows: after a brief outline of Poland's foreign policy towards his eastern neighborhood and Russia we examine the changed image of Ukraine among Poland's political establishment and society. The section is followed by an investigation of the changes of Poland's foreign policy since the outbreak of the crisis in terms of diplomacy, economic and security policy. The paper then analyses Poland's approach towards the crisis considering its convergence or divergence with the perspectives of other states on the crisis. It finishes with possible scenarios for future developments and summarizes the findings of the research.

Poland, its Neighborhood, and Russia

Since the end of socialist rule and Poland's transformation into the Third Republic⁶¹ in 1989, Poland's foreign policy has been based on two reasons of state: First, the "return to Europe", that is the broad integration into western institutions (first of all EU and NATO), and second, the support of the independence and democratization of Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania (Kapuśniak 2010: 59f; Kucharczyk & Fuksiewicz 2015: 104). The long-term aim of Ukraine becoming an EU member was never questioned by any Polish government (ibid.: 108), as well as a NATO membership of Ukraine, for which Poland pleaded since its own accession in 2004 (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 119).

⁶¹ The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that existed from 1569 to 1791 is regarded as the First Polish Republic. The Second Polish Republic refers to the re-established Polish state of the interwar period between 1918 and 1939.

The second aim of Poland's foreign policy orientation is the reason for a latent conflict with the Russian Federation (RF). Being the formal successor of the Soviet Union, the RF has – with varying intensity and conflictuality – claimed what it calls its “near abroad”⁶² as its legitimate sphere of influence and as an important part of its foreign policy concept. While efforts to keep its status as a great power were quite subtle under Yeltsin and Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, Russia's foreign policy was increasingly driven by a ‘neo-hegemonic’ drive after the inauguration of Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov in 1996. This coincided with efforts for an eastern enlargement of NATO and EU. Yet, rather than being viewed in terms of hard security threats, the accession negotiations of EU and NATO with the Central- and Eastern European Countries (CEEC) Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic were viewed with critical reservations only (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 119f.).⁶³

During the Orange Revolution, it became apparent that “the two neighbors [have] completely different notions of their own security” (Bil et al. 2016: 13). While Russia considered the Color Revolutions as a threat orchestrated by foreign powers in order to weaken Russia, Poland regarded

⁶² The countries encompassing the post-Soviet space.

⁶³ There are three reasons for this. The first reason is the role Germany played in the enlargement process. For Germany, the eastern enlargement was crucial due to geopolitical reasons. Its position in Central Europe (*Mittellage*) made it necessary to achieve strategic depth in the east. Yet, geopolitical terms were not used in public in order not to coin the enlargement in military terms. Instead, the enlargement was interpreted as a new space of stability under Russian involvement in order to counter potential reservation. The German leadership served as the crucial link between the US and the RF and sought an intense involvement of Russia's political actors in the decision-making process (Hoffmann 2012: 127ff.). In 1996, German Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel visited his Russian counterpart Primakov six times, and Chancellor Kohl travelled to Russia ten times between 1996 and 1997 (Hoffmann 2012: 145). The second reason is that Russia simply lacked the capacities and the power to seriously interfere in the enlargement process. The third reason is that Poland itself was able to convince the NATO members of the advantages of its accession (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 119).

them as democratic attempts and indicators a strong civil society – factors contributing to regional stability (Bil et al. 2016: 13). This clash of interests occurred in the context of an increasingly assertive RF, strengthened in the aftermath of Putin's coming into power and the rise of prizes for energy resources.

The European Neighborhood Policy – Doomed to Fail?

Thus, the idea of an eastern dimension of the EU – which had the intention to bring the neighboring non-member states of the EU closer to the *Acquis Communautaire* (Kapuśniak 2010: 60f.) – stood under a dark cloud. Poland was in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, it sought to duplicate the stability-oriented security concept with a stress on the regional dimension that Germany had successfully implemented in its own eastern neighborhood. On the other hand, it failed to do so (mainly) because of Germany – which, together with France, viewed the region through a “Russia first”-prism, to the detriment of Poland's security interests.

As a compromise, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) came into life in 2004. It was widely regarded as a failure, mainly because of its geographical overstretch (entailing neighbors *in* Europe as well as neighbors *of* Europe), strategic ambivalences and general open-endedness (Lippert 2008: 8). The attempt of Germany during its EU Council Presidency in the first half of 2007 to bring into life a renewed concept was rejected by Poland, since it was supposed to leave Russia's special bilateral status with the EU untouched (Adamczyk 2010: 196-198).

A new window of opportunity opened in 2007/2008 with the change of the Polish government that – together with the decision of the Obama administration to cancel the missile shield project fostered under the Bush administration – paved the way for a “reset” of Polish-Russian relations. The liberal-conservative *Platforma Obywatelska* (Civic Platform, PO) did not intent to achieve this symbolical recalibration of relations with Russia to the detriment of the relation to Ukraine. Rather, the idea of a new conceptual framework called the Eastern Partnership (EaP) was that it should be based in a multilateral framework under the auspices of the EU rather than on a bilateral basis (Kucharczyk & Fuksiewicz 2015: 105). Although the shape of the EaP was made possible through a deal with France which led to the conceptional division of the southern and the eastern dimension of the neighborhood policy, the main catalyst for the EaP proved to be the Russian invasion in Georgia in August 2008.

This allowed for a common initiative of Poland and Sweden towards the EaP (Politt 2014: 8). Lech Kaczyński, then President of Poland and PiS-member as his twin-brother Jarosław Kaczyński, even flew to Tbilisi during the war and demonstrated together with the heads of the Ukrainian state as well as the Baltics against what he perceived as a clear sign of Russia’s neo-imperialistic ambitions and a game changer (exemplary Dorn 2015).⁶⁴ In such context, it was easy for the Polish leadership to convince the CEEC as well as the Baltic countries of the project. With this broad coalition, it

⁶⁴ In this context, it is interesting to note the “geopolitical prophecy” of Lech Kaczyński during the meeting in Tbilisi. He regarded Georgia as the first victim of Russia’s ambitions, to be followed by Ukraine, the Baltics and – finally – Poland (Bielański 2015: 68).

became possible to win Germany for the project (Adamczyk 2010: 198f.). The founding summit of the EaP took place in May 2009 in Prague.

Poland had proven its “enormous traction in the field of eastern policy” (Lang 2011: 104) and acted as an agenda-setting power for the first time after its EU-accession (Kapuśniak 2010: 61). Warsaw also highlighted its commitment in financial terms and spent EUR 90 mln from the overall budget of EUR 250 mln of the EaP between 2005 and 2013 (Pawlik 2015). The fact that Jerzy Buzek, former Premier Minister (PM) of Poland, was appointed as President of the European Parliament (EP) is regarded as an indicator for Poland’s success within the EU-framework (Lisek & Zalewski 2016). On the other hand, Poland failed to shape some of the main provisions in line with its foreign policy interests. Although Warsaw had always fostered an “open door”-policy for the eastern neighbors of the EU (Kucharczyk & Mesežnikov 2015: 11), “every attempt to insert a statement on EU membership as part of the Eastern Partnership project has failed” (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 117). The EaP also invoked critique from Moscow, which successfully claimed a special framework with the EU outside the EaP. In addition to this, Ukraine itself criticized the format because it deemed its reform efforts as not being appreciated, being thrown together with reform-avoiding countries such as Armenia or Azerbaijan (Meister & May 2009).

The Eastern Dimension in Light of the Financial Crisis

The next phase of the development came in the aftermath of a plane crash in Smolensk (Russia) in April 2010, leading to the death of President Kaczyński and a substantial part of Poland’s political elite (Lang 2011:

102). In the short term, this tragic event led to a new thaw in the Polish-Russian relations, induced by a reconciliatory policy on the Russian side.⁶⁵ This enabled the establishment of a new triologue format between Poland, Germany and Russia, called “Kaliningrad Triangle” (Wenerski 2014: 22). But, in the middle term, the tragedy of Smolensk led to a gradual worsening of the Polish-Russian relation because the official investigation by the Russian authorities was met with suspicion (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 120). In the same time, during its EU Council Presidency in the first half of 2011, Poland declared the deepening of the EaP as one of its priorities. Yet, the moment proved to be less than suitable for this undertaking. First, institutional changes based in the Treaty of Lisbon weakened the agenda-setting power of the Council Presidency as well as the role of the EU Commissioner for Enlargement and ENP. Second, the financial and sovereign debt crisis absorbed a great deal of energy and attention, to the detriment of Poland, which stood outside of the decision-making procedures of the Eurozone governance (Lang 2012: 2f.). But although this could have invoked old Polish fears of being disregarded (*nic o nas bez nas*), Poland was able to get a stance as *Pre-in*, as a prospective member, whose interests must be taken into account *ex ante* (Lang 2012: 3).

Following the complex power-arithmetic of the EU,⁶⁶ the crisis of the Eurozone led to a Polish-German rapprochement that went hand in hand

⁶⁵ Immediately after the plane crash, at prime time, the biggest Russian TV channel showed the film *Katyn* by Polish film director Andrzej Wajda (Wilson 2010). The movie deals with the mass murdering of Polish officers by the NKDV in Smolensk in spring 1940. For a long time, the Soviet leadership blamed the Wehrmacht for the atrocities. Only in 1990, Mikhail Gorbachov recognized the responsibility of the Soviet Union for the mass murders.

⁶⁶ The multiple crisis in the Eurozone turned out to be a catalysator for a Polish-German twin engine. It created a north-south divide within the EU (Weidenfeld 2014: 112), that negatively

with an approximation of their positions towards the EaP as well as towards Russia, whereas Poland followed Germany's stance in the latter case. As a policy report puts it: its eastern policy became more Europeanized (Shapovalova & Kapuśniak 2011: 2). While the German leadership tended to keep its wishful thinking towards a transformation of Russia under Medvedev and introduced the "Partnership for Modernization" under Steinmeier (Wilson 2010), Warsaw was divided over the issue. While the conservatives from the former government still were influenced by impression of the Russian-Georgian War, the liberals from PO and Tusk followed a pragmatic approach, based on economic interests with Moscow (ibid.; Shapovalova & Kapuśniak 2011: 2).

Ukraine Fatigue and European Summit in Vilnius

These considerations proved to be as beneficial for Moscow as they proved to be detrimental for Kyiv. Ukraine (or, generally, the EaP) occupied a less important place in Poland's foreign policy thinking of that time for two reasons. First, a further EU enlargement or deepening was not in Poland's interest due to the Euro crisis (Lang 2011: 13). Poland even postponed the introduction of the Euro for an indefinite time (Komorowski 2011). Second, it became apparent that the transformation dynamic of the main partners in the east, Ukraine and Belarus, had reached its limits, so that Warsaw became increasingly disappointed of the EaP (Wieliński 2015c). Olaf Osica, head of the Centre for Eastern Studies in Warsaw, conceded that "Poland's attempts to bring Democracy to the east have

impacted on the German-French tandem (*Merkozy*). Amidst this background, Berlin regarded Warsaw increasingly as a new "model pupil of Europe", since it followed a similar economic and fiscal policy as Germany and would thus be a natural ally in the enlarged EU (Buras 2011: 13; 15).

failed” (Vidal 2012). This resulted in a “Ukraine fatigue” (Buras 2011: 12) and diminished the EU-membership prospective for Ukraine and Georgia (Krasnodębska 2014: 10).

Amidst this background, the efforts for a completion of the AA between the EU and Ukraine became the most important benchmark for success. Warsaw has even tried to soften the element of conditionality that not only lay at the heart of the negotiations between the European Commission (EC) and Kyiv, but was the constant factor of the EU foreign policy towards its eastern neighborhood (Böttger 2014: 97). Poland had never been a proponent of regime change in Ukraine (Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 34).⁶⁷ This approach backfired when Polish leaders still adhered to this course despite the Yanukovych regime already having lost its legitimacy after the bloodshed on Bankovska street (Krasnodębska 2014: 12; Szeptycki 2014: 20).

It was expected that Yanukovych would finally sign the AA during the European Summit in Vilnius in the end of November. Poland had put a lot of political capital into Ukraine’s EU-integration and was in danger of losing its credibility as the chief negotiator. When Yanukovych cancelled several official meetings with Komorowski prior to the summit, it was regarded as misgivings (Krasnodębska 2014: 10). Apparently, Poland had overestimated the interest of Kyiv in signing the AA (Buras 2014b: 3), the

⁶⁷ Polish President Aleksander Kwaśniewski was “the only Western leader to visit Ukraine during its international isolation in the later Leonid Kuchma era” (Shapovalova & Kapuśniak 2011: 3). During the Euro 2012, Polish President Komorowski had a hard time persuading his colleagues throughout the EU not to boycott the final game of the EM, which took place in Ukraine (Lowe 2014). Although most EU-representatives did boycott the event, Komorowski participated – together with Yanukovych and Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko (Szeptycki 2014: 20).

more so since Putin's promise for a favorable loan worth EUR 11 Billion diminished the relative merit of the AA (Böttger 2014: 99).

Poland was ready to keep the causa Timoshenko⁶⁸ out of the negotiation in order to save the AA – contrary to Germany, who wanted to keep a final vestige of conditionality and insisted on the release of Timoshenko (Gotev & Kokoszczynski 2014). Such came to the detriment of Yanukovich, for whom the release of his most vocal political rival would counter every instinct of political self-preservation (Böttger 2014: 97f.).

The pressure to bring home a success story encouraged a harsh stance towards Russia, who in 2010 had initiated the Eurasian Customs Union (ECU) and regarded the AA (and the EaP in general) as a geopolitical project competing for the post-Soviet space (Wierzbowska-Miazga 2013). That is striking, given that Russia was informed about the negotiations and could have communicated its objections in the past. Since such an integration rivalry between the AA and the ECU *de facto* existed, the EU had tried to provide a higher convergence of regulations for both projects, but the proposal came too late in the eve of the EU-summit (Böttger 2014: 99). The conflict escalated after Yanukovich rejected signing the AA and ordered the use of violence against the protest movement that arose in order to ouster him. Judging from Brussels, at this early point of the

⁶⁸ Former Ukrainian PM Timoshenko has been in custody since August 2011. Kwaśniewski and Pat Cox, observer on behalf of the EP, were heading the negotiations between the EU, the Ukrainian leadership and Timoshenko about her release. While decision makers in the EU regarded her detention as a proof for the lack of rule of law in Ukraine and thus as the main obstacle for the implementation of the AA, the Polish leadership had a softer stance towards this issue and were able to negotiate exemptions for the Ukrainian side from the obligation to reform (Krasnodębska 2014: 10). However, they still were overruled by Germany and France in its attempt to establish a formal accession perspective for Ukraine (Böttger 2014: 96).

Revolution of Dignity it seemed as if the conception of EaP had failed. The conceptional dichotomy of the EaP and the bilateral Partnership between the EU and Russia further undermined the prospects for a compromise (Böttger 2014: 95; 102).

Changed Image of Ukraine: from Mentor to Partner

The construction of the image of a country is shaped by a mixture of historical sentiments, abstract experiences based on identities, medially conveyed rhetoric and images, stereotypes, as well as tangible interaction with representatives of the country. Moreover, the image is a co-constitutive phenomenon in the sense that the self-image is always implicitly included.⁶⁹

What can be observed in the last two years is a broader change of the “imaginary” relation between Poland and Ukraine, that is the change from “Poland as a mentor” to “Poland as a partner” or “advisor” of Ukraine, leading to a more pragmatic approach driven by cost-benefit calculations rather than by normative considerations (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 115f.). This goes hand in hand with widely shared beliefs about Poland being

⁶⁹ Post-structuralists would ask why the construction of a certain image of a foreign country is deemed necessary for the own identity of a country. One example: in 2014, Poland’s Foreign Minister Sikorski told the US based magazine “Politico” that Putin had allegedly proposed to divide Ukraine as early as 2008 so that western Ukraine would go back to Poland. Although the allegations were softened later by the Polish side, and assumed that it was a bad joke, what can be seen is that Russia’s image of Ukraine is that of an artificial state without any right to exist – with far-reaching political consequences. Had Poland had a similar – revanchist – image of Ukraine, the results of this meeting would have gone in a different direction. It also can be seen that a historical constellation (the partition of Poland between the Soviet Union and Germany in 1939) has been used by Russia as an incentive – with the little twist that, as seen in the power-based view of the Kremlin, it is Poland that should be the partner of a new division.

Ukraine's "bridge" or "window" to the west. Similarly, the narrative of Ukraine as a "second Poland" (Okhrymenko 2016) is also still efficacious among the political elite (see, for example Bielecki 2016; Wroński 2015; Polish Press Agency 2015a). In that case, the perpetuation of this image works for both sides: while Poland can still present itself as a success story, Ukraine can boost the belief of western decision-makers in the reformability of the country.

The positive connotation of the image of a bridge is increasingly overshadowed by the process of 're-bordering' the Polish-Ukrainian frontier into the external border of the EU. This has tended to put an end to the identitarian uncertainty of this multiple periphery, has led to a decrease of personal ties between Poles and Ukrainians and further commercializes the travel of Ukrainians to Poland (Szmagalska-Follis 2012: 45; 194). Up to the beginning of the war in Ukraine, the intensive economic activities of Ukrainians in Poland were mostly regarded as beneficial for Poland (Fomina et al. 2013: 8). There are signs that this is changing due to the high numbers of Ukrainians temporarily or permanently working in Poland as economic migrants and the increasing competition on the lower end of the strongly liberalized labor market (Nakhapetyan 2016). In January 2016, Prime Minister Beata Szydło talked about one million Ukrainian refugees in her country (Nakhapetyan 2016). Although the information was quickly debunked, the intent of a negative branding of Ukrainians in Poland was clear.

Images also convey underlying political messages and can be used as a resource for mobilization. The recurrence of the geopolitical concept of

intermarum (*Międzymorze*) is a good example in this regard.⁷⁰ On several high-level visits to Ukraine, both then President Komorowski as well as current President Andrzej Duda cited one of Pilsudski's most famous sentences: "without an independent Ukraine, there won't be a free Poland" (Wroński 2015). Duda even more directly referred to the intermarum project on the eve of the presidential elections in 2015 (Wieliński 2015b). The citation fragment entails at least three political messages.

