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## Longing for Europe, Nostalgic for Russia: Ukraine's Foreign Policy

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Since 1991, there has been a wide gulf between declared Ukraine's foreign policy of European integration and domestic policies. Ukrainian Presidents have not understood the strategic necessity of integrating domestic policies towards desired foreign policy goals and have undertaken undemocratic policies commonly found within post-Soviet Eurasia. Ukrainian political party platforms and election rhetoric on foreign policy are populist and vague, especially when dealing with difficult questions such as NATO membership while parliamentary and presidential election programmes largely ignore foreign policy questions.<sup>1</sup>

Presidents Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yanukovich sought to balance between Russia and the West through multi-vector foreign policies, that is perhaps the best option for a regionally divided country. Western policymakers have stated that Ukraine's integration into Europe and maintaining good relations with Russia are not incompatible policies; this though ignores Russia's zero-sum approach to international relations and its opposition to Ukraine joining NATO and the EU.<sup>2</sup>

Ukraine under Kuchma was orientated politically and in strategic terms to the West while the country's Russian orientation was more economic and

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<sup>1</sup> 'Ukraine: Low Profile for Security Issues in the Election Campaign,' US Embassy Kyiv, 29 January 2010.

<http://wikileaks.org/cable/2010/01/10KYIV168.html>

<sup>2</sup> See T.Kuzio, 'Russian Policies towards Ukraine are illogically Consistent,' *Atlantic Council of the US, New Atlanticist Policy and Analysis Blog*, 27 September 2013. <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russian-policies-towards-ukraine-are-illogically-consistent>



cultural in nature.<sup>3</sup> Under Yanukovych a more authoritarian political system operated alongside multi-vector foreign policies that were more geared towards Russia than the West.<sup>4</sup> Under Ukraine's first three Presidents (Leonid Kravchuk, Viktor Yushchenko and Kuchma) a significant proportion of Ukraine's élites continued to harbour a mistrust of Russia's intentions towards Ukraine. Ukraine therefore regarded NATO and the US in particular, as the guarantor of its independence and territorial integrity. At the same time, with broad cultural and historical links and family ties with Russia, Ukraine preferred to deal with the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) economically because this permitted quick and opaque gains for oligarchs using non-transparent economic, trade and financial practices that are the norm in Eurasia. Through multi-vectorism the Ukrainian élites could reap the benefits of political and strategic ties with the West while maintaining economic and cultural links with the East.

Ukraine's first three Presidents restricted the country's participation in the CIS to that of a participant (rather than that of an active member) and to mainly economic questions, preferring bilateral to multilateral ties. Ukraine refused to ratify the CIS Charter that would have meant joining CIS supranational institutions. Kuchma remained opposed to Ukraine joining the CIS Single Economic Space (precursor to the CIS Customs Union) and CIS Collective Security Treaty. All Ukrainian Presidents have been frustrated by Russia's unwillingness to support a CIS free trade zone unless Ukraine agreed to become a full member of CIS integration projects. The more pro-Western and nationalist President Yushchenko as the least disinterested in CIS cooperation and integration.

## **Trans-Atlantic and European Integration**

### *NATO-Ukraine Relations: Action and Disinterest*

Ukraine's relationship with NATO was more accommodating than with the EU and from January 1994, Ukraine was a leading and active participant in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. This was coupled with

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<sup>3</sup> See Rosaria Puglisi, 'Clashing Agenda's? Economic Interests, Elite Coalitions and Prospects for Co-operation between Russia and Ukraine,' *Europe-Asia Studies*, vol.55, no.6 (September 2003), pp. 827-845.

<sup>4</sup> 'A Yanukovych Foreign Policy,' US Embassy Kyiv, 25 November 2009, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/11/09KYIV2054.html#>



growing bilateral security ties with the United Kingdom and the USA. Wary of harming relations with Russia, Ukraine did not initially pursue NATO membership in the 1990s, signing a Charter on Distinctive Partnership in 1997 and adopting an all-embracing three-year government programme of co-operation a year later that was extended until 2004. Ukraine, unlike Russia, supported the enlargement of NATO.

