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Painful Moments and Realignment: Explaining Ukraine's Foreign Policy, 2014–2022

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ABSTRACT

For decades, Ukraine's foreign policy was indecisive, with elites balancing domestic interests, Russia, and the West. This article claims a critical juncture occurred in 2013–2014 resulting in Ukraine's decisive turn to the West for two main reasons. First, the fragmentation of the Donetsk elite and territorial losses that excluded parts of its voter base weakened "pro-Russian" political forces inside Ukraine. Second, Ukraine's predominant foreign policy narrative increasingly portrayed the EU and NATO as a civilizational choice and Russia as a radical other. The article shows how the critical juncture made Ukraine's shift possible and how Ukraine's pro-Western orientation stabilized from 2014 onward.

Introduction

From the 1990s until 2014, Ukraine's foreign policy could be aptly described as inconsistent, wavering, or vacillating (D'Anieri 2012; Dragneva and Wolczuk 2016; Kuzio 2005; Shyrokykh 2018). Ukrainian leaders tried to strike a balance between the European Union (EU) and NATO, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other, although priorities varied depending on the government in power. From 2014 onward, however, Ukrainian leaders pursued a firm, pro-Western foreign policy. In 2019, the goals of NATO and EU membership were included as an amendment to the Ukrainian constitution (Constitution of Ukraine 2019). Moreover, both the Petro Poroshenko and the Volodymyr Zelensky governments made it clear that they wanted to anchor Ukraine to the West. This article seeks to explain Ukraine's shift from foreign policy inconsistency for over 20 years to a staunch pro-Western position after 2014.

At first, the answer seems straightforward. As argued by Jeffrey Mankoff (2014), Vladimir Putin won Crimea and lost Ukraine. The argument indicates that Russia's illegal occupation of Crimea in 2014 directly translated into a stable pro-Western Ukrainian foreign policy orientation (see McFaul 2014 for a similar view). This article agrees that the Russian leadership's decision to occupy parts of Ukraine in 2014 is important but suggests that a more fine-grained explanation is needed to understand exactly how Ukraine's pro-Western foreign policy became stabilized. Scholars within the tradition of foreign policy analysis and neoclassical realism argue that threats and other external stimuli are rarely translated directly into foreign policy outcomes (Götz 2021; Kaarbo 2015; Ripsman, Taliaferro, and Lobell 2016). This implies that one needs to include domestic factors in an explanation of Ukraine's foreign policy choices.

Moreover, far from everyone predicted or advocated that Ukraine would pursue the goals of EU and NATO membership after 2014. Especially from the perspective of leading Western realist scholars, Ukraine was a "buffer state," and

accordingly, Ukraine's leadership had to accept "neutrality" to accommodate Russian interests (Mearsheimer 2014; Posen 2016; Walt 2015; see also Lieven 2021; Van Evera 2022). The logic was expressed clearly by Harvard professor Graham Allison:

Successful statecraft requires recognizing brute realities and imagining feasible possibilities. Given the reality that is Ukraine today, an internationally-recognized neutral state within its current borders would be a victory for all. By treaty, it could not be a member of NATO or the EU, or Russia's pale imitations of both; it would give Russia a 100-year lease on the base for its Black Sea Fleet. (Allison 2014)

A similar view was put forward by former American statesmen Henry Kissinger (2014) and Zbigniew Brzezinski, who suggested Finland as a model for Ukraine to manage its relations with Russia, with Ukraine having close economic relations with both Russia and the EU but not becoming a member "in any military alliance viewed by Moscow as directed at itself" (Brzezinski 2014).

The realist argument taps into the existing alliance literature, which claims that states, under certain circumstances, tend to choose hedging or even bandwagoning strategies vis-à-vis a threatening power. Especially when decision-makers believe resistance is difficult or conclude that appeasement can accommodate the threat (Koga 2018; Walt 2009). The fact that leading Western powers, including the United States, initially did not support Ukraine with substantial lethal weapons could indeed have made a more accommodative approach to Russia an alternative.¹

Further, far from everyone in Ukraine preferred a pro-Western foreign policy even after 2014. Some Ukrainian politicians, primarily from the Opposition Bloc (which eventually split into two parties; see below), continued to support an accommodative stance vis-à-vis Russia. For example, Oleksandr Vilkul argued that "the most effective model for Ukraine is the model of neutrality" and that the goal of EU and