First, there is the negative image of Russia as an aggressor, against which a political alliance should be formed. Second, the strategic relevance of Ukraine for Poland is once again reaffirmed – a symbolic-rhetorical act that was highly appreciated by Oleksandr Zinchenko from the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance. In a short comment for the Polish newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, he acknowledged that "it is important that each new president of Poland should begin his visit with these words in order to let the events of the 20th century not repeat" (Wroński & Andrusieczko 2015). Third, the message reveals a great deal about Poland's self-image, given that the basic condition of any revival of intermarum is that it is realized under Polish leadership.

But the most explicit focal point for the political importance of this image is the dispute between historians, politicians and journalists from both countries over the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in Volhynia and East

⁷⁰ Intermarum is an idea elaborated by Józef Piłsudski, who was the leading figure of Poland before, during, and after WWI (Kucharczyk & Fuksiewicz 2015: 102). Back then – when the idea was based on a romanticized revival of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth – as well as today the main idea is that of a loose cooperation between mainly slavic countries, stretching from the Baltics to the Black Sea. While its realization was buried after the death of Piłsudski in 1935, the idea as such survived in Polish emigrée circles who published the exile magazine *Kultura* in Paris (Bielański 2015: 67).

Galicia, which persisted from 1921 to 1948, with varying intensity.⁷¹ Although the dispute about the proper interpretation of these atrocities – called Volhynia Slaughter in Poland and Volhynia Tragedy in Ukraine – has been used as a bargaining chip in Polish-Ukrainian relations for a long time, the discourse has shifted since the outbreak of the conflict. Presently, it takes place not only in the midst of the political establishment (Sutowski 2016), but also in the past-oriented societies of Poland and Ukraine, since people on both sides are directly affected via their family history (Sutowski 2016).⁷²

In July 2016, the Polish Sejm declared July 11 as a National Remembrance Day for Victims of Genocide by Ukrainian nationalists. In the eyes of Poland, it was a reaction on the events that took place during Decommunization (such as controversial renaming of bridges and streets) shortly before the Polish Memory Day of the Victims of the Volyn Tragedy. Shortly after, a draft resolution – albeit isolated and still in the process – by a single deputy was handed in the Verkhovna Rada in order to classify the actions of the Polish government against Ukrainians between 1919 – 1951 as a genocide (UAposition 2016).

⁷¹ During the interwar period, the regions were part of Poland (*Kresy*), but whereas ethnic Poles formed only a minority, ethnic Ukrainians posed between 64 and 70 percent. The Polish government of that time pursued an anti-Ukrainian policy of suppression and assimilation, following the logic of national homogeneity despite a given ethnic plurality underpinned with socio-economic, interethnic disparities (Szmagalska-Follis 2012: 174-176). Ukrainians openly resisted and founded the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) in 1929. The conflict spurred during WWII, leading to the mass killings of approx. 76.000 – 106.000 thousand Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia (Stańczyk 2012) between 1943-44, committed by or with the help of the military arm of the OUN, the UPA. Subsequently, the Polish Home Army (*Armia Krajowa*) and Polish partisans retaliated in several occasions and killed an estimated 20.000 Ukrainians. Nazi Germany massively exploited and fueled the conflict.

⁷² A survey conducted by the Institute of World Policy in six EU member states noted that “the top list of the Polish citizens’ associations with Ukraine is dominated by ones related to history” (Institute for World Policy 2015).

But the political leadership on both sides was eager to put an end to the political instrumentalization of the past and published a joint reconciliatory declaration during Duda's visit in Kyiv on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of Ukraine's independence. This went well with other reconciliatory attempts, such as the exchange of letters and appeals signed by a broad coalition of politicians, activists and people from the media sphere. What helped most was that the institutes of national remembrance from Poland and Ukraine in the end of 2015 had agreed upon an intense dialogue over their joint history.

This shows that the topic can easily become subject of political mobilization. Given that Ukraine is in the middle of a war against an overwhelming enemy, the abandoning of the self-image as a victim and acceptance of the image of a perpetrator instead (Babakova 2015) might indeed shake the main foundation of "contemporary ukrainianness" (Szmagalska-Follis 2012: 176).

Foreign Policy Changes Since the Outbreak of the Crisis

Revolution and Annexation: Marginalizing the Multilateralist

After the beginning of the Maidan protests in November 2013, Warsaw claimed a leading role in the mediation process based on its experience during the Orange Revolution 2004 (Szeptycki 2014: 19). Polish politicians from all political camps were very present during the protests. Polish Foreign Minister Sikorski spoke out in favor of an easing of the bureaucratic procedures of the EU; conservative opposition leader Kaczyński reaffirmed

Ukraine's prospects for an EU-membership (Krasnodębska 2014: 10f.), and Tusk realized an ambitious shuttle diplomacy that encompassed all key EU partners – a clear sign for the multilateral underpinning of the leading role (Buras 2014b: 2; Kucharczyk & Fuksiewicz 2015: 106f.).

After the escalation of violence on Maidan, the foreign ministers of Poland, Germany and France met in the framework of the Weimar Triangle with Yanukovych and representatives of the opposition to negotiations.

While Poland had been very quick in condemning the use of violence by the regime of Yanukovych, Germany had a rather cautious stance. During his inaugural visit in Warsaw in the end of December 2013, German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier rejected the role of a mediator (Sturm 2013), and the EU, besides rhetorical appeals, stayed inactive. This only changed in the end of January, after the first people were killed on Maidan. On the Ukrainian side, this created the impression that the EU was divided into a value-oriented east and an interest-based west (Krasnodębska 2014: 2; 11).

Shortly after Yanukovych fled Ukraine, the interim government was facing the annexation of the Crimea. In Poland, the annexation evoked strong fears among the populace (CBOS 2015)⁷³ as well as decision-makers. Poland shares a deeply rooted and historically grown “siege mentality”

⁷³ In a monthly survey conducted by the Public Opinion Research Center, in March 2014, 72 percent of the respondents acknowledged that the situation in Ukraine poses a threat to the security of Poland. The pattern of the perceived threat strongly correlates with the progress of the war in Ukraine: While the survey registered a low in threat perception during a period of military advancement with the regaining of separatist-held territory in June 2014 (49 percent: threat; 42 percent: no threat), a new high was registered in August/September 2014 – during the kettle of Ilovaïsk and the increasing use of heavy equipment on the Russian side (CBOS 2015).

(*Belagerungsmentalität*), that is a fear of loss of sovereignty as well as the condemnation of the geopolitical position between stronger and expansionist powers such as Germany and Russia/the Soviet Union (Frank 2003: 22-27). The day after the annexation, Tusk referred to the conflict in Ukraine as an “existential question” for Poland (Deutsche Welle 2014). Since Poland is the only EU and NATO member bordering both Ukraine and Russia (and her close partner Belarus, for that matter), and the secret Russian invasion in Eastern Ukraine is “politically ambiguous to allies and unclear for international public opinion” (Klus 2014), the threat indeed could not be underestimated.⁷⁴

The most important conclusion that was drawn immediately at the beginning of the conflict was that the relation to Poland’s main guarantors of security, the US and NATO, had to be strengthened. Washington’s immediate and harsh response reaffirmed the common assessment of the situation (Rodkiewicz 2014; Buras 2014b: 5);

The fastest reaction came with regards to sanctions against Russian individuals (asset freezing and visa bans), immediately after the illegitimate referendum on Crimea (Böttger 2014: 100; European Parliament 2014: 2). A debate as to whether there might be some truth in the narrative of Crimea belonging to Russia did not take place in Poland (Politt 2014: 5). The

⁷⁴ One year prior to the aggression, President Komorowski had made clear in an unofficial doctrine that the priority of the Polish military is the defense of the territorial integrity rather than the deployment abroad (National Security Bureau 2013). The doctrine was partly a reaction to the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 that was regarded by a part of the establishment as a sign for the recursion of a neo-imperialist Russia – a fear that was strengthened in 2009, when Russia held a military exercise in Kaliningrad, where a nuclear attack on Poland’s capital was simulated (Bil et al. 2016: 13). Thus, the beginning conflict in Ukraine was regarded as a proof that the concerns where correct.

sanctions met with comprehensive support from EU member states as well as abroad, but Poland, together with the Baltics, had pushed for even harsher sanctions against Russia (Gotev & Kokoszczyński 2014) and criticized that the conditions for an intensification of the sanctions were subject to interpretation and easy to thwart by Russia (Speck 2014). In order to raise acceptance for the sanctions, Tusk compared the Annexation with the very strong historical analogy of the *Anschluss* (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 123). This helped the Polish trade associations to be not overly vocal as to the prospective costs of the sanctions (Łada 2014: 5f.).

Poland's harsh stance comes as a surprise, given that the conflict has also a strong geo-economic dimension for the country. Russia is Poland's second largest exporter after Germany, and although the export volume only amounts to 12.1 percent of Poland's overall imports, around 75 percent of total imports from Russia are mineral products such as oil and gas. Looking at the total amount of Russian energy in Poland's energy mix, the energy security dimension becomes even more visible. Although Poland's dependency from foreign energy in general is rather low (25.8 percent) compared to the EU-28 average (53.2 percent), it is highly dependent on Russia as a single supplier. Russia provides around 75 percent of the domestic gas consumption and close to 100 percent of Poland's oil imports (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 130ff.; Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 36). Moreover, Poland is highly dependent on gas transfer via Ukraine – something that Russia has regarded as a political instrument and repeatedly suspended in the past years (2006 and 2009). Thus, Poland is eager to diversify both suppliers and delivery routes.

Since “EU sanctions are a compromise between the member states’ interest in sanctioning Russia and the negative consequences for their economies” (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 131), the ability of Poland to act as a regional leader can be measured thoroughly in this field. The negotiations on sanctions must be regarded as a defeat for Poland in that regard (Buras 2014b: 3) because of significant differences in interest. The energy dependence in the Visegrád-Group (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic; abbr. V4) is higher in the three countries besides Poland, making it harder to exercise leadership. The countries also differ in questions of minority rights or even the assessment of what actually happened in Ukraine (Gniazdowski et al. 2014; Klus 2014). Yet, a coalition of Poland and the Baltic states was able to specify the conditions for a third round of sanctions to implement in case that Russia would invade further parts of Ukrainian territory (Bierling 2014: 262).

The escalation of the conflict and the beginning of a military upheaval orchestrated from Moscow induced the internationalization of the conflict. That enhanced the influence of individually powerful countries such as Germany and France, but also global actors such as the US, NATO and OSCE (Krasnodebska 2014: 12).

This had a mixed outcome for Poland. Warsaw saw no ground for a cautious position towards Moscow and actively kept supporting the new government in Kyiv (Szeptycki 2014: 21). The more nuanced domestic positions in the German political public where met with a certain

indulgence in Poland (Frymark & Kwiatkowska-Drożdż 2014),⁷⁵ not least in order to keep a stake in the multilateral format that ran the risk of being undermined by a leading duo Washington-Berlin: “It was the German chancellor who communicated the West’s views and expectations to Russian President Vladimir Putin, and it was she who negotiated on behalf of the EU with U.S. President Barack Obama – despite not having an official mandate to represent all 28 EU member states” (Speck 2014).

The forbearance towards Germany was put into question in the security policy. In contrast to Berlin, the US and the majority of NATO members wanted to enhance the military presence in the eastern flank of NATO (Bierling 2014: 262).⁷⁶ It fits this picture that Foreign Minister Steinmeier excluded any NATO accession of Ukraine during a meeting of the Weimar Triangle in the beginning of April. The US positioned itself in the middle and met Poland’s security interests with the announcement that it would permanently deploy its troops in Poland “in the long term” (Buras 2014b: 5).

Militarization and Negotiation: Isolating the hawk

The conflict further escalated with the militarization by Russian proxies in eastern Ukraine as of April 2014. Poland began to prioritize

⁷⁵ Although German Chancellor Merkel, caught by surprise by the speed of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and Putin’s uncompromising stance, emphatically supported the idea of sanctions (Merkel 2014) and only one day after the fake referendum decided on common sanctions together with the US (Böttger 2014: 100), Foreign Minister Steinmeier seemed to be inclined towards a form of Appeasement 2.0. Warsaw thought that these differences were born out of the domestic need to satisfy different segments of the electorate (Łada 2014: 4f.).

⁷⁶ The dispute is based on a differing interpretation of the Founding Act of 1997 between Russia and NATO, which declared that the military alliance would not permanently deploy troops on its eastern flank, with the assumption that the security environment would not change (Busse 2014; NATO 1997). While Poland, together with the Baltics, considers that condition clearly as a given, Germany strongly opposes this view (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 126f.).

questions of defense policy over the crisis in Ukraine and intensified his diplomatic efforts towards the US and towards NATO. Thereby, it assumed its active role in that issue. Instead, Germany became the decisive moderator and networker. Although Berlin failed to set the agenda with its several proposals, it was successful in keeping the diplomatic process going.⁷⁷

From the Polish perspective, the start of a series of national roundtable talks initiated by the Ukrainian government in May 2014 was a low point in its diplomatic efforts, given that Poland possessed a lot of experience with this type of reconciliatory tool (Bujak 2014), but it was Berlin and Paris who had urged for this to occur (Speck 2014). Moreover, the experienced former German diplomat Wolfgang Ischinger – whose diplomatic reputation is highly appreciated among Russian diplomatic circles – was appointed to represent the OSCE at the round table.

Yet, Poland was able to gain from the side-lines of the conflict and to act as an agenda-setter. Tusk garnered support for the idea of an Energy Union designed to address EU's energy dependency (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 136). Such potential is high, since, as a PISM-report notes, Poland "might use the crisis to put the region in the spotlight of EU financing, and

⁷⁷ Negotiations on an international contact group with the participation of the OSCE going back to an initiative by Merkel in the beginning of March (Bierling 2014: 260) failed due to different ideas about the format. In the same period of time, Germany proposed a fact-finding mission under the auspices of OSCE, which was downgraded by the Russian side to a weaker OSCE Observer Mission (Rodkiewicz 2014). A high-level meeting between EU, US, Russia and Ukraine in Genf initiated by Steinmeier failed because it entailed a demand for the disarmament of illegal formations in the Donbas and thus would have curtailed Russia's lever on the conflict (König & von Drach 2014).

crediting. Increased regional interconnectivity will boost market development in Poland” (Godzimirski et al. 2015: 27).

President of the United States Obama, who started his tour through Europe in the beginning of June in Warsaw, also spoke out in favor of an Energy Union (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 136). He announced the so-called European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), worth several billion dollars (Belkin et. al. 2014: 5). In the eyes of the renowned Center for Strategic & International Studies, the program “represents a significant reinvestment in the U.S. military presence in Europe after decades of gradual withdrawal [and] it indicates the administration’s acknowledgement of the growing threat Russia poses to long-term U.S. national security interests in Europe and beyond” (Cancian & Samp 2016).

Poland’s marginal role must be seen against the background of a tightening of the domestic rhetoric due to the upcoming Euro-parliamentary elections. The war in Ukraine and the security-related implications of a neo-imperial Russia where by far the most important campaign issue (Majcherek 2014: 3). The election forecasts predicted a victory of PiS, which led the PO under Prime Minister Tusk to take over the anti-Russian rhetoric of his opponent (Szczurbiak 2014) – and hence made it impossible to act as a neutral arbiter.

Thus, the scope conditions for a marginalization of Poland in the diplomatic setting of the conflict were a given. During the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landing, Germany, France, Ukraine and Russia decided to establish the so-called ‘Normandy Format’ (NF) as a new dialogue form, where Putin and Poroshenko would meet directly (Szeptycki 2014: 21). Yet

the NF had some serious flaws. The wording of the joint statement of the participants of the NF “does not in any way indicate Russia’s role in instigating the fighting in east Ukraine” (Krasnodębska 2014: 13). When Russia increased its military engagement in Ukraine during August 2014, the constructive fault of this became more and more obvious. Steinmeier was perceived as a keeper of neutral distance between the EU and Russia (Speck 2014). France was seen as an actor with a rather Russian-friendly attitude (Krasnodębska 2014: 6f) and already had mediated between the conflict parties during the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 (Larsen 2009: 9). Poland, a longstanding and experienced partner in the region (Szeptycki 2014: 21), was not even invited to be part of the NF (Buras 2014a).

With that, Ukraine had lost its most important proponent within the direct negotiation format, and Germany and France successfully had asserted themselves as chief negotiators (Krasnodębska 2014: 13). Although Berlin was eager to explain that this had rather more practical than political reasons, Warsaw interpreted this as a sign of mistrust (Łada 2014: 8). But it soon appeared that the new format was beneficial regarding the negotiation tactics: Poland often held bilateral meetings with the Ukrainian leadership (Gotev & Kokoszcyński 2014) and informally consulted with Germany, which in turn increasingly took into account Ukrainian interests (Buras 2014a). Meanwhile, Russia was satisfied with the formal absence of Poland in the NF (Krasnodębska 2014: 14).

After the crash of Malaysian Airplane MH-17 – for which Poland, among others, blamed Russia due to the continuation of weapon deliveries (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 123) – the EU extended the sanctions regime on

whole sectors such as finance and trade and imposed an embargo on arms and dual use goods (European Parliament 2014: 2). Earlier that month, the cooperation between EBRD and EIB had already been halted – with the exception of Polish-Russian cross-border cooperation around Kaliningrad Oblast (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 132). Another effect was that the V4-countries unanimously spoke out in favor of sanctions despite still existing differences (Belkin et. al. 2014: 8).

Russia reacted by adopting retaliatory measures in the form of a ban of agricultural products, especially fruits and vegetables in August, and later extended them to meat, fish, cheese and milk. Given that Poland ranks high among the EU-members worst affected by these measures,⁷⁸ and taking into account that “the socio-economic impact of Russian counter-sanctions [...] could be a key factor benefiting PiS in the upcoming parliamentary elections” (Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 37), it comes with surprise that the Polish government did not at any given moment put the sanctions into question. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, Poland’s exports (agricultural, electrical, chemical and metallurgical products) to Russia are highly diversified, and it is easier for those to switch to new markets (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 130).