Ukraine first raised the objective of NATO membership in May 2002 and a year later a new law on national security laid out the twin goals of NATO and EU membership. Through cooperation within PfP, Ukraine's armed forces were reformed and reduced in size from 800,000 to 150, 000. 30, 000 Ukrainian forces conducted international peacekeeping operations under UN and NATO command. Ukraine is the only country to have participated in every peacekeeping operation under NATO command and has been a net contributor to European security and participated in every NATO operation, including in Afghanistan. Ukrainian units have operated in NATO and UN operations in Croatia (UNPROFOR and UNTAES), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo (KFor), Serbia, joint Polish-Ukrainian battalion (UKRPOLBAT), Afghanistan, Liberia, Lebanon, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Georgia. Ukraine is the tenth leading contributor of personnel and the third largest provider of strategic air transportation for UN operations.

Ukraine has fulfilled yearly Action Plans with NATO since 2003 that do not radically differ in scope from MAPs (Membership Action Plan). In February and April 2005, Yushchenko met US President George W. Bush in NATO headquarters in Brussels, and Washington respectively. Following these two meetings, Ukraine's relations with NATO were upgraded in May 2005 to an Intensified Dialogue on Membership, the stage before being invited into the MAP process. Divisions between orange democratic forces prevented Ukraine receiving a MAP in the November 2006 Riga NATO summit. In January 2008, President Yushchenko, Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko and Parliamentary Chairman Arseniy Yatsenyuk signed a joint letter requesting NATO offer Ukraine a MAP at the NATO summit in Bucharest. Speaking about Tymoshenko, the US Embassy in Kyiv 'was impressed by her ability to make the case for Ukraine's request for a MAP at NATO.'<sup>5</sup>

By 2008, there was widespread Ukraine fatigue in Western Europe and Germany led opposition to NATO and EU enlargement. US Secretary of

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<sup>5</sup> 'Ukraine: PM Tymoshenko Makes the Pitch For Map At Bucharest,' US Embassy Kyiv, 7 February 2008, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/02/08KYIV303.html#>



State Condoleezza Rice remembered 'The Ukrainian president almost cried. It will be a disaster, a tragedy, if we don't get the MAP.'<sup>6</sup> A compromise between those in favour of giving Ukraine a MAP (which included Eastern Europeans, the US and the British) and those opposed (Germans, French, Belgians, Italians and others) led to NATO issuing a statement that Ukraine and Georgia would become future members without mentioning a MAP or date of accession. The Bucharest offer, 'was the diplomatic equivalent of proposing marriage without setting the wedding day.'<sup>7</sup> Ukraine's new President elected in summer 2014 could use the 2008 resolution to re-open the question of Ukraine's NATO membership

During Yanukovich's four-year presidency, Ukraine's cooperation with NATO declined after he changed Ukrainian foreign policy in July 2010 to a non-bloc status which no longer supported NATO membership. Another factor was the deterioration of relations between Ukraine and Europe and the US after the imprisonment of Tymoshenko in October 2011. The Razumkov Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies, a Kyiv think tank, in a special issue of its *National Security and Defence* magazine devoted to NATO and Ukraine, wrote:

'Since the ruling Party of Regions has traditionally demonstrated an openly anti-NATO stance and, following the hasty change of Ukraine's foreign policy direction, the declarations on the need to continue a constructive partnership with NATO proclaimed at the highest level do not always receive proper support at the executive level. Given these circumstances and a number of other reasons related to domestic political processes in Ukraine, Western partners find it hard to believe in the sincerity of the ruling political forces to "continue a constructive partnership with NATO" and to assess the real importance of such a partnership for the Ukrainian authorities. However, it would be a mistake to view it all as a result of the policy conducted in the last two years only – inconsistent domestic reforms and a multi-vector foreign policy have existed during the entire modern history of Ukraine.'<sup>8</sup>

The PCA (Partnership and Cooperation Agreement) signed with the EU in May 1994 did not enter into force until March 1998 after members ratified it, itself a sign of the low strategic priority given to Ukraine. President Kuchma introduced wide embracing programmes on integration with the EU in June

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<sup>6</sup> Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor. A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishers 2011), pp.670-672.