NATO membership would be “a path of war . . . a path of eternal chaos” (quoted in BBC Monitoring Ukraine & Baltics 2019). Viktor Medvedchuk – a politician, businessman, and media owner whose close personal ties with Vladimir Putin are well documented (Zygar 2016) – declared restoring ties with Russia a key priority to achieving peace and strengthening the economy (BBC Monitoring 2018). He also criticized the Ukrainian government’s pro-Western foreign policy: “Ukraine has become a colony of the West. Today, it’s important to restore our country’s economic and political sovereignty” (quoted in Euromaidan Press 2016). With this in mind, Medvedchuk and his affiliate Yuriy Boyko traveled to Moscow on several occasions to meet with Vladimir Putin, Dmitri Medvedev, and other senior Russian officials to discuss the restoration of Ukrainian–Russian ties, including economic and energy relations (TASS 2020; Unian 2019). Relatedly, some Ukrainian politicians made the case against continued EU integration. Borys Kolesnikov, for example, argued that stronger ties with Russia were necessary to boost the economy and that EU integration should be put on hold: “We will be demanding that the authorities should freeze the economic part of the association agreement with the EU at least for 10 years” (quoted in BBC Monitoring Ukraine & Baltics 2016).

In other words, the Russian occupation of Ukrainian territories in 2014 did not automatically unite all Ukrainians on a pro-Western foreign policy course, and influential US scholars expected or advocated for Ukraine not to take a firm pro-Western direction after 2014.

Finally, in the past, a shift in power in Ukraine had often been followed by a shift in foreign policy priorities. Hence, it is essential to explain not only *how* Ukraine’s pro-Western foreign policy occurred in 2014 but also *why* it remained stable after Volodymyr Zelensky became president in 2019.

This article argues that scholars who proposed Ukrainian accommodation to Russia after 2014 did not consider the significant shifts occurring within Ukraine in 2013–2014. It suggests a critical juncture framework useful for explaining how Ukraine’s discontinuous foreign policy direction was followed by stability. In brief, my central argument is that a watershed moment occurred in 2013–2014 that shifted the logic of Ukraine’s foreign policy for two main reasons. First, after the Euromaidan revolution, the Donetsk elite fragmented. Relatedly, millions of core voters in the Donbas and Crimea that supported “pro-Russian”² parties were effectively detached from participating in Ukrainian elections. As a result, the balance of power in Ukraine’s political arena tilted against the more pro-Russian forces. Second, experiences during the violent phase of the Euromaidan revolution and the Russian occupation of parts of Ukraine in 2014 profoundly shifted Ukrainians’ perceptions of external powers. The predominant Ukrainian foreign policy narratives on the elite level changed and became increasingly framed in existential terms, leaving little room for the previously popular pragmatic approach toward Russia. Correspondingly, surveys show that support for close ties with Russia declined significantly within the Ukrainian population after 2014. In combination, the fragmentation and weakening of the more pro-Russian parties and the painful experiences in 2013–2014, leading to a shift in the predominant foreign policy narrative, account for the

stabilization of Ukraine’s unidirectional pro-Western turn from 2014 onward. The article and its findings contribute to debates about Ukrainian foreign policy, and more generally, to the literature on foreign policy stability and change (Doer 2011; Tsygankov 2019) by providing a bridge to theoretical work in critical juncture studies.

Explaining Foreign Policy Shifts and Stability: A Critical Juncture Framework

A review of the literature on foreign policy change finds that scholarship has insights into change of a specific foreign policy issue but “fails to unravel cases of fundamental change like redirections of states’ entire orientation toward world affairs” (Haesebrouck and Joly 2021, 1). Moreover, I contend that the literature can improve by using a coherent framework that links the process of discontinuous change to specific mechanisms that stabilize the new foreign policy. In my view, a critical juncture framework is suitable for these analytical tasks and for explaining Ukraine’s foreign policy shift followed by stability after 2014.

David Collier defines a critical juncture as “(1) a concentrated, macro episode of innovation that (2) generates an enduring legacy” (Collier 2022, 34). Accordingly, a critical juncture framework posits that a cleavage or shock is the proximate trigger for foreign policy change. It can take the form of external pressures, or political conflict within a society that has built up over time. External forces can also intensify an existing domestic cleavage (Collier 2022, 46–47). External powers can, for example, constrain and pressure domestic actors during critical junctures, and political and military action taken by external powers can have both intended and unintended consequences for the development of the political arena in the target country.