After the introduction of the ban, Poland, the world’s biggest apple exporter, selling 70 percent of its overall fruit production to Russia, immediately reacted with a diversification campaign, reaching out to India, Indonesia and the Balkans, and, in autumn, with a domestic consumption campaign (*Jem bo Polskie* – I eat it because it’s Polish). The EU also set up a

⁷⁸ Poland ranks 4th place among the countries that are potentially worst affected by Russian sanctions, and 2nd in terms of absolute value (EUR 841 million; European Parliament 2014: 4).

program which basically bought up the oversupply which could not be exported to Russia.. Secondly, Poland already has some experience with Russian embargos, and knowing the retaliatory-political nature of these measures, it is more inclined to bear the costs of those and to play the game accordingly. After a meat embargo in 2005, Poland for example tried to hamper Russia's negotiations with EU and WTO (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 132f.).

Stakes were high for Warsaw during the NATO Summit in Wales in September 2014. Prior to that, NATO General Secretary Rasmussen had advocated the idea of new military bases in CEE (Foxall 2014: 11). But, referring to the 1997 Founding Act, Germany refrained from such actions. Instead, it decided upon the creation of a rotating "Spearhead Force" within the existing NATO Response Force (NRF) – and thus against the permanent deployment of troops in the eastern flank of NATO (Gebauer & Schmitz 2014). Although the Baltic states in general perceived this as a positive process, and Warsaw as well in official terms, commentators and experts rather doubted that this process would substantially enhance NATO's defense capabilities (Kokot 2014). Usually, Poland demanded the permanent deployment of two heavy brigades (around 10.000 soldiers) on its territory alone (Belkin et al. 2014: 9).

The tension between Berlin and Warsaw could partly be lowered by some concessions to the Polish side. Besides the Wales Summit Declaration, which highlighted the will to further strengthen the transatlantic partnership (Godzimirski et al. 2015: 10), it was the deal between Germany, Poland, and Denmark, to upgrade the HQ of the

Multinational Corps in Szczecin from low to high readiness (Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 37). Moreover, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine agreed upon the launch of a joint brigade, with the HQ being in Lublin (Agence France Presse 2016).

Immediately after the summit, the ratification of the Minsk-Accords in September 2014 looked like a breakthrough at the beginning. And although the truce already broke down after one month, the agreement led to a quietening of the diplomatic front. The reason for that was that the majority of the EU-countries shied away from drawing political conclusions from Russia crossing the red line in the form of further advances into Ukrainian territory (Larsen 2014: 32). Poland was completely marginalized in this process.

Election and Domestication: Reclaiming an Active Role

Donald Tusks inauguration as President of the European Council in December 2014 brought deputy party chairwoman Ewa Kopacz into office. His new position allowed Tusk to act as an agenda-setter and to keep the pressure in the causa on the EU level (Radziszewski 2014). He was especially able to upload his idea of an Energy Union onto the EU level so that Jean-Claude Juncker, since November new president of the EC, ranked it second among his top priorities (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 136f.). Tusk skillfully used the crisis as a window of opportunity: “Had it not been for the Ukrainian conflict, the security of supplies would have been likely to occupy last place in any list of EU energy policy goals” (Godzimirski et al. 2015: 11).

On the domestic level, Kopacz's first press conference in November 2014 was (mis)interpreted so that she seemed to be inclined to "distance herself from the policies of her powerful predecessor and political patron" (Sobczyk & Wasilewski 2014), to weaken the solidarity ties with Ukraine and to foster a narrowly defined concept of national security instead (Wasilewski 2015). Although this was afterwards recanted (Rzeczpospolita 2014; Pawlik 2015), the circles close to PiS would use this flaw to discredit the PO-government during the upcoming elections.

When analyzing certain actions in light of rising fear among Polish society, resulting in a cautious stance towards the conflict, as well as the prelude of the elections marathon that made the Polish government more responsive towards the society,⁷⁹ it can be said that the stance towards Ukraine did not change in substance, yet became based on sharper cost-benefit calculations and a more cautious rhetoric.

In December, Kyiv decided to abandon Ukraine's nonalignment status in favor of Euroatlantic integration. This evoked a cautious statement by the new Foreign Minister Grzegorz Schetyna that "there is no question about Ukraine joining NATO nowadays. If someone raised this issue, it would create an irreconcilable international problem" (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 118f.). Yet, Warsaw made clear that it would change its stance in case of any prospect for an accession.

Also telling in that regard is the announcement by Schetyna of possible arms deliveries in the course of the bloody rocket attack on

⁷⁹ As a CBOS-survey reveals, in the beginning of 2015, more respondents regarded sanctions as a sufficient instrument, and more respondents insisted that Poland should keep a neutral stance towards the conflict, as compared to the beginning of 2014 (CBOS 2015).

Mariupol in the beginning of 2015, leaving 30 civilians death and more than 100 wounded, spurring a debate on whether Ukraine should be provided with arms or not. Schetyna was eager to downplay the relevance of the offer and pointed to the sole economic background of a possible arms deal (Gazeta Wyborcza 2015). In a similar diplomatic vein, Defense Minister Semoniak repeated that Poland was not eager to deliver arms, but on the other hand would not exclude the possibility *a priori*.

In this situation, Schetyna's call for a strengthening of the sanctions after the attack as well as his line of argumentation, according to which the separatists and Russia are under obligation to implement the Minsk agreement, were a rather inexpensive way of showing solidarity, even though other states see the responsibility for implementation mainly on the Ukrainian side (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 123). Poland was also actively seeking a common stance within the V4 in terms of a strengthening of the sanctions regime (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 132).

During Duda's presidential election campaign in spring 2015, resulting in his victory, he challenged the *European Mainstream*-approach of Komorowski and claimed that Poland should take a rather assertive stance – an *Own Stream* – towards the EU. This also affected the Ukraine-policy. PiS insinuated that PO had “been constrained by its unwillingness to move too far beyond the EU consensus and act as a counter-balance to the major European powers which are over-conciliatory towards Moscow” (Szczurbiak 2015a). In that vein, Duda stressed the urgency of permanent NATO bases in Poland, claimed that Poland should seek for a more active role in the conflict, and criticized the flaws in the design of the Minsk II Agreement.

Frustration about Poland's marginalization was widespread among conservatives in the political establishment. As the director of the prestigious Polish Institute of International Affairs, Marcin Zaborowski, puts it, "we could have been more lavish towards Kyiv" (Wielński 2015c).⁸⁰

What at first glance seemed like a substantial policy change, on closer examination can be debunked as mainly rhetoric dedicated to the upcoming election circle. The actual difference in the positions was minor.

For example, Foreign Minister Schetyna, already in autumn 2014, had claimed that there should be a new negotiation format which would include Poland (TVP 2014). In May 2015, during the EaP-summit in Riga, Poland was among the few countries that openly supported Ukraine's membership prospect (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 117). The most telling indicator was that the Sejm in May raised the military spending to 2 percent of the overall budget – a raise of around 18 percent within the military budget. The vote came almost unanimously, with altogether four MPs abstaining or voting against (Łada & Wenerski 2015: 126). Nevertheless, the delimitation campaign worked, and the image of Polish politicians as "lawyers of Ukraine" weakened, compared to 2014 (Junko 2015).

The Volhynia Tragedy/Massacre also played a role during the election campaign. In early April 2015, a few hours after Bronisław Komorowski held a speech in the Ukrainian parliament (Verkhovna Rada) on the occasion of the 75th Anniversary of the Massacre of Katyn, the Rada passed

⁸⁰ He also expressed his dissatisfaction with Poland's absence in the NF as well as its outcome so far. Jerzy Pomianowski, back in 2015 director of the European Endowment for Democracy, expressed a similar view (Zerkalo Nedelii 2015b).

a number of laws that heroized the members of the OUN and UPA as fighters for Ukrainian independence – an act that was perceived in Warsaw as a slap in the face (Kravchuk 2015). Duda called for a stop of the glorification of the UPA and cancelled the first visit of Poroshenko shortly after his election victory on such a short call that the latter had to turn back on his way to Warsaw (Zerkalo Nedelii 2015a).

In August, Duda came up with a precise plan, suggesting that Poland as well as representatives of the EU, the US and the neighboring countries of Ukraine should become part of the NF or otherwise be included into the dialogue on the situation in Eastern Ukraine (Polish Press Agency 2015b). That demand was directed via the Polish press towards the German leadership (Wieliński 2015d), and must be regarded as a kind of blackmailing light, given that fears were quite widespread among Germany that Duda would play the anti-German card during his visit of Gauck in Berlin later that month.

The reactions towards the proposal were flatly negative. Both Russia and Ukraine rejected it (Kravchuk 2015), just as did Germany, mostly due to Poland's "alleged partisanship and radicalism" (Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 36). The initiative must be regarded as an attempt to accommodate those voters who expected a rather hawkish position in the Russian-Ukrainian Crisis. Meanwhile, Beata Szydło, the PiS frontrunner in the upcoming parliamentary elections, focused on domestic issues, which are the natural subject of the Prime Minister within the Polish governmental system and had far higher prospects of success given that Ukraine as a topic had slowly lost its mobilizing power (Babakova 2015).

The elections resulted in an overwhelming victory of PiS and led to Szydło's nomination as PM. In institutional terms, Poland's overall policy towards the Russian-Ukrainian Crisis now had enough space to implement a possible policy turn. But at the end of the day, the new government provided only a very subtle change, mostly expressed on the ministerial level on behalf of people such as new Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski, who restated Poland's ambitions as a regional leader, and who was more explicit about the need to have permanent NATO bases (Waszczykowski 2015a), and who vocally criticized the previous government. He went so far as to declare the foreign policy legacy of PO from 2007 to 2015 as lost years, claiming that an erroneous EaP had led to the Revolution of Dignity, and implying that Tusk had voluntarily refrained from being part of the NF (Waszczykowski 2016a). Simultaneously, to soothe fears of a policy change, President Duda during his first state visit in Kyiv in December 2015 stressed that Poland will keep continuity in his policy towards Ukraine (Wroński 2015).

There, both sides sharply criticized the plan of Gazprom and five Western companies to build North Stream II (Wroński & Andrusieczko 2015). They were supported by a protest note issued by all CEECs towards the EC the same month (Bota et al. 2016). Although this might be regarded as an indicator for a common stance within the V4, the underlying interests were in fact as diverse as usual, with some countries having commercial interests, while others – such as Poland – rather deeming the geopolitical

dimension of the project as important (Buras 2016: 181).⁸¹ Meanwhile, Poland's efforts for diversification paid off, and the LNG-terminal that was built in Świnoujście since 2006 was finished and received its first shipment of liquid gas from Qatargas.

Isolation and Demystification: Heading Towards Inward Leaning Security

Since the beginning of 2016, two phenomena can be observed. The first one is a rising gap between Ukraine and Poland, based on a rise of 'Ukraine fatigue' in Poland due to the government crisis in Ukraine that led to the approval of Poroshenko's trusted friend Volodymyr Hroisman as Ukraine's Prime Minister (Bielecki 2016). Polish society has become increasingly critical towards the help the Polish government offers its neighbor in terms of financial aid. For example, the EUR 100 Mln credit line is criticized by some, suggesting that the money should be used domestically for pensions and wages instead (Babakova 2015).

Even the long-awaited DCFTA that came into force in January did not change this perception substantially. The reasons for this are manifold. Ukraine is on the margin of economic importance for Poland. In 2013, it was the 8th biggest export destination and occupied the 21st place among Poland's importers. Two years later, Ukraine ranked 18th in exports and 23rd in imports (Płonka 2015), with only the level of FDI staying almost constant (Wenerski & Speiser 2015: 134f.). From the Polish perspective, the DCFTA

⁸¹ Two months earlier, the companies had agreed on the details of the project. In Poland, the construction of North Stream I in 2005 had invoked fears of a Russo-German rapprochement and was labelled a second "Hitler-Stalin-Pact". Accordingly, Germany was regarded as lacking solidarity, since the expected revenues on the Russian side from the new pipeline would by far exceed the imposed costs of the sanction regime and the whole project would contrast with the diversification strategy of the Energy Union. In addition, Ukraine would lose around EUR 1.8 Billion in transit fees (Schuller 2015).

is a rather meagre conditional instrument in terms of Ukraine's reform-ability, and with its introduction, the political effect fell flat. Such a result would have been unexpected prior to the Revolution of Dignity, when the AA was one of the few political pawns, but for Poland it is clear that "meaningful relations with Ukraine are not constituted by trade only" (Sek 2012).

The second phenomenon is a rising gap between Poland and the EU, based on the fact that the space for manoeuvre after PiS came to power was mainly used to demonstrate an anti-federalist (or Eurosceptic) stance towards the EU, not only in words (Wroński 2015; Wieliński 2016), but also in deeds, such as the annulation of the appointment of five judges for the constitutional tribunal that led to the initiation of a rule of law-procedure by the European Commission. This, in turn, has had some serious repercussions for Ukraine in Europe, because it has led to a loss of trust in the reform-ability of Ukraine – why should it succeed when even in Poland, the transformatory and post-communist role model, the constitutional situation could deteriorate as fast as it has (Bielecki 2016)? – and diminishes Poland's importance as Ukraine's lawyer within the EU.

This came amidst the background of a stronger focus on security issues. In January, the Polish government announced the creation of a national guard. Starting with three brigades in this year, the troops are a direct response to Russia's hybrid warfare since "national guards with local knowledge will be able to distinguish between any friend and foe they might encounter in time of crisis" (Day 2016).

In that vein, the upcoming NATO summit in Warsaw in July has grabbed a significant amount of attention and has induced decision-makers to formulate their expectations in the public sphere: Waszczykowski published a lengthy article for The New York Times, where he reiterated that the result of what he called the ‘Warsaw Package’ should “go much further [than the NATO summit in September 2014], including a permanent NATO presence in Poland” (Waszczykowski 2016b). Similarly, Deputy Defense Minister Tomasz Szatkowski reminded the public that “the defense ministers of the NATO countries agreed upon the enhancing of the military presence on the eastern flank” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016a) during another run-up meeting of the NATO Defense Ministers in February this year.

In terms of coalition-building, Poland was only partly able to convince other actors of his position. During a run-up preparation summit in Bucharest, Poland demanded that NATO would decide upon permanent structures in its eastern flank and that it should refocus on territorial defense (TVN 24 2015). While the participants of the summit – nine members of NATO’s eastern flank, from the Baltics to Romania – issued a joint statement, no other NATO member reacted (Smolar 2016). Interestingly, during the months before the Warsaw Summit, Poland had watered down its expectations: during a visit to Washington, Duda said that “whether the presence of NATO troops in our country is permanent or rotating is of ‘secondary importance’” (Polish Press Agency 2016). This clear departure from the earlier position can be explained with the pressure to present the outcome of the Warsaw Summit as a success.

The summit indeed was a triumph. Moreover, in organizing what was the probably most important NATO summit since the end of the Cold War, Poland demonstrated leadership and called for an equal status within the alliance (Waszczykowski 2015b) – an indicator for Warsaw’s rising self-confidence that is fed up with “second-class” membership in NATO (Dorn 2015). Following a conclusion issued by Duda, it provided Poland with a “‘real allied force’ on its territory, capable of protecting it any time a threat emerges” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016c).

Four points shall be highlighted as an outcome: First, the commitment of the US to deploy a heavy brigade with a HQ in Poland, consisting of four battalions to be stationed in Poland and the Baltics on a rotational basis. Although it is not the full-fledged military basis which constitutes Poland’s maximum security aim, it is, as Edward Lucas notes, “still a symbolic and physical reminder of the alliance’s commitment to territorial defense” (Lucas 2016). Second, the Head of the Ministry of National Defense, Antoni Macierewicz, announced the rise of the military budget to three percent of the GDP (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016b) in order to raise the number of soldiers from 115.000 to 150.000 in 2017. Third, the alliance agreed upon the enhancement of Ukraine’s military capabilities via reforms and common standards. Although Ukraine was not named as a potential candidate, the open-door policy of the alliance was confirmed during the summit, and the cooperation between NATO and Ukraine is a de facto implementation of certain standards that bring the membership closer in incremental steps (Szeligowski 2016: 1). Fourth, Poland demonstrated its commitment in various NATO activities that go

beyond its eastern flank (DefenseNews 2016). By that, Poland wanted to express solidarity in the broader context, and Defense Minister Macierewicz underlined that “although the threat from the east is the most important for us, we understand and will participate in the effort to defend the southern flank” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016b).

Poland was also successful at other fronts. In August, it was announced that North Stream was not going to be built for the time being, since each gas supplier was to use existing pipeline infrastructure – an impossible undertaking taking into account the route of the pipeline through the North Sea. Moreover, the Polish Office of Competition and Consumer Protection (UOKiK) objected to the project, arguing that it would cement Gazprom’s position on the EU energy market (De Jong 2016).

Poland and the EU

Convergence in Threat Perception, Divergence in Interests

National perspectives on the Russian-Ukrainian Crisis have converged to the perspective of Warsaw rather than *vice versa*. This is especially true for the rather negative view of Russia and the renewed importance of defense policy. The commitment of all NATO members to raise the defense budget to two percent of GDP throughout the next 10 years is a telling indicator in that regard. Yet, the countries still differ in their threat perception and in the political conclusions to be drawn. While Germany, for example, does not regard Russia as an existential threat and speaks out in favor of dialogue with Moscow, for Poland, deterrence is the key to success (Łada

2016: 5). The Baltic states are the strongest advocates of this view, within the V4 the threat perception is overlaid by diverging interests in foreign, security and economic policy as well as ideological underpinnings (Cichocki 2016: 199; Kucharczyk & Mesežnikov 2015: 195-197), and southern EU-members such as France, Italy or Spain are rather ambivalent as to whether Russia should be regarded as a threat as well as who is to blame for the violence in eastern Ukraine (Pew Research Center 2015: 16-18).

But even if perceptions do somehow converge, that does not mean that political priorities do as well. The EU has had to deal with multiple crises.. Inside the EU, there are clear disintegrative tendencies, the Refugee Crisis at its southern flank and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict on its eastern flank. Due to limited capacities in problem-solving, countries tend to process them in line with their immediacy. While for Germany the Refugee Crisis ranks higher on the political agenda (Bil et al. 2015: 18), in France it is the struggle against terror (Buras 2016: 180).

