

## **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, party 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.

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