When analyzing critical junctures, one needs to focus on decision-making by powerful actors (Capoccia 2015). In this context, the focus is primarily on the interplay between the Ukrainian government, the domestic opposition, and the Russian leadership. This does not mean that critical junctures are wholly contingent events. Even during critical junctures, actors tend to be constrained by structural conditions – various preexisting political, economic, and social factors (Collier 2022). Moreover, choices by leaders can result in unintended consequences and are often followed by “reactive sequences” (Mahoney 2000, 509) – periods of turbulence that transform or reshape the intended outcome (Collier and Munck 2022). Although critical junctures have been applied in different contexts, this article focuses on major events, when an important decision triggers a reactive sequence with dramatic implications for a country, such as large-scale violence (Jervis 1976). In the final step of the critical juncture framework it is important to identify the mechanisms of reproduction (Collier and Munck 2022). In other words, how is the critical juncture’s legacy sustained over time?

Drawing on the existing literature, three mechanisms can be identified. Two mechanisms refer to changes in domestic political power structures. First, as noted by scholars in critical juncture studies, such moments often result in the inclusion or exclusion of certain actors in the decision-making apparatus

(Bengtsson and Ruonavaara 2017, 55). For example, the marginalization of a previously influential party or the expulsion of key political leaders during a political crisis can contribute to a shift in the domestic balance of political power. This in turn can result in changes in the country's foreign policy orientation followed by stability. Relatedly, a second, bottom-up mechanism refers to shifts in one or several parties' voting base. Scholars in the tradition of foreign policy analysis have long argued that governments responsible for foreign policy depend on support from certain constituencies, and in turn, shifts in these constituencies can result in foreign policy change (Hermann 1990, 6–7). An overlooked way that constituencies can change is through shifts in territorial configuration – for example, during conflict and occupation. I argue that this can result in long-term changes in a country's political arena by excluding the political voting base of a particular party. This is especially so if a party relies heavily on voters within a concentrated territory (Mazzuca 2017).

A third mechanism proposed in this article is that formative events can change the prevailing national identity discourse and, in turn, the perceived legitimacy of foreign policy choices. This part of the argument builds primarily on constructivist research on how experiences such as wars and revolutions transform society and deeply affect the images of external powers among both the country's elites and large swaths of the population (Becker 2014; Jervis 1976; Lerner 2022).

In other words, painful watershed moments can result in profound identity transformations that drastically change a country's foreign policy orientation. Such formative experiences influence a state's international outlook in fundamental ways and can serve as a guide for a country's foreign policy for generations. In a broad sense, these experiences shape political elites' and societies' identities and values. As shown by constructivist scholars, identities provide answers to questions of self and other, and hence influence and to some extent even constitute foreign policy behavior (Hansen 2006; Hopf 1998). Identities inform decision-makers of what choices are considered appropriate and thinkable, and what choices are effectively unthinkable. Based on identities, certain predominant foreign policy narratives help decision-makers make sense of a complex environment. As noted by Jelena Subotić, “groups need a narrative, a compelling story of where did ‘we’ come from, how did we come to be who we are, what brings us together in a group, what purpose and aspirations does our group have” (Subotić 2016, 612). In short, narratives are reproduced through discourse, are normative, and give purpose and direction to foreign affairs. Of course, this does not mean that all elites or the whole population are similarly affected, but major events are expected to have a significant impact on identity transformations.

What is the role played by elites and the public in this theoretical framework? Elites, especially senior government officials, play a central role, since they are the actors directly responsible for foreign policy making. Conversely, the public plays an indirect role in foreign policy making (Ozkececi-Taner 2017). First, as mentioned above, in states with functioning elections, the public can elect a new government, which in turn can result in foreign policy change. Second, if the public is strongly in support of a particular foreign policy,

their demand can be difficult for leaders to ignore, or the government may face protests or loss of voters. Moreover, if both a majority of the political elite and the public are in support of a particular foreign policy orientation, it increases the likelihood that the foreign policy becomes stabilized.