The development of a *status quo*-oriented EU has always been fostered by external shock and crisis (Godzimirski et al. 2015: 7). Thus, it should be asked whether the crises bear opportunities for Poland. From this perspective, the *Brexit* could prove beneficial for Warsaw, at least in security terms. The UK has always been the strongest adversary of the deepening Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP), that would, in the view from London, ultimately lead to a European army and undermine the *NATO first*-paradigm. Since UK will leave the EU, but stay in NATO, the military commitment there will continue – additionally the Brexit paves the way for a deeper cooperation between Germany, France, and Poland

towards a Defense Union. Here, the instrument of Permanent Structured Cooperation might be used in order to foster closer cooperation.

How does the relation to NATO relate to this? The defense alliance seems to have overcome their identity crisis and has refocused on their traditional task of territorial defense. Poland welcomes this reorientation, yet fosters a multidimensional concept of security oriented towards two tangents: the commitment to peace (who wants peace as we understand it?) and the guarantee for peace (who can enforce peace?). Accordingly, the PiS-government seeks to enhance its own security capabilities, fosters the security ties towards the US, and only then relies on NATO (Łada 2016: 23; Buras & Balcer 2016). Thus, it “has to strike the right balance between investing in European defense capabilities and enhancing its own military capacity to defend its territory and borders, especially in a situation when NATO’s Article 5 commitment to collective defense is not automatically implemented” (Godzimirski et al. 2015: 25).

Although the NATO Summit in Warsaw was a success for Poland, the Polish leadership is still sceptical towards the possibility of deterring Russia and to deploy NATO troops fast enough in case of an invasion (Buras & Balcer 2016). In addition, after Trump became the new US president, there are fears that NATO (and US, for that matter) security guarantees will cease to exist.

To conclude, Poland will increasingly rely on its own capabilities in terms of security. Simultaneously, it is expected that the cooperation between NATO and EU will enhance on a practical level (e.g. more pooling and sharing). While differences between the countries in threat perception

and political priority will hamper the emergence of a common European strategic culture, the enhanced cooperation of willing actors in the field of defense and security might in the future increase the incentive of other countries to join, given they see some tangible success.

Structural Marginalization or Regional Leadership?

But such developments are not decided alone in the isolated field of security and defense. Poland's position within the EU as the most important focal point for governance is undergoing a process of structural marginalization, observable in those policy fields that will stay in the focus in the middle term such as asylum/migration, freedom of movement as well as fiscal and monetary policy (Buras 2016: 183). While representatives of the former government for some time had argued in favor of joining the Euro – and eventually regarded the Russian-Ukrainian Crisis as an argument for faster accession (Buras 2014b: 5), Prime Minister Szydło, building on a consensus that formed in the course of the financial crisis, put an end to this path in the beginning of 2016 (Cichocki 2016: 195f.).

Here, the political costs of the *Brexit* are clearly visible. The UK, as the biggest EU-member outside the Eurozone and integration-scepticist, always made sure that it is not sidelined in the decision-making process, what allowed countries with a similar attitude – such as Poland – to bandwagon, as it were (Cienski 2016). Now, things look slightly different. As Marcin Zaborowski from the Center for European Policy Analysis notes, “Poland as a non-euro member probably won't get any invitation to be part of the new core of Europe” (ibid.).

Another factor of marginalization is based on the rising normative gap between the EU and the Eurosceptic PiS-government, which negatively impacts the relation with the Commission as the traditional ally of the new EU member states. This might become evident in the end of 2016, when the financial framework of the EU will be reviewed. In the middle term, “the key questions for Poland will be whether this political and institutional framework will be [...] sufficient to protect Poland’s interests” (Buras & Balcer 2016). It remains to be seen whether Euroscepticism will remain a largely rhetoric artefact (and a derivation from domestic politics), or whether deviance from the European consensus will lead to more radical steps (Szczurbiak 2015b).⁸²

As a result, Poland searches for new models of cooperation in\and outside existing organizations and established formats (Baranowski & Cichocki 2015: 37; Tomkiw 2016), “on the North-South Axis from Scandinavia through the Baltic republics, Romania, and Ukraine to Turkey”

⁸² In any case, the assertiveness negatively impacts the relation with individual member states. Germany is an instructive case in this regard. First, the Weimar Triangle is an important format where both Germany and Poland informally discuss urgent topics together with France. Second, for Poland, Germany is the main instance mediating standpoints and concerns between a V4 under Polish leadership and the Weimar Triangle. Third, Germany is regarded as a kind of hegemon within the EU, being partly responsible for the broad EU consensus that Poland wants to deviate from. While Tusk, during a historical speech he gave 2011 in Germany, acknowledged that he fears German inactivity more than German power (Sikorski 2011: 9), and the Polish Foreign Ministry then referred to the country as the most important bilateral partner (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2012: 17), the new Foreign Minister Waszczykowski in his foreign policy outline degraded Germany to a trading partner, and “forgot” to hint on his central role in NATO and EU (Smolar 2016) and vocally criticized the postmodern “German” lifestyle. This, in turn, has drawbacks on the EU level. Not only did it lead to irritation in Washington as to whether their military presence in Germany was not negatively affected by the deteriorating relation between Berlin and Warsaw, but also reduced the prospects of a German-Polish tandem within the EU, as well as the room for compromise between the V4 and Germany. The benefit of that could be observed in September 2015 during a meeting of EU Internal Affairs Ministers, with Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary voting against the redistribution of refugees and only Poland voting in favor, preventing an open conflict within the EU (Cichocki 2016: 199; Buras 2016: 182).

(Buras & Balcer 2016), in order to counterbalance “old Europe”. The focus here will lie not exclusively on CEE, although the already mentioned geopolitical concept of *intermarum* – and thus the turn towards the east – will further unfold under the new leadership (Szczzerbiak 2015b). One possibility could be to strengthen the “Eurasian” dimension of its foreign policy in form of the Chinese New Silk Road project which aims towards the strengthening of economic ties between Europe and China under exclusion of Russia (Buras & Balcer 2016).

So far, there are two promising approaches in this regard. First, to foster the cooperation within the V4 in a narrowly defined defense cooperation, and second, to deepen the coordination within the countries of the eastern flank of NATO with the idea of a biennial “watchdog-summit”, according to Duda with the aim to “analyze security situation and implement the decisions taken at the NATO summit in Warsaw” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2016d). The next summit of the so-called Bucharest Format will be held 2017 in Warsaw.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to see how Poland deals with the challenges that arose from the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict and whether it was able to benefit from the crisis in order to achieve its foreign policy goals. The study carved out four phases of Poland’s performance in the course of the conflict, with a significant change occurring in between.

During the first phase, Poland was able to use its long-term experience in the region and his status of an advocate of Ukraine to establish itself as a leading actor with a strong multilateral reflex. This approach is mainly a continuation of the pre-Maidan approach of the PO-government. Poland's political actors throughout the political spectrum performed well and repeatedly echoed the message that Ukraine is Europe.

Poland's stake in the conflict diminished in the second phase, in the course of the annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. This caused an internalization that enhanced the influence of individual countries. Poland became increasingly marginalized in the process. Not only that, with its staunchly pro-Ukrainian position impeded to act as a neutral arbiter, countries such as Germany or France with experience in negotiating similar conflicts with Russian involvement were preferred as mediators. Yet, Poland was still deemed important enough to evade complete marginalization.

Even in the NF, where Poland is not represented, Berlin kept informal consultations with Warsaw, be it because Germany knew about the importance of Poland's "consultation reflex", be it because it actually considered Warsaw's influence on the negotiation setting as important.

The more Warsaw became marginalized, the more it deemed the oblique sidelines of the conflict as important. It was able to set the agenda in the case of the Energy Union designed to address EU's energy dependency – a policy aim whose relevance became confirmed in the course of the conflict. In particular, the question of defense policy became prioritized. The NATO Summit in Wales must be regarded as a defeat for

Poland, since Germany's position prevailed in the end. The concessions to Poland (and the Baltics) were only partly able to compensate.

During the third phase, this conflict was strongly domesticated due to the election marathon taking place in Poland. Warsaw succeeded in uploading its idea of an energy union, thus using the conflict as a window of opportunity. Amidst the background of a harsh dispute between PO and PiS, the overall policy of Kopacz towards Ukraine did not change in substance, yet became based on sharper cost-benefit calculations and a more cautious rhetoric. This changed in the course of the incremental takeover of power by PiS, starting with the election of Duda in spring 2015. The new Head of State challenged the *European Mainstream*-approach of Komorowski and claimed that Poland should take a rather assertive stance towards the EU. The effect on the Ukraine-policy was that Poland reclaimed an active role and blamed the PO-government for Poland's marginalization. Yet, the activism proved to be rather rhetorical than substantial, since the actual difference in the positions was minor.

Finally, the last phase (still ongoing) is marked by an increasing turn in the EU-policy of PiS, with serious repercussions for Ukraine. If the constitutional situation could deteriorate that fast as in the transformatory role model of Poland, does it make sense to hope for the reform-ability of Ukraine? Simultaneously, Poland placed a stronger focus on security issues, not least because of the NATO summit in Warsaw. There, Warsaw was clearly able to set the agenda and to improve its position, with the commitment of the US to deploy a heavy brigade with a HQ in Poland

stopping short of reaching the main aim of a permanent basis on NATO's eastern flank.

In sum, the starting hypothesis (foreign policy aims: stable; strategies, instruments and coalitions: change) can be partly confirmed. The main aim – to achieve a maximum of security – significantly gained relevance in the course of the conflict and the rising fear of the continuation of Russia's invasion. Poland seems to be in the middle of a new consensus build about NATO and rather traditional security concepts. It came close to receiving a permanent base on NATO's eastern flank. Yet, a more inward looking (or: isolationist) Poland is inclined to self-reliance and a multidimensional concept of security. This also impacts on another aim, since such a Poland is less inclined to integrate a matured, yet reform-abiding Ukraine into western institutions.

Hereby, it itself deviates from the EU-consensus that defined its *raison d'être* for decades. Given these are not rhetorical games for domestic reasoning, in the middle-term, the structural marginalization within the EU will increase the need to find new strategies, instruments and coalitions. It remains to be seen whether Poland will be able to establish itself as a regional leader in CEE and beyond.

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WALKING ON THIN ICE: SLOVAK PERSPECTIVE ON UKRAINE CRISIS⁸³

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Abstract. *This paper aims to present an analysis of Slovak positions towards Ukraine and Russia since the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis till the middle of 2017. Partial attention is also devoted to Slovak policies towards the Eastern Neighborhood and Russia preceding the Ukrainian crisis. Authors emphasize the surprising rhetoric of Slovak political elites which left many observers with the impression of Slovakia being unsure of its place on Europe's geopolitical map, mainly thanks to the statements of Prime Minister Robert Fico. These statements were challenged by President Andrej Kiska and the official position of the country represented mainly by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák. The paper also discusses the results of the first-ever Slovak Presidency in the European Council in the second half of 2016 and its impact on the EU-Ukrainian as well as Slovak-Ukrainian relations. Finally, the paper aims to assess the changed image of Ukraine in Slovak domestic debate and possible future prospects for further development.*

Keywords: *Ukraine, Russia, Slovakia, crisis, Eastern Neighborhood, security.*

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Slovakia's Foreign policy towards the Eastern Neighborhood and Russia

Overall, Slovak relations with Ukraine never became a real priority at the political level despite the fact that such efforts were declared by several governments. In certain moments, relations with Kyiv were even side-lined, especially when it came to the Slovak interests in Moscow.

Since 1993 when Slovakia became an independent state with its own foreign policy-making, and especially in the late 1990s, Slovak attitude towards Ukraine might be characterized as “indifferent neighborhood.” The then Slovak governments were viewing Ukraine as a “gateway to Russia” rather than a partner worthy of attention in its own right. At that time, Ukraine was overshadowed by Russia in the Slovak eastern policy. The new Slovak government that came to power after the 1998 parliamentary election proclaimed a will to change the attitudes and practices of the previous years, but without real results. On the contrary, 1998-2000 could be characterized as the most problematic years in the modern Slovak-Ukrainian relationship since both countries gained independence owing to the Slovak support for the Russian plan to construct a new natural gas pipeline known as Jamal 2 that bypasses the territory of Ukraine via Belarus, Poland and Slovakia, which brought new negative impulses to the Slovak-Ukrainian agenda. In addition, Slovak government introduced a visa requirement for Ukrainian citizens in 2000, arguing that Slovakia must bring its visa policy in line with that of the EU, a step that Ukraine regarded as premature. Kyiv argued that unlike Slovakia, other Western neighbors of Ukraine, namely Poland and Hungary that also follow the EU standards are not in a hurry in this regard. As a response, the Ukrainian government decided to respond by denouncing the readmission treaty with Slovakia. The Slovak-Ukrainian relations witnessed intense high-level bilateral contacts in 2001 succeeding in reaching an agreement on the liberalization

of the visa regime. At the same time, Ukraine stopped the process of denouncing the readmission treaty with Slovakia. Both countries also reached an accord concerning cooperation in the transit of crude oil from the Caspian basin to the EU and Central European markets, etc. Thus, 2001 might be characterized as a new beginning in the modern Slovak-Ukrainian relationship (Duleba, 2002).

However, not only did Ukraine become an important partner at that time, but also the role of Russia in the Slovak foreign policy has increased due to the Slovak business and energy interests. In 2007, Slovakia was placed in “power audit” of the 28 European Union member states’ relations with Russia in the group of “friendly pragmatists”, which “maintain a close relationship with Russia and tend to put their business interests above political goals”. Moreover, things have already changed as Slovakia is listed as an EU “leader” in two out of five areas of the EU’s relationship with Russia. On the one hand, it is supporting the strong line of the European Commission’s Directorate General for Trade on compliance issues with Moscow. On the other hand, it is pushing for the diversification of gas supplies away from Russia. (Kobzová, 2015)

The 2009 gas crisis had a significant impact on both Slovak-Russian and Slovak-Ukrainian relationships. Based on the suspicion of Gazprom, a Russian natural gas group that Ukraine is illegally pumping gas for Central Europe, the Russian side has reduced, and then discontinued, the supply of natural gas to Central Europe. As a result of the gas conflict between Russia and Ukraine Slovakia was cut off from natural gas supply for almost two weeks. The crisis prompted a solution to the situation of different actors, politicians, industry representatives as well as strategic enterprises, in this case the Slovak gas industry.

Despite energy issues, this crisis had major political implications. Prime Minister Fico, even President Gašparovič, tried to contribute to the

resolution of the Russian-Ukrainian dispute and personally traveled to Ukraine. The related comments of the Slovak Prime Minister's reveal that he considered the Ukrainian side and the Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko as a "contravener and responsible". The Russian-Ukrainian dispute also significantly disrupted the level of Slovak-Ukrainian relations. In this case, similarly as in the question of positioning of the European missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland or in the Russo-Georgian conflict, the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic defended a pro-Russian position. These events returned Slovak-Ukrainian relations almost to a point of zero.

The next challenge in Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation is the current crisis, which might change the paradigm that Slovak relations with Ukraine never became a real priority at the political level. The position of the current Prime Minister Robert was heavily affected by the course of events during the 2009 Russia-Ukraine gas dispute.

Nevertheless, the current Slovak government declared in its foreign policy strategy for 2016 the importance of the Eastern Partnership in general as well as of the continuous and positively developing relations with Ukraine and Russia. Eastern Partnership is seen as the basic outcome of the Eastern vector of the Slovak foreign policy. Slovak Republic's priority was to use its Presidency in the EU Council for more promotion of the EU enlargement and Eastern Partnership as only consistent and credible enlargement policy, fostered by financial tools, which shall secure political stability, security and economic prosperity in the potentially unstable neighborhood. In this context, Slovakia is able to offer its direct experience from its own reforming process of the integration in the European and transatlantic structures. Furthermore, Slovakia will support the European orientation of Ukraine and contribute to the deepening of relations with Ukraine, whereby the main framework for this cooperation in both mid-term and long-term perspective is the Association Agreement, including the

Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. The principal objective of Slovakia is to make mutual relations more dynamic, especially economic relations. In energy, opportunities for more intensive cooperation are not limited to the gas and oil sectors (e.g. the ambition to maintain Slovak-Ukrainian gas corridor as a secure and cost-effective manner of gas transport to Europe (MZVaEZ, 2016). This aspect is will also play a significant role in the discussion about the proposed project Nord Stream 2, causing some controversy among the EU members.

To sum it up, Bratislava had good reasons to seek economic cooperation with Moscow: most of its gas supply as well as nuclear fuel for its Russia-built nuclear power plants come from Russia, and some of its core defense equipment is still procured from Russian manufacturers. So when the EU discussed the first round of sanctions on Russia in spring 2014, Slovakia (along with several other countries) pushed for keeping some of the more high-profile Russian names off the sanctions list, hoping to safeguard its interests. Top government officials in Bratislava warned against “too hawkish” steps towards Russia. Moscow gave Slovakia no special consideration for these efforts: the country’s gas supplies from Russia have been cut by 50 percent, after the country started in 2014 to supply natural gas to Ukraine through reverse gas flow (which now accounts of one-third of Ukraine’s annual consumption). Russian actions such as Turkish stream or Slovak car industry hit by crisis in Russia affected the political decisions of Slovak elites. Bratislava has, for example, begun to see the country’s economic closeness to Russia as a potential liability and started taking steps to diversify its ties. The government is negotiating a new gas connection to Poland, which would add one more route to the three new connections that have been built in the past five years (to Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Austria), and thereby decrease Slovakia’s vulnerability to future gas cut-offs from the east. The Slovak defense

ministry has announced a plan to replace virtually all Soviet-made weapons, beginning this year with military helicopters, to be followed by supersonic jets and air defense radar systems. (Kobzová, 2015)

Slovakia's foreign policy since the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis

The Ukraine crisis brought a seismic breakdown to the European post-Cold War architecture. The conflict is, first of all, about the territorial integrity of Ukraine⁸⁴ and, indeed, its very existence, but it is also about the future of Russia, the future of the EU project as well as identity of particular countries.