<sup>7</sup> *New York Times*, 12 November 2008.

<sup>8</sup> *National Security and Defence*, nos. 2-3, 2012. <http://www.razumkov.org.ua/eng/journal.php?y=2012&cat=175>



1998 and July 2000 but these did not influence the pace of Ukraine's domestic reforms and move the country from the crossroads. Following the accession of Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia to the EU in 2004 and Romania in 2007, Ukraine's Western border became the new Eastern frontier of 'Europe.'

A breakthrough only came about in 2009 when the EU launched an Eastern Partnership. The Eastern Partnership launched by Poland and Sweden brought together six former Soviet republics of whom Ukraine was by far the largest and most geopolitically important. The Eastern Partnership and its two main products, the political Association Agreement and Deep Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), offered integration without membership (EU enlargement "light").

Negotiations for an Association Agreement began in 2007 while those for a DCFTA were launched after Ukraine joined the WTO in 2008. In March 2012, following four years of negotiations, the Association Agreement was initialled but signing by the European Council and ratification by the European Parliament and member parliaments was frozen. EU Commissioner for Enlargement [Štefan Füle](#) said that, 'Today, when during the elections representatives of the opposition are to be found in jail on the basis of selective use of justice, then obviously you should expect this fact to have direct consequences as to how these elections will be viewed.'<sup>9</sup> Karl Bildt, William Hague, Karel Schwarzenberg, Sikorski and Guido Westerwelle the foreign ministers of Sweden, Britain, the Czech Republic, Poland and Germany respectively, signed a commentary in *The New York Times* that lambasted democratic regression in Ukraine, 'Today, however, we are at an impasse in the association process. While negotiations on the association agreement were successfully concluded in December 2011, the way forward — through signing and ratification of the agreement — has in effect been blocked by Ukraine's actions.'<sup>10</sup> The five foreign ministers continued, 'The reason for this is simple: Developments in Ukraine in the last two years have caused us to question Kiev's intentions with respect to the fundamental values that underpin both the agreement and our relations in a broader sense.'<sup>11</sup>

Ukraine and the EU held their twice-annual summit on 25 February 2013; three years to the day after Yanukovych came to power. Two months

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2012/03/15/6960684/>

<sup>10</sup> Carl Bildt, William Hague, Karel Schwarzenberg, Radek Sikorski and Guido Westerwelle, 'Ukraine's Slide,' *The New York Times*, 4 March 2012. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/05/opinion/05iht-edbildt05.html?\\_r=1&ref=opinion](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/05/opinion/05iht-edbildt05.html?_r=1&ref=opinion)

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*



earlier the European Council had drafted benchmarks Kyiv needed to undertake to unfreeze the Association Agreement. The three key reforms in the EU's benchmarks for Ukraine dealt with an end to selective use of justice (i.e. political prisoners such as Tymoshenko), improvement in election legislation and judicial reforms. The EU set a short-term deadline of May 2013 to show some progress in fulfilling the benchmarks with more substantial progress by November when the EU held an Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius. The EU offered an inducement of 610 million Euros in assistance that was conditional on Ukraine reaching an IFM agreement.

There were six factors behind the failure of the Cox-Kwasniewski EU mission that had visited Ukraine 27 times to seek a compromise on the Tymoshenko question. Firstly, Yanukovich was not ideologically committed to European integration in the manner of Eastern European and Baltic leaders who desired to escape their communist past and Russian hegemony and Yanukovich's priority was how integration would benefit or damage his personal interests. Secondly, Yanukovich, like many Ukrainian leaders and experts, had an exaggerated opinion of Ukraine's geo-strategic importance to the West and therefore believed the EU was bluffing and would sign the Association Agreement irrespective of whether Tymoshenko remained in jail.