Finally, how do the mechanisms above relate to each other? Foreign policy change is often discussed in terms of lowered constraints on the one hand and drivers and facilitators for a new foreign policy on the other (Haesebrouck and Joly 2021). In my framework, a shift in domestic power structures – for example, the fragmentation of an influential party or the exclusion of a voting base – is seen as lowering the constraints against a foreign policy. On the other hand, a shift in national identity, sustained by policy entrepreneurs, is considered a driver for a new foreign policy. Added together, they help explain why discontinuous foreign policy change can be followed by longer periods of stability.

In the following, I apply this framework to analyze Ukraine's shift to a firm, pro-Western foreign policy in 2014. The empirical material used in this analysis includes various media sources, statements by Ukrainian political leaders, surveys produced by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS),³ and secondary sources.

A Watershed Moment: Yanukovich's Miscalculations and the Euromaidan

In the fall of 2013, the Ukrainian government was under significant external pressure. At the Vilnius Eastern Partnership summit, scheduled for the end of November, Ukraine was expected to sign the European Union's Association Agreement (EUAA). Yet, already in the summer of 2013, Russia had started to pressure Ukraine's president Viktor Yanukovich to abandon a partnership with the EU and instead sign up for the Russian-led Customs Union, which would become the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in 2015 (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2015). Besides coercive Russian diplomacy, opinion polls indicated that Ukrainians were divided, primarily by region but also by age, on which integration offer to choose (KIIS 2013).⁴

After a visit by Vladimir Putin to Kyiv in July 2013, Russian authorities started an embargo on certain Ukrainian goods, and senior Russian officials increasingly relied on implicit or explicit threats (Der Spiegel 2014). For example, they declared that signing agreements with the EU would be “suicidal” for Ukraine and that Russia, in that case, would need to implement significant protective measures. Russian officials presented a dark economic prognosis for Ukraine that drastically differed from those calculated by European organizations (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2015). Thus, the Ukrainian government was under severe external pressure, but that did not predetermine a particular response.

At first, Russia's strategy seemed to backfire. In early September, Yanukovich arranged a party meeting in Kyiv. According to members present at the meeting, the president signaled that “we will pursue integration with Europe” (Piper 2013). He reportedly went on for hours criticizing Russia for not treating Ukraine as an equal partner and trying to force him to act according to Moscow's wishes. Some party

members with business interests linked to Russia protested, but Yanukovich insisted (Piper 2013).

At the same time, Yanukovich did not want to release his primary opponent Yulia Tymoshenko from prison, a case that had become a significant issue in Brussels.⁵ EU representatives Aleksander Kwaśniewski and Pat Cox presented creative solutions such as pardoning Tymoshenko or keeping her official prisoner status but sending her to Germany for treatment (Olchawa 2017, 66). In other words, Yanukovich had options to solve the Tymoshenko case and get the EUAA, but he postponed further discussions.

Yanukovich and Putin held at least two long meetings in October and November. Precisely what was said during these meetings is still unknown, but journalists and experts have argued that Putin leveled threats against Yanukovich. Moreover, Yanukovich was likely offered economic benefits and subsidies if Ukraine would reject the EU's proposed deal (Der Spiegel 2014; Dragneva and Wolczuk 2015). Ukraine's then prime minister Mykola Azarov later said: "The Russian government made it clear to us that signing of an [EU] agreement means it would be subsequently impossible to discuss trade and economic relations" (quoted in Grytsenko and Traynor 2013). On November 21, Azarov announced that Ukraine would not sign the EU agreements in Vilnius. Negotiations with the EU would be put on hold, and the government would renew the dialogue on the economy and trade with Russia. The sudden decision, reportedly made by Yanukovich himself, surprised key EU officials and even people within his own party (Der Spiegel 2014; Olchawa 2017). Although Yanukovich was under significant external pressure, he could have signed the EUAA or communicated earlier to Brussels that Ukraine needed additional time. In response to his U-turn, protests unfolded in central Kyiv.