Regarding the outbreak of the current conflict, Slovakia sent mixed messages, mainly thanks to PM statements, which were very sensitively perceived by Ukrainian public. They covered various issues, ranging from acknowledgement that as neighbors Slovakia and Ukraine „were unable to establish normal political relations⁸⁵,” through labeling Ukraine as „unreliable partner” (in relation to the gas crisis), to questioning of Ukraine's abilities to manage difficult challenges arising from rapprochement with the EU⁸⁶. Besides this, Slovak PM also has remained very critical of the introduction of sanctions against Russia. On August 14, 2014 Fico said: „Why should we

⁸⁴ All Slovak political parties represented in parliament support the territorial integrity of Ukraine; however, a Member of the European Parliament from the ruling party Smer-Social Democracy Monika Flašíková Beňová described the referendum on the independence of Crimea as expressing the will of the majority of the local population and disagreed with the EU and US decision not to recognize it. (Marušiak, 2015)

⁸⁵ After the culmination of protests on Maidan, Fico stated that „despite the fact that Ukraine is our neighbor, we share almost 100 km boundary, as a politician, I have to say that we never managed to establish normal political relations.” (Fico uznal..., 2014)

⁸⁶ In September 2014 Fico stated in his interview for Nový Čas that „we want peace in Ukraine, because it is our neighbor..., because it is a transit country... It is also good that AA was signed, which gives Ukraine a perspective to bring it closer to the EU. However, I think that Ukraine can hardly handle difficult challenges related to the accession to the Union, because it is before absolute disintegration. And I reject the idea that Ukraine could at some point be a member of NATO, because it could undermine security in the region.” (Premiér Fico otvorene o konflikte..., 2014)

jeopardize the EU economy that begins to grow? If there is a crisis situation, it should be solved by other means than meaningless sanctions. Who profits from the EU economy decreasing, Russia's economy having troubles and Ukraine economically on its knees?" (Slovakia grumbles as EU..., 2014) It is very rare that an ambassador responds to the statements of the Prime Minister of their hosting country, but in the case of the Ukrainian ambassador to Slovakia it happened. The Prime Minister has also warned that Slovakia might potentially veto any sanctions that would damage the national interests of Slovakia. The pro-Russian narrative has been mainly challenged by the Slovak President Andrej Kiska and the opposition parties (Sloboda a solidarita, Most-Híd, Obyčajní ľudia – nezávislé osobnosti), which on several occasions confirmed Slovakia's commitment and support to the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Ukraine.

The Slovak government, and the Prime Minister in particular, continue to publicly oppose further sector-specific sanctions on Russia, and public opinion is also divided. But in practice, the administration has avoided taking any steps that would undermine EU's unity. The government thinks that the solution to the crisis in Ukraine lies both in diplomacy with Moscow and in strengthening Ukraine itself. In other words, Ukraine's success hinges not only on Kyiv's or Europe's ability to limit Russia's actions in the Donbas but also on the Ukrainian government's resolve in implementing long overdue, deep structural reforms. (Kobzová, 2015)

However, in the case of the official position of the Slovak Republic, Ukraine has found a strong partner in Slovakia. Since the outbreak of the protests on the Maidan till Minsk II agreement, Slovak FM Lajčák traveled to Ukraine six times. In the format of Foreign Ministers of the V4 Lajčák was even one of the first foreign statesmen who visited Ukraine after the regime change (the day after the Russian annexation of the Crimea). In March 2014, under the auspices of Slovak and Swedish diplomacy a

meeting of „*Friends of Ukraine*” was organized in Brussels. And, finally, Slovak-Ukrainian Chamber of Commerce and Industry was established last year. The most important dimension of Slovak-Ukraine relations, however, is energy security.

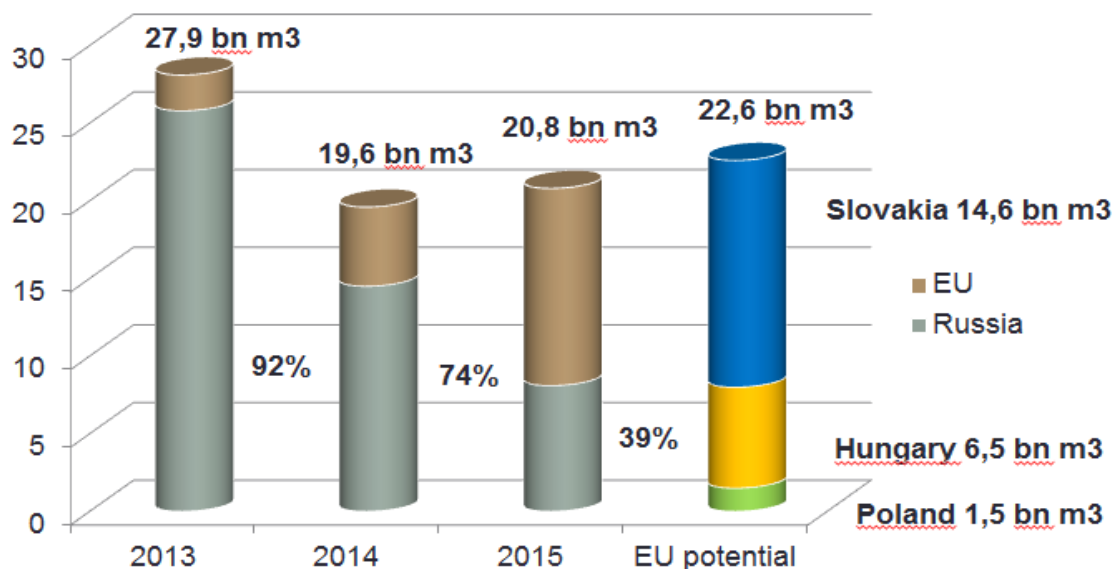
In this regard, Slovakia launched reverse gas flow of Vojany-Uzhgorod pipeline through Veľké Kapušany in September 2014 and subsequently finished works on another switch point - Budince. The fact that there was no „*Russian Winter*” in Ukraine, was achieved mainly due to the position and diplomacy of Slovak government. This was technically possible only thanks to the interconnection built with Czech Republic. However, it took both sides almost 1,5 years to overcome all technical and legal obstacles in order to launch the reverse gas flow to Ukraine.⁸⁷ To a smaller extent, Ukraine was also receiving reverse gas flow from Poland and Hungary. However, Hungary, under the pressure from Russian political circles stopped its supply, helping bring Ukraine “to its knees.”

From the Ukrainian perspective, Slovakia is of strategic importance for at least three reasons. The first is the already mentioned reverse gas flow. The second is a self-confident statement of Russian Gazprom that after 2019 the transit of Russian gas will be completely diverted from Ukraine to Turkey. Thirdly, the European Commissioner for Energy Union is a Slovak, Maroš Šefčovič. In this regard, it is going to be Šefčovič who will be in charge of the forthcoming trilateral talks between the EU, Russia and Ukraine over Russian gas supply.

The abovementioned trilateral dialogue shall be continued also from the Visegrad Group perspective with the aim to contribute to finding a long-term market-based solution to Russia-Ukraine energy relations. V4

⁸⁷ Although Kyiv and its European advocates (notably from Poland) put the blame on Slovakia for the delay, in practice it was Ukraine that refused to accept the Slovak offer to utilize the existing pipeline and pushed for a much expensive (and longer-term) solution. (Jarabik, 2016)

wants to underline the importance to ensure and maintain an uninterrupted and safe transit route via Ukraine and infrastructure investments enhancing at the same time diversity of sources, suppliers and routes to the EU Member States and its neighbors like Ukraine. Ministers of Visegrad countries responsible for energy issues agreed in the context of mutual EU-Ukraine-Russia relations to recall the principle of solidarity, which constitutes a basis of the European Union external policy and having in mind March 2015 European Council conclusions, to highlight the need of thorough reform of the Ukrainian energy sector to sustain secure energy supplies to Ukrainian consumers in the future and to appeal to the European Commission and the Member States to keep Ukraine energy situation on the top of the political agenda. In addition to it, they welcomed reaching the agreement between Ukraine, Russia and the EU on the “gas winter package” and call for its due implementation, aiming to ensure uninterrupted gas supply to Ukraine and transit to the EU during the upcoming winter. (Joint Declaration of Visegrad Group Ministers..., 2015)



Graph 1: Ukraine gas consumption over the last 3 years⁸⁸

⁸⁸ In 2013 Ukraine imported 27,973 bcm gas out of which 25,842 came from Russia and 2,132 from the EU (92%), in 2014 out of 19,6 imported 14,5 from Russia and 5,1 from the EU (74%),

The Ukrainian crisis has also been reflected in Slovak foreign policy agenda after the adoption of the Minsk agreements. In 2015, both the President of the Slovak Republic Andrej Kiska and PM Robert Fico visited Ukraine. While Fico visited Kyiv in early February 2015, President Kiska traveled to Kyiv later in May. PM Fico planned to visit Ukraine also on May 8 as a part of his criticized participation in the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of the victory of the former Soviet Union over Nazism in World War II in Moscow on May 9. However, his trip to Kyiv was later cancelled and he traveled only directly to Moscow. This event sparked a significant controversy and serious domestic political debate over Fico's decision as President Kiska declined to attend. His decision was announced earlier in March 2015 when President stated that he will commemorate the anniversary of the end of WWII only at home in Slovakia and will not go to Russia. This step could be well interpreted as a clear expression of support for Ukraine. Despite controversies over Russia's actions and its meddling in Ukraine as well as President's decision, Fico decided to travel to Moscow and honor the Victory Day celebrations. In his view the historical aspect prevailed over the current political turmoil between Russia and Ukraine. With Czech President Miloš Zeman and President of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades he was one of the few European leaders to do so while not joining the long list of EU's statements who boycotted the celebrations. However, what is even more interesting, PM Fico visited Moscow again on June 2nd. During this meeting he reaffirmed his counterparts, both PM Medvedev as well as President Putin, that there are no open issues that would harm Slovak-Russian relations. It should be taken into consideration

while in 2015 out of 20,8 bcm 12,7 came from the EU and 8,1 from Russia (39%). In 2015, imports of gas from the European market more than doubled from 5.0 to 10.3 bcm. In 2015, the import from the Russian Federation decreased 2.4 times compared to 2014, from 14.5 to 6.1 bcm. As a result, the share of Russian supplies in Ukraine's gas consumption decreased from 34% in 2014 to 18% in 2015.

that PM pragmatic approach towards Russia did not harm the pragmatic relations with Ukraine especially when it comes to energy issues, reverse gas flow and the energy security of CEE countries. That was well illustrated in September 2015 during Ukrainian PM Arsenij Jaceňuk visit of Slovakia where he met both President Kiska and PM Fico. Following the meeting with PM Fico in Bratislava both PMs remained very critical towards Nord Stream 2 project calling it anti-Ukrainian and anti-European project.

In the 2nd half of the year 2016 Slovakia chaired its first-ever presidency in the Council of the European Union. This event most significantly shaped the Slovak foreign policy agenda. Bratislava became one of the European political power centers what could be also seen by informal gathering of 27 European leaders without the British PM in Bratislava on 16th of September 2016, so called Bratislava summit. The political program of the Presidency tried to reflect upon the need to contribute to a development of a secure, prosperous and democratic European society. It was putting forward a positive agenda based on four priorities: economically strong Europe, modern single market, *sustainable migration and asylum policies and globally engaged Europe*.

Six months of the EU presidency offered great opportunities to pay more attention to the current development in Ukraine, to the Ukraine-Russia as well as EU-Russia relations. It was also important to discuss Eastern Partnership issue more intensively on the European level as Ukraine and Georgia already achieved essential progress on their way to the integration or at least to the deeper, comprehensive and closer cooperation with the EU.

Especially in the context of relations with Eastern Partnership countries Slovak Presidency tried to promote an effective European neighborhood policy that seeks to maintain the momentum of the accession process. During the Presidency Slovak FM Miroslav Lajčák stated

at the Alpbach Forum that „*the Eastern Partnership policy of the European Union aims to extend stability, predictability and prosperity in our neighborhood and is not directed against anyone.*” He further underlined that since Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine already have association agreements with the EU on political convergence and economic integration, „*the biggest challenge for the EU now in this context is to define where we want the Eastern Partnership to be directed.*” (Lajčák: Východné partnerstvo..., 2016) In terms of progress regarding visa liberalization with Ukraine Slovak presidency brought concrete results. Slovakia has succeeded in reaching an agreement on the suspension mechanism.⁸⁹ It was a condition for visa liberalization for countries like Ukraine and Georgia. Agreement at the level of COREPER was reached on November 17, 2016. The process of adoption of the regulation on visa liberalization for Ukrainian citizens was finished under the Maltese Presidency in the first half of 2017. The visa requirement was formally lifted on June 11, 2017 and at this occasion Slovak President Andrej Kiska met his Ukrainian counterpart Petro Poroshenko at a border crossing in Vyšké Nemecké-Uzhgorod.

Ukraine`s image and its place in Europe`s security architecture

In 1993, Ukraine's Deputy Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk described Europe's security architecture as resting on twin pillars - strategic partnerships between Germany and France and Ukraine and Poland. (Dobriansky) Regarding current Europe's security architecture one might ask whether the crisis has led to its collapse. For 20 years Europe has been building a system relying on security collaboration with its underlying principles of refraining from either threatening or using force, of respect for national sovereignty and territorial integrity, the inviolability of borders,

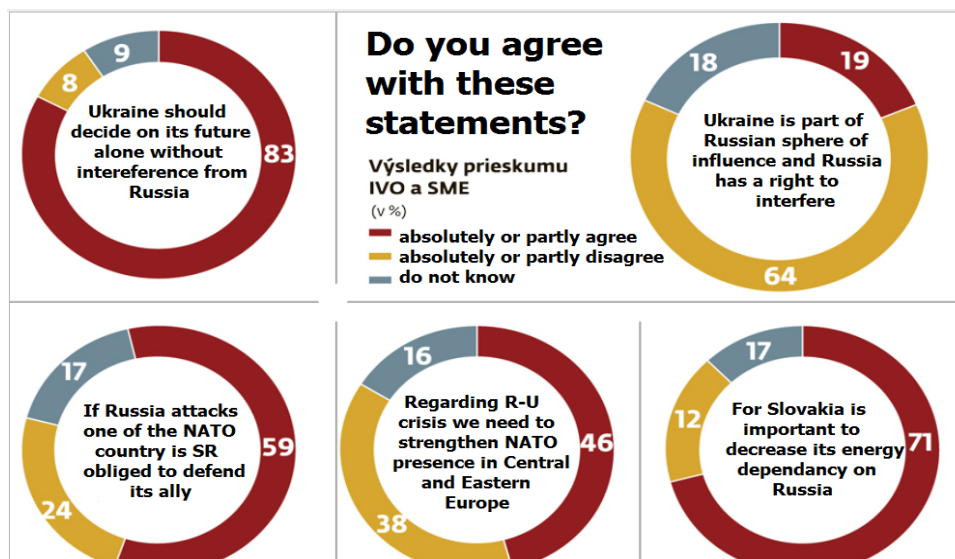
⁸⁹ The mechanism sets out the conditions under which the visa may be reintroduced.

and the right of states to choose freely their allies. These principles are contained in the UN Charter and in such underlying documents of European security as the CSCE's Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris, as well as in the Founding Act on NATO-Russia relations. *"The EU's sanctions should not be lifted until the reasons for those sanctions have disappeared, which does not seem likely to happen any time soon"*. Russia violated these principles when its troops set foot in Ukraine. But that violation does not necessarily mean the end of Europe's security architecture. A violation of agreed upon principles doesn't make them automatically null and void, for this crisis has both unified and strengthened Europe. But even if the basic principles of that architecture still apply, the security environment has clearly changed. Borders have been changed by force and the predictability of international relations has been seriously reduced. (Paet, 2015)

We could assume Ukraine has EU absolute support but this is not reality in all aspects. Rather we could say Ukraine's position in the EU is very questionable because of some influencing steps taken by Russia which "force" not only Slovakia but also other European states to think about proper foreign policy behavior towards both Ukraine and Russia. All parties, the EU as well as Russia, are aware of their interdependence in energy, economic and security area therefore each "incorrect" political decision would lead to more stagnation of their relations and to more tension with negative impact on their economies or energetic interests.

As a consequence despite the EU's unity towards sanctioning Russia due to its actions in Ukraine, its former "strategic partner" (that by some has been called "a strategic enemy") still has much leverage. First is the chronic energy supply dependency as most Eastern and Central European countries still import most of or all their gas from Russia. Second, Russia directly funds far left and right wing populist parties in nearly half of the EU countries (including France, the UK, and Germany), of which many,

along with opposing further European integration, favor closer ties with Russia or an exit from the EU. Third, the case with the French *Mistral* warship deal in 2014 proved Russia plays EU countries against one another to raise tensions and mistrust. Likewise, Russia sabotages the possibilities for deeper EU–NATO cooperation as it strengthens ties with historical adversaries like Turkey and Cyprus. Although NATO has carried out reassurance and deterrence measures, it is not yet the ultimate answer to the multifaceted challenges to European security the Ukraine crisis has either unearthed or deeper exacerbated. Likewise, the Ukraine crisis highlighted that the EU and NATO had not been expecting, nor were prepared, to meet the challenges of hybrid warfare consisting of massive propaganda campaigns and proxy insurgent groups used in combination with conventional politico-military tools. The longer the Ukraine crisis remains unresolved, the longer Russia will be perceived globally as “a winner” over EU and Western powers, which have not been able to avert new protracted conflict zones in countries willing to integrate within their structures. (Bambals, 2015)



Graph 2: Slovak views on Ukraine (2014)

Source: Institute for Public Affairs - IVO, 2014

As we can see, the situation in EU regarding the position of Ukraine in the EU architecture is very precarious. Although some surveys, such as the results of the IVO and SME survey, (visible in the diagram above) show that there is a strong support for Ukraine in the Slovak public. It agrees absolutely or partly with the statements, Ukraine should decide on its future alone without interference of Russia; Slovakia is obliged as a NATO member to defend its allies if Russia attacks a NATO member state and also with the statements to strengthen NATO presence in Central and Eastern Europe and subsequently to decrease energy dependence on Russia. In our opinion, the first results and public opinions would correspond with the opinion and decisions of Slovak political leaders. This issue is also closely connected with the next statement of the survey; Ukraine is part of Russian sphere of influence and Russia has right to interfere; with which both political elite and general public absolutely or partly disagree. Obligation to defend NATO allies is also clear and without any doubts, even though current political elite does not promote strengthening of NATO presence in Slovakia.