Thirdly, Serhiy Kudelia argues that the EU misunderstood 'the political significance of Tymoshenko's jailing and Yanukovich's strategic calculations behind it.' In addition to removing her from politics, the imprisonment of Tymoshenko 'also meant to demonstrate to a domestic audience (both ruling coalition members and the opposition) his capacity to repress his most prominent critic and then withstand international pressure to have her released. Her conviction and jailing established his credibility as the ultimate power wielder in the country and played a crucial role in his further successful consolidation of political and economic power and in preventing defections from within the regime.' Kudelia continues: 'Tymoshenko's release would, hence, have imposed substantial political costs on Yanukovich by exposing his vulnerability to external pressure and, hence, undermining his power superiority. This could have threatened the cohesion of his ruling coalition, raised doubts about his relative strength among his core voters, and showed the West that pressure actually works. Tymoshenko's release would have also shifted the power balance in favour of the opposition...'<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Serhiy Kudelia, 'The failure of the Cox-Kwasniewski mission and its implications for Ukraine,' *Ponars Eurasia*, 22 November 2013. <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/article/failure-cox-kwasniewski-mission-and-its-implications-ukraine>





Fourthly, the EU either kept changing the 'deadline' or different EU officials and member states would raise alternative 'deadlines.' Poland's Foreign Minister Sikorski only a few weeks before Vilnius said the 'deadline' could be extended into 2014 while the Polish President said the Association Agreement could be signed in Vilnius and the 'benchmarks' implemented the following year. Such confusing and mixed signals undermined the EU's credibility as a negotiating partner. Fifthly, Yanukovych and his government blamed the EU for not offering sufficient financial compensation to cover economic losses from Russian blockades. Implementing the reforms within the DCFTA would be very expensive with limited EU assistance and Ukraine would only feel the benefits of European integration in the medium to long terms. 'The talks with the EU were an auction. It was a position of a pimp who is offering Ukraine up for sale,' Petro Poroshenko said. 'Mr Yanukovych let it be known that, if Europe wanted a modern, democratic Ukraine, it needed to pay. His price was \$160 billion by 2017.'<sup>13</sup> Yanukovych demanded 20 billion euro's a year over four years as his price for signing the Association Agreement which was scoffed at by the EU who responded by saying they were in the business of supporting reforms - not paying for poor economic and financial policies. Finally, the EU never used its strongest card of Ukrainian officials bank accounts in EU states or their offshore zones. Ironically these accounts were only frozen after Yanukovych and his allies fled from Ukraine and were criminally charged and placed on international wanted lists.

## Conclusions

NATO and the EU have adopted different policies towards Ukraine with the former supporting an open door with membership and the latter still not offering membership. Ukraine was close to entering a MAP in 2006 but domestic factors (internal conflicts among 'orange' democratic forces) undermined this. Four Ukrainian Presidents have not integrated domestic policies towards their declared goal of European integration with the biggest gulf between reality and rhetoric under Yanukovych. Quite often Western policymakers and scholars would uncritically accept at face value pro-European rhetoric.<sup>14</sup> James Sherr decried the gap between declaration and

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<sup>13</sup> 'Stealing their dream. Viktor Yanukovych is hijacking Ukrainians' European future,' *The Economist*, 30 November 2013.

<http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21590977-viktor-yanukovych-hijacking-ukrainians-european-future-stealing-their-dream?zid=307&ah=5e80419d1bc9821ebe173f4f0f060a07>

<sup>14</sup> For examples of this see Richard Connolly and Nathaniel Copsey, 'The Great Slump of 2008-9 and Ukraine's Integration with the European Union,' *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol.27, nos.3-4 (September-December 2011), pp.541-565. For analyses of how Western policy makers and journalists reached wrong conclusions about Yanukovych see T.Kuzio, 'Viktor Yanukovych Two Years on: Why Many Got Him



implementation that, 'has been almost obscenely and flagrantly and provocatively enormous since the autumn of 2010.'<sup>15</sup>