Convergence of divergence with the rest of the EU

In fact, the Slovak internal debate only reflected a broader distribution of views within the EU, which included also other Central and Eastern European countries with significant pro-Russian views. As regard the *Visegrad Group*, V4 positions towards Ukraine and Russia represent a twofold story – one at the multilateral and second at the bilateral level. The Ukrainian „*revolution of dignity*” followed by Ukrainian crisis and latter Russian aggression found Visegrad Four (V4) countries unprepared in having a common European answer for these crucial events. This was well demonstrated by significantly different, sometimes even opposite understandings and positions regarding European prospects of Ukraine as

well as Russia's actions and their consequences for the Central European security. All four Central European countries mirror a broader distribution of positions within the EU, with a strong pro-Ukrainian line of Poland on one side, Hungary aligning in a pro-Russian stance on the other and ambivalent positions of Czech Republic and Slovakia. (Lenč, 2015)

Visegrad Group has recently deepened its cooperation with Ukraine in some specific areas of their interests. On the one side their military cooperation is developing as representatives of general staffs of the Visegrad Four met on the occasion of passing the V4 military presidency from the Czech Republic to Poland on a two-day meeting discussing military cooperation inside the V4 and with Ukraine, whereby Ukraine's joining the V4 EU Battle Group is one of the examples in which the coordination has already occurred. Ukraine has contributed to it by singling out its capacities of strategic air transport. Another direction in which V4-Ukraine cooperation may be heading is reform of the logistics of the armed forces. Moreover Ukrainian military may be helped by the training and education of its officers in the Czech training command in Vyskov. (CTK, 2016)

On the other side it is also interesting to observe initiatives of the V4 to deepen its cooperation with this Eastern European country. V4 countries announced a plan to create a special fund to support Ukraine. While the assets of the Fund have not been made public, it was announced that the Fund is ready to provide Ukrainian students with 410 scholarships to study in Europe. In addition to this step during the official meeting in Kyiv with the Foreign Ministers of Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko announced Ukraine's intention to join the "Visegrad Four", and subsequently to convert the group into "Visegrad five". Thus, it is essential to deepen cooperation between Ukraine and the "Visegrad Group", in particular, for sharing the European experience

and further development of cross-border cooperation in the process of enlargement of the European Union (using certain benefits from the creation of free economic zones, development of joint cross-border projects and cross-border infrastructure, improvement of cross-border control, etc.). It is also important to consult on other issues of mutual interest, such as promotion of political and economic interests of Ukraine in international organizations and receiving effective assistance from the countries of the Visegrad Group in the form of additional financial resources. (Makoukh, 2016)

Taking into account current political trends in Central Europe as well as rising East-West tensions among the EU member states, Slovakia could take over an *honest broker* position among Visegrad countries and Ukraine's Western neighbors. Slovakia might be favored for this position as it has neither a checkered history like Poland, nor a sizable minority like Hungary. However, this position has not yet been consolidated for various reasons: the lack of focus and capacity Slovakia devoted to its largest neighbor (as the Euro-Atlantic integration was an absolute priority) as well as its traditionally balanced position when it comes to Ukraine as well as Russia. (Jarábik, 2016)

An important energy issue that might possibly trigger Slovak-Ukrainian as well as Slovak-German relations is the future of the project Nord Stream 2. Both Bratislava as well as Kyiv perceive Nord Stream 2 as a threat to own national interests and a politically motivated project, which main objective is to cut off Ukraine from the position of a transit country in terms of transit of Russian gas to Western European customers. It should be noted that the construction of additional transmission capacity is unnecessary, since the necessary capacity already exists. Just to illustrate the capacity of the Brotherhood pipeline is 90 bcm³/year, but its real use is

currently at 46.5 bcm³/year. The planned capacity of Nord Stream 2 is 55 bcm³/year. (Nord Stream goes against ... 2, 2015)

Scenarios for future developments

The current situation and development offers to Slovakia both – great political and economic potential on one hand, but also direct threats to its security. The country's diplomacy is very much aware of the fact that the Russian aggression in the East of Ukraine represents a serious threat to its own national security in case no progress will be found in Minsk II deal and no real solution to the conflict will be found. From the political and military point of view it is obvious, without Russia it is impossible to find any solution to the Ukrainian crisis.

Further on, Slovakia was in a similar position to Ukraine as a state in the 1990s and 2000s and therefore fully realizes the potential economic and political challenges. So if Ukraine anchors itself in the EU economic and security sphere, Slovakia could and should benefit considerably as addressing the economic problems is one of the pillars how to solve the current political and military crisis in Ukraine. Slovakia has a potential to play a crucial role in Ukraine's aspiration of much bigger economic cooperation with the EU and we should be prepared for this change (to be a strategic window or bridge between the EU/West and Ukraine). Along with our diplomatic efforts, it is probably one of the most crucial roles we can play in the current crisis and changing geo-economical and geo-political situation.

There are strong arguments for Ukraine's possible accession to the EU from the long-term perspective, especially in the economic terms. Enlargement of our eastern neighbor would flesh out the obstacles that hinder the development of trade between the Slovak Republic and Ukraine.

The rate of our bilateral trade is currently the lowest in comparison with other neighboring countries of Slovakia. In 2014 it amounted import from Ukraine only 0.92% of the total import and export of the SR 0.5% of total Slovak exports. (MZVaEZ SR, 2015) The country welcomed Ukraine's Association Agreement as a tool that might Ukraine closer towards EU not only economically, but also politically and that can serve as modernization instrument for modernization of Ukraine's large Soviet-style inherited economy.

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Passing the Buck or Dividing the Work?

The UK's Approach to the Ukraine Crisis

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Abstract. *The United Kingdom has not been a very active player in the post-Soviet space since at least the mid-1990s. Yet, the “Revolution of Dignity”, the annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas had a profound impact on British foreign policy debates and public opinion. This article tries to systematically assess what impact the crisis had on Ukraine’s image in the UK and on London’s foreign policy towards the conflict. It argues that despite the UK’s absence in more high-profile formats for conflict resolution, London had been instrumental in the EU’s wider approach to the crisis. Instead of “passing the buck” to others, the more homogeneous position of both UK elites and public on the conflict and its main actors helped to install and uphold a tough sanctions regime against the Russians and assure considerable material support for Ukraine. Yet Brexit, reflecting an apparent more general rift between elites and the public in the UK, might not only become a challenge for the UK’s so far considerably Europeanized foreign policy, but also for its supportive position on Ukraine.*

Keywords: *Ukraine, Russia, UK, Brexit, Crimea, annexation, crisis, war.*

Introduction

“We should define what our national interest is in this instance and I think it is that Britain benefits from there being a world where countries obey the rules and where there is a rules-based global system. We are an international country - a country that relies on the world’s markets being open, and on countries obeying norms and standards of behavior. We know what price is paid if we turn a blind eye when such things happen: we build up much bigger problems for the future” (David Cameron, House of Commons 2014)

This paper is designed to analyze the United Kingdom’s Ukraine policy and to ask what effect the events since late 2013, the Euromaidan, the annexation of Crimea and the War in the Donbas had both on Ukraine’s image in the UK and on foreign policy-making towards Kyiv and Moscow. Finally, the UK’s policies are to be assessed in the wider framework of the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy in general and Brussel’s approach to the crisis in Ukraine in particular. What kind of player is the UK inside CFSP and did the crisis in Europe’s East draw London closer into EU foreign policy-thinking and decision-making?

I argue here that the UK’s approach to the crisis in Ukraine has initially been a very reluctant one as in the majority of EU countries, reflecting not only the low priority and knowledge about Ukraine among the UK’s elite and public, but also the subordinate position of Europe’s East in London’s foreign policy in general. In light of the annexation of Crimea British policy-makers were then more eager than most of their European colleagues to call things by their name, criticize Russia strongly and

support the political results of the Ukrainian “Revolution of Dignity”. With the conflict extending to the Donbas London also decided to lend Kyiv considerable economic and humanitarian support, culminating in the sending of military advisory personnel. However, it seems that on the more political dimension, such as in conflict resolution via the “Minsk Agreements”, the UK restrained itself and let Germany and France take the lead.

So has the UK, as one of the “big three” players inside the EU largely “passed the buck” to Germany and France in regulating the Ukraine crisis? Is there something to the argument that the significance of Russian capital for London has an effect on Ukraine-policy? And is its alleged withdrawn position a reflection of wider debates such as around Brexit and a new pragmatism in the UK’s foreign policy?

The paper starts with an assessment of the state of the art in British foreign policy in general. The second part intends to analyze the image of Ukraine and the perception of the crisis among the British elites and the public since 2013. In the third and main part London’s policy towards the post-Soviet region and Ukraine is assessed. Here, I first examine if and how Ukraine figured in British foreign policy discourses before 2013. Based on that, it is asked whether the events of 2014 led to a re-examination of earlier policies and what the UK has specifically done since then in terms of political and material investment in Ukraine. The main part finishes with a discussion of the central question why the UK did not take part in the “Normandy format” and if that reflects some kind of drawn back position, lack of interest or even anti-EU sentiments. The article concludes with a chapter on the UK’s role vis-à-vis CFSP and the likely consequences Brexit will have for London’s foreign policies and Ukraine in particular.

A Note on British Foreign Policy and its Prolonged Crisis

If one thing is certain about British conduct in international affairs and the UK's self-perception as an international actor, it is a sustained inherent vision of greatness and a role not only as a major part, but autonomous architect of world order on par with the great powers of the twentieth century. The most vivid and lasting verbalization of this view has been Winston Churchill's famous 1948 "three great circles" theory, in which Britain is placed like a hub between its former Empire, the English-speaking world and Europe, able of "joining them all together" and securing a "safe and happy future for humanity" (Davis 2013). Notwithstanding the changing international and domestic environment since the late 1940s – Britain's post-WWII decline in relative power terms, the effects of decolonization diminishing the significance of the Commonwealth, and not least the shrinking cohesion of the island countries itself during recent decades – the majority of Prime Ministers have held on to this paradigmatic view (eds Daddow & Gaskarth 2011, p. 232).

The British self-perception in combination with an ever more complex post-9/11 world order, the effects of globalization and major foreign policy decisions themselves have brought Britain into a delicate international position. First and most obvious is that the perceived "great power" status does not match the actual capacities of the United Kingdom. While a new - and in many ways post-European international order does in no way lend the assumed major position to the UK, its military resources were overstretched in Afghanistan and Iraq. Second, Britain's quest to act as a "bridge" between the US and Europe, the two remaining "circles", was unsuccessful. London was hardly able to influence US foreign policy under both George W. Bush and Barack Obama and be more than a junior, not to speak of a "special partner" (Ibid., p. 225). In the European "circle" the

British position inside the EU suffered from its lack of commitment to the European project, which esp. since the creation of the Eurozone turned the UK itself into something of an outsider to European politics and its underlying coalitions (Wallace, 2005). Third, British foreign policy, with its tendency to over-ambitiousness, policy failures such as the war in Iraq, and its (at best) ambivalent course towards Brussels has contributed to a profound crisis of elite trust and legitimacy in British politics, co-preparing the ground for the 2016 Brexit referendum.

Under such general circumstances much caution seems to be justified in regard to an analysis of the UK's response to the conflict in Ukraine. In contrast to the states of Central Eastern Europe, the Post-Soviet region has never been a priority for London after the Cold War (see the discussion below). Moreover, with the poor record of London's policy of "liberal interventionism" in recent years and a foreign policy debate favoring more pragmatism and commercial thinking, the mood to engage oneself in new theatres – especially for the sake of democracy – must also have been especially low. Above all, the UK's governing conservative elites' highly critical attitude towards the EU and its role as a true foreign policy actor can hardly be dismissed as factors influencing British thinking and policy-making in the Ukraine conflict. For many EU critics in the UK, the EU's role especially in the early phase of the conflict should have served as an ideal pretext to slash out on the EU extending too far in every regard and thereby even jeopardizing peace on the continent.

The Image of Ukraine in the UK and the 2014 Debate

As in many EU countries Ukraine does not figure much and is not regularly covered in the UK press – even in a 2015 survey UK respondents were hardly able to name key associations with Ukraine other than Kyiv (5%),

Eurovision (5%) and the national football team (4%). Most respondents tellingly named War (33%) and Russia (33%) as their major associations (Institute of World Policy 2015). While it is fair to say that the public attitude has been one of neglect and ignorance especially before 2013, UK political elites also hardly had Ukraine on their minds before the events of the “Orange Revolution” in 2004 – with the notable exception of the debate around the removal of nuclear weapons from Ukraine during the mid-90s. In this chapter, we will ask for the reasons behind that observation and look if there is nevertheless a sort of a dynamic since the “Euromaidan” in late 2013.

The “Russia Prism”

One of the main phenomena named by many interviewees when it came to Ukraine’s image in the UK is the strong tendency of elites and public alike to look at it through a “Russia prism”. As in many other EU countries this seems due to a serious lack of knowledge about the country and structures or experts covering Ukraine as their major subject. Most Eastern Europe-related academic institutes and think tanks concentrate on Russia and, according to an interviewee based in one, largely reinforced the “myth of a somewhat legitimate Russian sphere of influence in its ‘near abroad’” during the crisis (Wolczuk, 2015). Even more critical is the situation among media and journalists: few of those who covered or commented on the events since late 2013 had any regional knowledge nor language capabilities, whereas a strong “Russia-” and “Russian media-filter” was ensured by the fact that reporting on Ukrainian events was taken over by Moscow-based correspondents and that Russia experts were easily treated as Ukraine experts (Ackles, 2015). Russian propaganda contributed to the “Russia prism”, which officials said is a “challenge” also in the UK. “Russia Today UK” has been launched in October 2014 (with somewhat self-inflated audience numbers), but even traditional quality press

sometimes seems to be open to Russian influence – one example being the weekly “Rossiskaya Gazeta”, a supplement of the “Daily Telegraph”. The “Independent” and the “Evening Standard” belong to a Russian oligarch Alexander Lebedev (Spence 2015). Furthermore, the BBC came under criticism at the outset of the crisis when more critical reporting was nearly absent with the conflict portrayed in a “Russia says this, Ukraine says that” manner.

Pro-Ukrainian Centre, Pro-Russian Fringe Politics?

A second trend the UK has in common with other major EU countries is the way in which the events in Ukraine since late 2013, but especially since the annexation of Crimea, were interpreted quite differently by the political center on the one hand and both left-wing and right-wing forces on the other. Whereas the Cameron government, the Liberal Democrats and major parts of the Labour Party saw the Maidan as a “classical case of revolution for freedom” and supported Ukraine against its internal and external foes, left- and right wing-forces were consistently expressing themselves in a pro-Russian and anti-Western direction. However, differences in degree matter and a closer look at the arguments is thus justified.

For example, it is interesting to analyze the extended House of Commons debate on Ukraine on March 10, 2014, when the Russian-supported referendum plans on Crimea were in full swing. It is obvious that the referendum is deemed illegal by a wide trans-partisan majority of the House and that the PM’s plaid for the EU’s “three phase-approach” is not only widely supported, but that tougher rhetoric against Moscow and more concrete actions and proposals for eventual sanctions against Russia are demanded from the Prime Minister by the opposition and many of his own party’s MP’s:

“(…) I welcome the European Council’s decision to look at further measures, although the agreed language is weaker than we would have wished. I welcome what the Prime Minister said about asset freezes and travel bans” (Edward Miliband (L), House of Commons 2014).

“(…) does the Prime Minister not think it might be more reassuring for the British public if he were completely to rule out any sharing of military and technical information with the Russians for the foreseeable future?” (Steve MacCabe (L), House of Commons 2014).

Another interesting facet of the debate is the strong support especially the Prime Minister lends to the Ukrainian or the Maidan’s cause on the one hand and the strong anti-Russian undertone of many MP’s on the other:

“(…) we decided to send a political message of support to the Ukrainian Government and people. The interim Ukrainian President spoke at the European Council with great power and force. The Ukrainian people want the freedom to be able to choose their own future and strengthen their ties with Europe, and they want a future free from the awful corruption that they have endured for far too long.”

“We must stand up to aggression, uphold international law and support the Ukrainian Government and the Ukrainian people, who want the freedom to choose their own future. That is right for Ukraine, right for Europe, right for Britain” (both David Cameron, House of Commons 2014).

“Will he tell the Russian officials who were involved in the

murder of Sergei Magnitsky and in the corruption he unveiled that they are not welcome in this country?” (Chris Bryant (L), House of Commons 2014).

“Is the right hon. Gentleman (the PM, t.a.) not concerned that the measures he has committed to, or set out as possibilities, may prove insufficient to disrupt that pattern? Will we not look back with great regret if this emboldens Russia to continue on this path, potentially to the door of NATO members themselves?” (John Woodcock (L), House of Commons 2014).

Finally, the debate also shows that the Ukraine crisis was immediately influenced by the larger debate on Britain’s role in the EU and its role in European foreign policy. Whereas the Prime Minister felt obliged to convince deputies about a joint European approach to the crisis and the government’s leading role in formulating an EU approach, opposition deputies used the topic to attack David Cameron on his more general EU-sceptic course, indicating the possibility of a considerable fall out in light of the Ukraine crisis.

“As with other measures, it is best if possible to take these decisions in concert with our European allies” (David Cameron, House of Commons 2014).

“We recognize the constraints on the Prime Minister in seeking to reach EU-wide agreement. However, I urge him, particularly as we approach the referendum in Crimea, to apply maximum influence on our allies, so that maximum pressure can be applied on the Russian Government. Hesitancy or weakness in the EU’s response will send precisely the wrong message” (Edward Miliband (L), House of Commons 2014).

“At the critical moment a few weeks ago, and during the street

protests in Kiev, the Foreign Ministers of Germany, France and Poland represented the European Union. Why was Britain absent from that group? Was it a deliberate choice of the UK Government, or was it a reflection of our threat to leave the European Union in three years' time?" (Pat McFadden (L), House Commons 2014).

"I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister has come to the House to make a statement on the European Council, something he has not done quite as assiduously as I think he should have done in the past" (Gisela Stuart (L), House of Commons 2014).

On the fringes of the political spectrum, rather than genuine pro-Russian leanings, a general distrust of "US-led" Western policies and NATO (left) as well as a strong anti-EU (including its "expansionism towards the East") attitude (UKIP) provided the background here. Nigel Farage, the leader of the right-wing and anti-EU UKIP party said in March 2014 (after the annexation) that the "imperialist, expansionist" EU "had blood on its hands" (BBC, March 22, 2014) because of its support for the revolution, and was also cited to "admire Putin" (Graham 2014). It is however interesting to see how Farage, obviously in light of an ever broader public consensus on the matter during 2014 (in early 2015 57% of polled UKIP supporters supported the sanctions regime) (YouGov 2015) and UKIP voters' own bigger sympathies for the Ukrainian cause (48% with new Ukrainian vs. 9% with Russian government) (YouGov 2014), adjusted his position somewhat over time, spoke more favorably about the Maidan, and at least ceased to openly support Russian actions:

"This (the EU and UK position) has encouraged brave young men and women in western Ukraine to rebel to the point of toppling a legitimate president and led to the utterly

predictable debacle whereby Vladimir Putin has annexed part of the country and now casts a long shadow over hopes of genuine democracy in the rest of it.“

“I do not support what Putin has done – of course I don’t. But the approach of David Cameron, William Hague, Nick Clegg and other EU leaders has been disastrous. If you poke the Russian bear with a stick he will respond. And if you have neither the means nor the political will to face him down that is very obviously not a good idea” (UKIP Official Website 2014).

Though the British left seems to be more pluralist on the issue (see the above Labour MP comments), the election of Jeremy Corbyn – who also repeatedly stated NATO and EU had pushed Ukraine into the conflict (Jeremy Corbyn Official Website 2014) – as party leader seems to have given anti-Western and Ukraine-critical voices more exposure too. However, despite being accused of becoming a likely future “useful idiot” (Porter 2015) for Putin’s policies by some commentators, Corbyn has never openly taken a pro-Russian position, whilst his views on the Ukraine crisis rather reflect his commitment to the anti-war movement and his outspoken critique of both US foreign policy and NATO:

“Does he not think that there would be a better chance of reaching some kind of agreement with Russia if there was a clearer statement that NATO does not intend to expand into Ukraine, and that in return Russia should withdraw from its border regions, so that we do not build up to two huge armed forces meeting in central Europe yet again?” (Jeremy Corbyn, House of Commons 2015).

Rather, what seems to have happened with the British left during the Ukraine crisis is a split into a solid center-left rejecting Russian aggression

and supporting sanctions, and a much smaller radical part, pointing at right wing radicals on the Maidan and the role of NATO “expansionism” (Croucher 2015). A proponent of the latter position is the former Labour MP George Galloway, who parted ways with the party after the Iraq War, and repeatedly spoke on “Russia Today” taking a clear pro-Russian position on the conflict:

“Russia has every right, indeed obligation, to act in defense of its compatriots, its citizens, its economic and military assets (...), which it has on the territory of Ukraine” (Russia Today America 2014).

Those views are however marginal. On the contrary, there is much more evidence that parts of the left have undergone some transition during the crisis, making it more aware of Ukrainian matters as such and also changing positions on Russia. The creation of the “Labour Friends of Ukraine Group” was directly linked by its founder to the democratic nature of Ukraine’s revolution and Russian aggressionism (Milne 2015). A good example for an evolution of leftist foreign policy orientations due to the crisis is the Welsh Labour MP Paul Flynn, a long-time critic of NATO and UK interventionism:

“I have been a longtime critic of NATO excesses. But I also recognise its key role against Putin’s and the Middle East forces of barbarism. I will not say ‘no’ or ‘yes’. Can I get a badge that reads, ‘Maybe to NATO?’” (Mansfield 2014).

Public Opinion: Whither the West?

The formation of elite positions on international issues and foreign policy does not happen in a vacuum and is to a high degree dependent on public opinion. The more ambiguous public views on an international matter are the more room of maneuver elites have, the clearer the opinion

the more bound they are. It is also obvious that what we are calling the “Ukraine crisis” took on a much bigger significance over time when steadily developing from a domestic event into an international conflict after the annexation in Crimea and the obvious involvement of Russian troops (“voluntarily” or not) in the Donbas. Thus, the topic also dominated the international headlines in the UK during 2014 and triggered a significant public debate.

What became apparent here very soon was that the British in their majority (50% vs. 33%) (YouGov 2014) interpreted the conflict as something “that should concern Britain and the Western alliance” and that the overall sympathies of UK citizens early on (as of March 2014) clearly lay with the Ukrainians (53% vs. 3% for Russians) (Ibid.). In contrast to fellow Europeans UK citizens were least convinced that what is going on in the Donbass is a civil war (Institute of World Policy 2015). The dynamics of public views on Russia are also interesting to observe: Till spring 2015 the image of Vladimir Putin and Russia in the UK dropped significantly (18% favorable of Russia, in comparison to 47% in 2007, 14% with confidence in Putin, in comparison to 37% in 2007) (Stokes 2015), with those numbers strikingly in line with the rationaly critical of Russia Poles and even lower than in the US and Canada. Additionally, the British were much more eager than Germans or Italians to put the blame for “violence in Ukraine” on Russians and separatists (57%) than on the Ukrainian government (7%) (Simmons, Stokes & Poushter 2015). As for UK partisan views, it has to be highlighted that there is a consensus across voters of all parties that the sympathies in the conflict lie with the Ukrainians (YouGov 2014). The three major parties’ numbers (Conservatives, Labour, LibDems) are also more or less comparable in their assessment of how to react to the crisis. Only past Labour voters are slightly more inclined to stay out of the conflict altogether (with 28% vs. 21% of Conservatives and Liberals)

(AngusReidGlobal 2014), and only among potential UKIP voters has there been a majority (48% vs. 40%) (YouGov 2014) for treating this crisis as a matter between Ukraine and Russia only. The most striking finding here is that although an absolute majority of voters across the big three UK parties is satisfied with the government's response to the crisis, a significantly bigger proportion of voters of each party would prefer a tougher approach against Russia (between 34 and 37%) (AngusReidGlobal 2014).

Notwithstanding the lack of surveys and data for a dynamic assessment of public opinion on the crisis a relatively clear picture emerges. The annexation of Crimea and the later obvious support of Donbass separatism had a devastating effect on the image of Russia and its president in the UK; that support for Ukrainians was very high in relative terms; and that there was a cross-partisan consensus on the nature of the conflict as well as on the form of its regulation. In comparison to other European publics the British seem to have refuted Monaghan's argument that the country tends to take a middle position between Russian sympathizers (Germany, Italy) and critics (Poles, Swedes) among EU states (Monaghan 2005). In fact, it was much closer to the more radical Poles and firmly in line (although slightly less so on preferred policies, see above) with US and Canadian positions.

The Dynamics of London's Ukraine Policies

Ukraine in British Foreign Policy till 2013

During the 1990s Ukraine clearly had not been a priority in British foreign policy, not even among the countries in the Post-Soviet Region. The most pressing questions for London after the Cold War were the management of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the connected question of Ukraine's suddenly inherited nuclear weapons arsenal (Alexandrova 1996). As soon

as the latter question was regulated however, the focus changed to the political and economic development of the Russian Federation itself, while the space “in between” Russia and the Central and Eastern European states – soon destined for inclusion into Western political institutions – was neglected. In fact, the today (in)famous Budapest Memorandum of 1994 remained at least until 2008 the only international effort at the management of this increasingly obvious “grey zone” in Europe’s security architecture. Tellingly, the Memorandum foresaw only consolations in case of its violation by one of the parties. Yet, that lack of geopolitical foresight seems awkward only from today’s point of view since a self-occupied Russia and Ukraine at least until the early 2000s enjoyed rather friendly (or “brotherly”) relations.

The first rifts in the relationship between these two biggest successor states of the Soviet Union occurred in 2004, when the so called “Orange Revolution” managed to overturn the fraudulent election of Putin-supported Viktor Yanukovych for Ukrainian president. The then reactions of UK elites and public were however not too much enthusiastic, portraying rather a sense of distance, as a 2004 citation from Timothy Gatten Ash and a 2014 retrospective by James Sherr demonstrate:

“Why won't all these bloody, semi-barbarian, east Europeans leave us alone, to go on living happily ever after in our right, tight, little west European (or merely British) paradise?” (Gatten Ash 2004).

“The very blunt answer is that Ukraine has not been a priority for No.10 and until recently it is not certain that it has even been on their radar. (...) Instead, Britain’s priorities have been the global financial crisis and the limited overseas military commitments that we have” (Sherr quoted in Freeman 2014).

More important in strategic terms were however the consecutive gas crises between both countries between 2005 and 2009, creating temporary gas shortages esp. in Central Eastern European states but also questioning EU energy security as such. From that time on London had Ukraine “on the screen” but opted for a cautious approach nevertheless. The UK, a supporter of ENP and Eastern Partnership (eds Magone, Laffan & Schweiger 2016, p. 62), never went beyond the EU’s limited design for the region. In fact, it seems that the usual British approach to EU politics, preferring enlargement (widening) over more political integration (deepening) did (despite some rhetoric) not apply to Ukraine or any post-Soviet country. The reasons for that might be twofold: the disillusion with the development of the region after 1991, manifesting itself in hardly concealed authoritarian projects and high levels of corruption, and geopolitical cautiousness stemming from Russian forces’ presence in Crimea and Moscow’s rejection of further NATO expansion in its “near abroad”. Accordingly, when Ukraine’s and Georgia’s NATO membership bids were about to become real prospects at NATO’s Bucharest summit in early 2008, then PM Gordon Brown distanced itself from US policy and rejected “Membership Actions Plans” for both countries together with Germany and France (Brown 2008). Even the Georgian-Russian war in August the same year was taken by Brown as a confirmation of his earlier policies, obviously hinting at existing territorial conflicts making both Georgia and Ukraine unfit for NATO membership.

The 2014/2015 Review and London’s Reaction

When deadly violence broke out on the Maidan in late February 2014 events in Ukraine finally took center stage also in Western media. It soon became clear after the overthrow of the regime and the ousting of Viktor Yanukovich as president that the conflict would not remain a domestic affair. The annexation of Crimea and the subsequent destabilization of

Eastern Ukraine by Russian and pro-Russian forces during the spring largely took Western and also UK politicians by surprise. Obviously, events in Kyiv served as a template for a wider regional strategy on behalf of Moscow, which successfully speculated on unprepared and slowly reacting Western states and institutions. As for the later British debate on the reasons of the conflict and related foreign policy reactions several observations can be made based on a report by the House of Lords' European Committee (House of Lords 2015).

First of all, the report was highly critical about the EU's (and therefore also the UK's) obvious lack of inside knowledge about Ukrainian and regional politics as such. That can – with the benefit of hindsight – taken as a confirmation for the above-mentioned neglect the UK and other major EU member states paid to the states in the critical geopolitical “greyzone” between the EU and Russia especially after the EU's Eastern Enlargement in 2004 and 2007. Neither the last-minute refusal of Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich to sign the long prepared Association Agreement with the EU at the Vilnius Summit nor the furious reaction to that by the Ukrainian people, and – most of all – Moscow's reaction to both the EU's offer and the revolution in Kyiv were in anyway foreseen.

“An element of ‘sleep-walking’ was evident in the run-up to the crisis in Ukraine, and important analytical mistakes were made by the EU. (...) The EU and Member States lacked good intelligence-gathering capacity on the ground. The lack of an integrated and coordinated foreign policy was also evident” (Ibid.).

“Collectively, the EU overestimated the intention of the Ukrainian leadership to sign an Association Agreement, appeared unaware of the public mood in Ukraine and, above all,

underestimated the depth of Russian hostility towards the Association Agreement. While each of these factors was understood separately, Member States, the European External Action Service and the Commission did not connect the dots” (Ibid.).

Second, the report confronts Brussels – with the contribution of London to that not explicitly mentioned here – with major shortcomings in its foreign policy, which according to the authors have both structural and strategic grounds. While the ENP seems to lack a proper definition of and agreement on interests towards the region overall, its concentration on economic rationals and instruments is seen to lead to a neglect of the (geo-)political perspective. The report sees the major strategic fauxpas however in the EU’s policy towards countries of the region which are aspiring to EU membership. Precisely the lack of clarity on this question combined with the ENP’s “more for more”-approach is said here to have led to false assumptions in those states and – less pronounced but surely implicitly meant – to Russia’s mistrust and strong unilateral reaction:

“There is an unresolved tension between the offer of membership on the table to Eastern Partnership countries and the political will of member states to follow through (...). This creates unrealistic expectations and complicates Russia’s relationship both with these countries and with the EU. Member states must clarify whether EU membership is on offer” (Ibid.).

“It is clear that Russian concerns about the impact of EU trade agreements, while having an economic basis, were also politically driven, while in seeking to address Russian concerns the Commission was putting forward free-market liberal economic arguments. Both sides were to some extent talking

past each other. The absence of Member States' political oversight during this process is glaring" (Ibid.).

Next to those critical aspects it is however telling that the report does not deny that in the face of Russia's aggressive policies, not only a strong sanctions-approach coordinated with the US, but also a unified and better coordinated EU approach is necessary from the authors' position. In contrast to assessments that criticized especially British policy towards the conflict for trying to "diminish the actorness of the EU" by deliberately taking a withdrawn position, here the Commission is not only specifically mentioned as an effective rule-enforcer vis-à-vis the Russians, the reports' authors moreover call upon the EU member states to get more engaged in a common as well as bilateral format:

"The European Commission has played a strong and effective role in holding Russia to its international commitments in the World Trade Organization" (Ibid.).

"The very fact of the European Council exercising its decision-making processes and strategic thinking on Russia will, by demonstrating the engagement of Member States, send an important message to the Russian government. To maintain political oversight, we recommend that the UK Government should ensure that a discussion on Russia is regularly placed on the agenda of the European Council" (Ibid.).

"Europe is at the centre of the crisis in Ukraine and relations with Russia. The handling of future relations is a key test for European diplomacy and foreign policy, yet hitherto divisions between Member States have been the most important factor hampering development of a strategic EU policy on Russia. In the long term, only a dual approach, with Member States acting

together as well as using their bilateral connections in the service of EU policy, will be effective. The first step must be to maintain solidarity on current policy and to continue to seek a common approach in the response to the crisis. There is a real danger that once the crisis ebbs away Member States will continue to prioritize their economic relations above their shared strategic interests” (Ibid.).

How does the British reaction to the conflict look like, is there – following the above mentioned public trends and the reassessment of London’s Ukraine- and Russia-policy – a substantial amount of foreign policy change discernible? And, how does the British response to the conflict in Ukraine relate to the wider debate about the UK’s place in the world?

First of all, it seems that we have to distinguish clearly between the response of London to events inside Ukraine on the one hand, and towards the conflict and i.e. Russia on the other. As far as the domestic Ukrainian arena and e.g. Britain’s support for a successful transformation of Ukraine into a resilient democratic and corruption free state is concerned, the “National Security Strategy and Strategic Defense and Security Review” of 2015 sets high goals:

“We support a diplomatic resolution of the crisis in Ukraine and will continue to work to uphold Ukraine’s sovereignty, assist its people and build resilience. We have provided humanitarian aid, and we will continue to support Ukraine with advice and assistance on fighting corruption, defence reform and training their Armed Forces. We will also continue to support the EU Assistance Mission which the UK was instrumental in launching, as part of a wider package of support from the EU” (United Kingdom Government 2015).

Subsequently, London's investment in humanitarian, economic and defense assistance has been considerable: Already since 2014 the UK has developed into the 2nd largest bilateral donor in humanitarian assistance for Ukraine with an amount of 16,4 Mln. pounds reaching Ukraine via various agencies such as the WHO and UNHCR, while 10 mln. pounds are given as economic assistance to Kyiv from 2014-2016 via the UK's Department for International Development. Ukraine is also a key priority in a UK-sponsored, 20 Mln. pounds-heavy "good governance fund" for five countries of the Post-Soviet region. Even more significantly, London – following a lifting of an arms embargo against Kyiv by the EU in 2014 – has repeatedly delivered a substantial amount of non-lethal aid to Ukraine worth nearly 1 mln. pound only in 2014, while it has send to date 75 military training personnel to various locations in Ukraine focusing on medical and ground threat awareness (mines). In 2014 and 2015 Kyiv has furthermore been a main beneficiary of the UK government's "Conflict Pool", receiving far over 1 mln. pounds for various activities (UK Embassy Kyiv 2015). Adding to this, the UK also agreed at the NATO Summit in Wales that it would lead a "Trust Fund"-initiative for Ukraine with at least another 400.000 € of UK assistance (Mills 2015). Although military assistance to Ukraine is not entirely new and does not foresee to include any combat troops, the UK defence secretary Michael Fallon was more than outspoken about the reasons for the UK's increased support in 2015:

"As part of the wider government effort to support Ukraine and ensure a robust response to Russia's aggression (...)" (quoted in Ibid.).

Official (an un-quotable) sources pointed in interviews to the fact that more money from London could be offered if only the bureaucracy-hampered asorption capacity of the country would be higher. All these steps have also been accompanied by structural changes inside the Foreign and

Commonwealth Office, reflecting the increased awareness of British foreign policy makers towards Eastern Europe in general and Ukrainian affairs specifically. The growing role of communication and anti-propaganda measures in light of Russian actions has been esp. reflected: Whereas the former desk officer in London has been replaced by a full team concentrating on strategic communications, embassy staff in Kyiv has been increased, including a regional conflict advisor and more political personnel. On a more individual level, the increased importance of the issue has led to a more high profile nominations, including the new British ambassador in Kyiv, Judith Gough (from Sept. 2015), having been director for the East European and Central Asia region inside the FCO before, and by the change of the former Director Intelligence and National Security, Laurie Bristow, to the position of British envoy to Moscow in 2015.

The Conflict: Has Britain Passed the Buck?