By 2008-2010, NATO's open door policy had been closed by Germany and Ukrainian domestic conflicts. Preeminent national security expert Volodymyr Horbulin told the US Ambassador to Ukraine that there were two Russian Embassies in Kyiv, one of which spoke German.<sup>16</sup> Faced by Russian aggression in the Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, support for NATO is growing and Ukraine's Euromaidan leaders will undoubtedly return to the policy of pursuing membership that was pursued by Presidents Kravchuk, Kuchma and Yushchenko. The West should not have been so surprised by Vladimir Putin territorial expansionism towards Ukraine as he ad out his plans in 2008 at the NATO summit.<sup>17</sup> Russia had a long-term territorial claim towards the Crimea and Sevastopol.<sup>18</sup>

The Eastern Partnership launched by the EU in 2009 offered association without membership; in other words, integration and reforms without the inducement of joining the EU. Ukraine was to be the showcase of the EU's Eastern Partnership because negotiations had begun earlier than for other partners and it was the largest in terms of territory and population. Nevertheless, in late November 2013 on the eve of the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius, Yanukovych withdrew from signing the Association Agreement provoking the Euromaidan mass protests eventually leading to his overthrow four months later. The new Euromaidan leaders signed the Association Agreement in March and the DCFTA later in 2014. Moldova and

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Wrong,' *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol. 9, no.39 (25 February 2012) and 'First 100 Days of Viktor Yanukovych Explodes Six Myths', *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, vol.7, no. 109 (7 June 2010). [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=39058](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=39058) and [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews\[tt\\_news\]=36462](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=36462)

<sup>15</sup> Interview with J.Sherr in the *Kyiv Post*, 23 April 2012. <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/james-sherr-ukraines-relationship-with-the-eu-is-d-126486.html>

<sup>16</sup> 'Ukrainian-German Relations on the Rocks,' US Embassy Kyiv, 16 March 2009. <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/03/09KYIV465.html>

<sup>17</sup> See cable by US delegation to NATO, 14 August 2008, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/08/08USNATO290.html> and 'Ukraine-Russia: Is Military Conflict No Longer Unthinkable?' US Embassy Kyiv, 8 October 2009, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2009/10/09KYIV1740.html>. Putin's speech to the NATO-Russia Council was leaked and published as 'To, shcho zh kazav Volodymyr Putin u Bukharesti?', *Dzerkalo Tyzhnya*, 19 April 2008. [http://dt.ua/POLITICS/to\\_scho\\_zh\\_skazav\\_volodimir\\_putin\\_u\\_buharesti-53499.html](http://dt.ua/POLITICS/to_scho_zh_skazav_volodimir_putin_u_buharesti-53499.html)

<sup>18</sup> See T. Kuzio, *The Crimea: Europe's Next Flashpoint?* (Washington DC: The Jamestown Foundation, November 2010). Valentyn Badrak and Volodymyr Horbulin, two Ukrainian security experts, detailed Russian threats to Ukraine in 'Konkvistador u pantsyri zaliznim,' *Dzerkalo Tyzhnya*, 12 September 2009 and Oleksandr Lytvynenko, and 'Velykyy susid vyznachyvsvya. Shcho Ukraini robyty dali?' *Dzerkalo Tyzhnya*, 19 September 2009.

[http://dt.ua/POLITICS/konkvistador\\_u\\_pantsyri\\_zaliznim-57892.html](http://dt.ua/POLITICS/konkvistador_u_pantsyri_zaliznim-57892.html)

and [http://dt.ua/POLITICS/velikiy\\_susid\\_vyznachivsya\\_scho\\_ukrayini\\_robiti\\_dali-57918.html](http://dt.ua/POLITICS/velikiy_susid_vyznachivsya_scho_ukrayini_robiti_dali-57918.html)





Georgia signed Association Agreements also in 2014, Armenia and Belarus are members of the CIS Customs Union while Azerbaijan has an authoritarian political system that makes it incompatible with European values underpinning the Association Agreement.