However, these obvious changes stand in sharp contradiction to the debate about the British non-participation in the more high profile attempts and formats of EU member states aiming at a regulation of the conflict in Ukraine's East. The debate centers especially around the later void agreement between then Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych and the Ukrainian opposition on 20th February 2014 in Kyiv, which was facilitated by German, French, Polish and Russian representatives, and the so called "Normandy Format." The semi-official format, a contact group including Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine, operational since June 2014 on heads of states- and foreign minister level, became instrumental in the Minsk II accords of February 2015. From the very beginning, the absence of London both in Kyiv and later in the format has been taken as confirmation by critics for a lack of engagement and interest in Ukraine and East European Affairs on behalf of Britain at best, and for a signs of an ever

more anti-EU-trend in British foreign policy or even pro-Russian leanings at worst:

“Institutionally, the Ukraine crisis was tackled with the aid of mediation by three EU foreign ministers, from France, Germany and Poland, co-signing the agreement that preceded the end of the Yanukovych regime. This was a new ‘big three’ in action on behalf of the EU. Why was the UK not there, since in the past it would automatically have been invited in these informal self-selection process to be part of the leading action? Answer: some combination of Poland’s successful diplomatic activism by foreign minister Radoslaw Sikorsky, and the UK having vacated its seat through persistently wanting to minimize the ‘actorness’ of the EU” (Emerson 2014).

"The UK is a major NATO member, it is a major EU member, it is a member of the UN Security Council, and it is unfortunate that the weight that the British prime minister could bring to efforts to resolve this crisis appears to be absent" (Shireff quoted in Wesel 2015).

These accusations are not without grounds. As we have seen above, the UK has not played a very active role in Eastern Europe since the end of the Cold War, while its new foreign policy priorities such as border protection, the fight against terrorism and a more general anti-interventionist, commercialist-pragmatic trend do hardly speak for more engagement in the Post-Soviet space. Additionally, it became obvious from the UK debate following the annexation of Crimea that the EU’s role was indeed seen very critical also by many mainstream MP’s, esp. regarding the ENP’s alleged arousing of “unrealistic expectations” and its overtly economic focus. A call for more bilateralism and more traditional foreign policy could hardly be overheard in London. Finally, there have even been

voices explaining British absenteeism with the reliance of the City, London's financial center, on Russian oligarch's money and the pressure of their networks in the UK (Judah 2014). In sum, it seems, that critical voices were accusing the UK policy towards the conflict in Ukraine of something like a "buck-passing strategy" (Mearsheimer 2001, p. 157/158), where London deliberately remains on the sidelines while letting other states confront Russian aggression and do the "hard work" of investing their leaders' political capital in conflict resolution. The motives for such a policy-choice could either be moderate and be based on a lack of true interest and threat perception, or more radical, such as the hope for negative consequences of an unresolved and lingering crisis for the European project (see Emersons quote above).

I argue here instead that there are good reasons to believe that the British choice for non-participation not only had little to do with its foreign policy priorities and underlying trends, but that it was substituted by other significant tasks and roles taken over by the UK, and even well thought through on a more tactical level. The first plea one has to raise here is the UK's firm stance and leading role in the management of a tough sanctions regime against the Russians (and some Ukrainians), which to date stand in considerable contradiction to the ambivalent position of some other EU member states, e.g. Italy. The UK government has not only very clearly stated that it sees itself at the center of the sanctions regime and related coalitions together with the US, but that, other than e.g. in Germany or France, "sanctions governance" as such is an effective, institutionalized and ultimately publicly supported pillar of its foreign policy towards rule-breaking actors such as Russia.

"What Britain has done is led the charge in Europe for very strong and tough and consistent sanctions against Russia. I think Britain has helped to hold together a coalition of

countries including of course the Baltic states and Poland but also everyone in the EU. That has put through surprisingly tough sanctions against Russia and done that in a way that has been co-ordinated with the US” (Cameron quoted in Watt 2015).

“International economic sanctions have proved their effectiveness as part of wider efforts to uphold agreements and laws, and inflict a cost on those who breach them. Sanctions, including those coordinated through the EU, helped bring Iran to the negotiating table and are an essential element of our response to Russia’s actions in Ukraine. To improve the UK’s implementation and enforcement of financial sanctions, we are establishing an Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation and introducing legislation to increase penalties for financial sanctions evasion. We will review sanctions governance to ensure the best coordination of policy, implementation and enforcement” (United Kingdom Government 2015, p. 61).

Second, while it is of course tempting to argue that the UK’s inclusion in high profile measures of conflict resolution would help to exert more pressure on the Ukrainian and especially Russian side, one also has to consider the very different relationship actors such as Germany and France have with Moscow. Especially in contrast to the close „special relationship“ between Berlin and the Kremlin, founded on the depth of their historical connection and the strength of economic ties, the UK is not a well suited or natural interlocutor vis-à-vis the Russians. Albeit David Cameron had tried for a reset of the relationship since 2010, the yet worst period in the Post-Cold War era between both countries from app. 2006 to 2009 (see the Litvinienko- and Magnitsky-cases, espionage affairs, and Moscow’s pressure on the British Council) is still looming large. London and Moscow, it is

argued, notwithstanding a common interest in improved economic ties, are enjoying „almost no state-to-state relationship“ and are very low on each others list of priorities (Monaghan 2013). In general, the atmosphere between both countries has been marked by distrust and Cold War attitudes even before the events of 2014 (Ibid. 2014). This background, and the clear direction of public opinion, has allowed UK leaders to take one of the most uncompromising stances towards the Russians among EU states at the height of the conflict:

“Two-thirds of the public and opinion-formers think that Russia is a threat to the security of the EU, and one in five in both groups regard Russia as a ‘very big’ threat. Out of a list of 16 European countries, Russia is regarded the most unfavorably, with 56% of respondents recording that they feel ‘especially unfavorable’ towards it, a 26-point jump since the previous survey” (Raines 2015).

“Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea and destabilising activities in Ukraine directly challenge European security and the rules-based international order. We are working in NATO, the EU and the UN to ensure Russia is held accountable to its actions” (United Kingdom Government, 2015).

Thirdly, it has been stated above that a popular thesis regarding the UK’s allegedly soft approach to Russian aggression and absenteeism from the Normandy Format is connected to the interest of British business, esp. bankers, law firms and property agents, in Russian oligarchs’ capital. The subsequent influence of the latter in the UK, esp. in the City of London, has become in its more radical variant known as “Londongrad,” where Britain is ready to betray Ukraine and its Western allies for protecting “the City of London’s hold on dirty Russian money” (Judah, 2014). It is true that the UK, due to its liberal regulations for money circulation and buying property, for

decades but especially since 2010 has become a major point of attraction for “dark money,” though not only from Russia (Aris, 2015). After the murder of the famous Russian ex-politician Boris Nemtsov some commentators even went so far to demand a so called “Nemtsov Act” (modeled on the US-imposed “Magnitsky Act”), adopting tighter regulations to restrict Russian corruption from infiltrating the UK and thereby further hurt the economic circle around the Russian President (Armitage, 2015).

However, while the presence of Russian oligarchs and their financial interests in the UK is considerable and “commercialization” one of the key words in current debates on British foreign conduct, one needs to take a wider look in order to substantiate the claim that the UK’s Russia-policy is a victim of economic interests. In 2012, Russian Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) in the UK had been as low as 2% of an overall 406,3 bln. \$. Though an additional 12% fell on the British Virgin Islands, Russian FDI in the Netherlands or Cyprus is still higher (Central Bank of Russia 2012). As much of this money seems to flow back to Russia as FDI, these „tax optimization purposes“ together with the overall rather low significance of the Russian share in FDI to the UK seem rather to make the Russian side more sensitive for any relationship disruptions. Additionally, Russian firms in the UK stood for just 5,8% of market capitalization and the 34 Russian companies listed at the London Stock Exchange account for just 1,5% of the total number (House of Lords 2015). That picture is complemented by a modest trade partnership. Whereas overall trade had been on the rise before 2014, Russia in 2013 was still only the 14th biggest market for UK exports and the 16th biggest for imports (BBC 2014). The only area where London and Moscow seem to have a special economic relationship is in British FDI into Russia, which rose steadily since the early 2000s, especially in the oil and

gas sectors.⁹⁰ Even here however restraint seems to be appropriate: it is hardly forgotten how the significant BP investment in Russian TNK came under pressure in 2008, when the Russian side „wanted to change the terms of BP’s involvement in the Russian oil sector“ (Gvosdev & Marsh, 2014, p. 272). Taking also into account that the UK is relatively insensitive to Russian energy imports (Chyong & Tcherneva, 2015), it can hardly be argued that Russia is more than an economic partner among many others for the UK. Rather, there is a stark contrast to other EU member states, for example to Germany and the Central Eastern European States, where the primacy of politics over economics seems much more difficult to hold up in regard to Russia.

To sum up: In the absence of a certain degree of mutual trust and considering that the low interconnectedness between both countries does not provide London with much leverage over Moscow, the added value of including the UK officially in instruments such as the Normandy Format does indeed look questionable. One could even argue that such a prominent UK role could easily raise opposition from the Russian side and spoil the format. Interviews with un-quotable sources confirm that the UK leadership was very aware of this fact and therefore saw its role rather in exerting direct pressure on the Russian leadership, managing the sanctions regime and acting as a coordinator between the US and the rest of the EU. Furthermore, there are no indications that the UK leadership in any way tried to undermine a common EU position on the conflict. Rather, London saw the Minsk process from the beginning as the „only game in town“ and was openly supportive of it. Thus, both the UK’s difficult relationship with Moscow and the its true role since the outbreak of the conflict speak against the “buck passing thesis.”

⁹⁰ So far also Western sanctions did not have a serious effect on BP or Shell investments to Russia (Katakey 2016/ TASS 2015).

The Ukraine Crisis, the UK's Role Vis-à-Vis CFSP, and Brexit

It is a known fact that cooperation between EU member states on foreign policy matters has been driven by outside events and crises much more than by any general consensus on the matter. This is especially true for UK policy makers, whose engagement in EU foreign policy and defense cooperation has always been „slow and ambivalent“, but who nevertheless with time came to accept the fact that working more closely with European partners is a geopolitical necessity (Aktipis & Oliver, 2011, p. 75). Especially in light of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s Britain adjusted its former very restrictive position on more European defense cooperation, culminating in the St. Malo declaration of 1998. Could the Ukraine crisis have a comparable effect on the British role inside the CFSP? How was the CFSP seen inside the UK during the crisis? Did Russian aggression lead to a more positive British attitude towards a common foreign policy? And finally, what effect will the surprising decision of the British people for Brexit, eventually also meaning the formal withdrawal of the UK from CFSP, have on European foreign and defense cooperation, and on the UK's and the EU's policy towards Ukraine?

The British perception of the evolution of CFSP has always been affected by the following core interests: First, London always insisted on a strong preference for an inter-governmental approach towards CFSP, which should preserve its autonomy and reflect its special status as a permanent UNSC member. Second, any involvement in European foreign and defense cooperation could only go so far as to not challenge the strong transatlantic vector in UK foreign policy and at best be compatible with it. Finally, if no reasonable alternative to European cooperation exists, the UK should at least try to exert leadership in proposing policies, in order not run the risk of being portrayed as just a follower to German or French

initiatives. For example, the British focus on ESDP and related initiatives like the above mentioned St Malo declaration have ensured that the UK uses its relative advantage in military capabilities in order to lead on the EU level.

Considering those limitations, it cannot surprise that the UK was never content with being just a „downloader“ of EU policies in the realm of foreign and security policy. Yet, during the first decade of 21st century the most significant line of conflict in British EU policy seems not to be any longer between London and Brussels, but between UK policy makers and the British public. On the one hand, the degree of Europeanization especially among the foreign policy elite has grown considerably in recent years (Ibid., p.90), and is reflected in current debates about the future of British foreign conduct:

“Despite the UK’s many attributes as an international hub, it will not be successful acting alone as a flexible intermediary in an increasingly competitive world; to try to do so would yield ever-diminishing returns. Given the growing international competition for power and wealth and the relative decline in the UK’s resources, the government should think of Britain as located at the centre of a series of concentric circles, with the EU constituting the first or “inner circle” of its international influence” (Niblett 2015).

“Only by working through the EU will the UK have a chance to influence the shape of international deals on combating climate change or protecting digital privacy and an open internet. Acting alone, its voice would be diminished in each of these policy areas” (Ibid.).

On the other hand, public opinion other than in Scotland has

remained very critical of the EU with Brexit as the final confirmation. This attitude also relates to CFSP. When asked in 2012 about their opinion regarding EU involvement in foreign and defense policy, 43% of British respondents wanted their government to exclusively handle foreign policy issues (against 20% of Germans and 28% of Danes), while autonomy in defense policy was preferred by 69% (YouGov 2012).

Coming to British policy inside the CFSP framework during the Ukraine crisis an interesting picture emerges, which does not confirm to often heard claims or critiques in many ways. First, the role of the UK government in the creation and upholding of a tough sanctions regime against the Russians is admitted by many experts throughout (Schreck, 2016). It is mentioned that the tough line of David Cameron and especially foreign minister Philipp Hammond (Antidze, 2016) have helped convince other EU member states about the necessity of „robust“ sanctions, „which would have been weaker without the UK’s prime minister“ (House of Commons 2016, p. 17). Second, as the EU-related policy review discussion above confirms, UK policy makers have been and are very aware of the necessity of joint action in the face of Russian aggression, the divisions between EU member states regarding policy on Russia, and finally Britain’s subsequent special role on the EU level. It is telling that especially during the earlier phases of the crisis members of the opposition even used it to criticize the Prime Minister for its until then ambivalent approach to EU and CFSP. Third, both the above outlined sending of military advisory personnel as well as the pronounced role the UK took inside NATO in regard to Ukraine policy confirm the statement of UK officials that one is aware that only a certain division of work or „burden-sharing“ between EU members will help find an effective response to the crisis. Therefore, by avoiding to call the UK an uploader to CFSP during the Ukraine crisis - though partly justified by its imminent role in the sanctions regime - the

crisis and related debates inside the UK might have led to a better understanding of both the necessity and functioning of CFSP on London's behalf.

In light of that the June 2016 decision of the British people for Brexit must have sent shock waves, especially through the mainstream of the UK's foreign policy elite. If one takes Theresa May's statement that "Brexit means Brexit" (Independent 2016) serious, this will of course have consequences for Britain's foreign policy and European foreign policy in general. However, if one looks beyond the initial post-Brexit hysteria, foreign policy is for sure one of the areas where London's leaving the Union will have the least serious consequences. For sure, coordination and finding of agreed „EU plus UK“ positions will take additional efforts and time. There also might arise – especially in case Brexit negotiations will take the form of a prolonged and difficult divorce marred by populism – a new rift between a now more autonomous UK and a smaller, even more German-Franco dominated EU. That rift would weaken the West as an actor in world politics and invite exploitation by foreign powers. EU foreign policy, beyond the considerable loss of geopolitical potential, would lose a very experienced, pragmatically minded member-state and decisive link esp. to the US but also to other world regions. Yet, as we have seen above, for UK decision-makers CFSP has been an inter-governmental platform, a kind of additional layer next to bilateral and other multilateral fora. Notwithstanding the symbolic damage, a new working mechanism for finding common positions should be easy to find, especially in light of the many overlapping or even identical interests. Moreover, it is not set in stone that Brexit will automatically mean a weaker West. After all, more autonomy means more responsibility for the UK, which will have to invest much more in its foreign conduct in the future to achieve its strategic goals and avoid belittling itself. That will include an investment into alternative

multilateral fora and rebuilding ties with countries and regions London so far is working with mainly in concert with its EU partners.

That brings us to Ukraine, where Brexit was taken by many as a confirmation of a crumbling West ever more exposed to an assertive Russian policy aimed at regaining hegemony in Eastern Europe by successfully deepening rifts among the West's main power centers. And yes, Brexit, while at least two years away as a final reality, has the potential to cut out a major proponent of the EU's sanctions-regime against Moscow and strengthen the position of more pro-Russian forces inside the EU. Yet, following the reasoning above, there is also another scenario: UK officials have already announced that Brexit will lead to an even bigger profile and engagement of London inside NATO, an institution still taken more serious by Russians than the EU in security matters. Moreover, a more autonomous UK might even turn out to be a bigger burden for the Russian aim to weaken Western sanctions, especially if London couples even more closely with the more conservative US position on the matter. Finally, on a highly speculative note, the UK – contrary to the recent past – might even enhance its engagement in the post-Soviet world as such and, freed from the structural ties to more Russian-friendly EU states, develop into a major supporter of Ukraine's territorial integrity and Western aspirations.

Conclusion

The overall aim of this article had been to evaluate how British foreign policy was reacting to the crisis in Ukraine and if the image of Ukraine in the UK as well as London's general policy towards the region changed during the course of the "Revolution of Dignity," the Russian annexation of Crimea and the War in the Donbas. I argue here that 1) despite a comparable lack of knowledge about Ukraine and the until then low

priority of the post-Soviet world in London's foreign policy, the elite and public debate on the Ukraine crisis in the UK has been much more homogeneous than in many EU countries, more resembling a Western or Anglo-American discourse, and thus helped to shape the West's overall and the EU's largely pro-Ukrainian policy; 2) while UK economic, humanitarian and even military support to Ukraine is considerable, the most striking result of the Ukraine crisis for the UK's foreign policy is its more realistic and unambiguous image of Russia and Russian foreign policy, which also sets it apart from many EU countries; 3) despite a strong economic relationship with Russia and an increased tendency to commercialize foreign policy in general, the UK has been a front-runner in demanding and implementing economic and financial sanctions against the Russians, reflecting a much looser connection between the national interest and economic prerogatives than, for example, in Germany and other EU member states; and finally 4) that rather than having "passed the buck" to others, the UK's policy towards the Ukraine crisis so far reflected an increased conviction among British policy-makers that more, not less, cooperation in a CFSP-framework is necessary and that "burden sharing" is the best approach. The UK's non-inclusion in the "Normandy Format" is thus due to its much different relationship with Russia compared to Germany and France and an EU-wide agreement that the UK's role should be more pronounced indirect pressure on Moscow, support for Ukraine and the insurance of a coordinated approach with the US. In light of the latter, the result of the June 2016 Brexit referendum has been as serious blow for London's foreign policy elite, which will face the tough task now of satisfying Britain's strategic interests without the structural support of EU institutions and established common foreign policy frameworks. For Ukraine, Brexit also could be a major turning point as the more Russia-friendly camp inside the EU will grow stronger from now on. Yet, Brexit

does not change the UK's interests and a more autonomous and necessarily more assertive UK foreign policy, combined with more awareness for NATO and regions neglected so far, might even turn out to benefit Ukraine's cause.

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