The second significant decision during this critical juncture was the Ukrainian government's choice to use force against the protestors. The government had several options available to manage the demonstrations. It could have waited for the protests to fade out, or Yanukovich could have engaged in serious negotiations early on and tried to accommodate some demands expressed by the activists. These options, however, were not pursued. Instead, the Yanukovich government went down another path. On the evening of November 29, demonstrators remained on the Independence Square in central Kyiv, and on the night of November 30, a decision was made to use the Berkut (riot police) to clear the square. Berkut used indiscriminate violence, including batons, tear gas, and stun grenades, to disperse the protesters, leaving dozens injured. The use of force by the police against peaceful, mainly young protesters was unprecedented in contemporary Ukraine and triggered a massive response. As a result of Berkut's actions, "a paradigm shift occurred" (Wynnyckyj 2019, 93). On the following day, at least 300,000 people went out on the streets in Kyiv (Grytsenko and Walker 2013). Continued use of force by the government in January–February 2014, reciprocated by a minority of the demonstrators, put Ukraine on the edge (Kudelia 2018).

These actions and counteractions resulted in a highly polarized environment. Surveys showed regional differences in participation in the Euromaidan protests (Way 2015). In

February 2014, the Ukrainian government had, *de facto*, lost control over western parts of the country, where resistance against Yanukovich was the strongest. The violence reached its peak on February 20 when over 100 protestors were killed by sniper fire on the Maidan. Intense negotiations between Yanukovich and the Ukrainian political opposition followed on the night of February 20/21, facilitated by EU leaders. A compromise deal was reached and accepted by Yanukovich and the main political opposition leaders (D'Anieri 2019a). After the violence on Maidan, however, many demonstrators were vocally disappointed with the deal. Then, suddenly, Yanukovich fled Kyiv – he went to Kharkiv first and eventually ended up in Russia. It is not exactly clear why Yanukovich escaped. One interpretation is that Yanukovich assumed that he had lost the support of his security forces and feared for his life. However, evidence shows that preparations for his escape were made already before the shootings on February 20 (Carnegie 2015). In either case, Yanukovich's decision to leave Kyiv set in motion the last phase of what this article considers to be a critical juncture for explaining Ukraine's foreign policy from 2014 onward.

In response to these developments, Putin decided to annex Crimea in February/March 2014 (for a detailed discussion, see Bukkvoll 2016; Hopf 2016; Treisman 2018). Moreover, during the spring of 2014, turmoil occurred in cities in southern and eastern Ukraine, such as Odesa and Kharkiv, but in collaboration with regional elites, the Ukrainian government managed to avoid a takeover by militias. In Donetsk and Luhansk, however, the situation escalated into violent conflict. In part, the regional differences can be explained by local conditions in Donetsk and Luhansk after Yanukovich's escape, but also by the inflow of Russian intelligence officers, "volunteers," and army veterans into the Donbas – for example, the former Russian FSB agent Igor Girkin who led the occupation of Sloviansk in April 2014 (Arel and Driscoll 2023; Nitsova 2021; Wilson 2016). When the Ukrainian armed forces, a mix of regular army and volunteer battalions, in August 2014 seemed to overrun the militias, which were backed by the Russian military, the Kremlin launched a limited conventional war (Kofman et al. 2017). After several months of intense fighting, Russia and the militias established control of significant parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, including the two cities so named. The so-called Minsk I agreement (September 2014) and the Minsk II agreement (February 2015) were signed to freeze the conflict, although fighting continued at a lower level of intensity (D'Anieri 2019a; Kofman et al. 2017).

Evaluating the 2013–2014 Critical Juncture

How can the period from late 2013 to mid-2014 be analyzed from a critical juncture perspective? First, Yanukovich experienced significant pressure before he decided to turn down the EU's integration offer. The Ukrainian government acted in an increasingly complex environment marked by two competing integration offers on the table, Russian coercive diplomacy, and divisions inside Ukraine over the country's foreign policy orientation. Thus, the choices to turn down the EU's offer and to use force against protestors were made in a constrained

environment during a moment of crisis, but they were not predetermined.⁶ On the contrary, several decisions with dramatic implications seemed improvised, which in turn set in motion a reactive sequence of dramatic proportions. After Yanukovich escaped from Kyiv in February 2014, Russia annexed Crimea. Although it is difficult to know whether this operation was long in the making, Putin's inner circle clearly had the discretion and available alternatives to make a different decision (Bukkvoll 2016). From a critical juncture perspective, this period fits the definition of a concentrated macro-episode of innovation and fluidity, in which contingency and choices by influential decision-makers play a significant role. The following section shows how the critical juncture resulted in a legacy – namely, a stable pro-Western Ukrainian foreign policy – and specifies the mechanisms that produced this legacy.

How Did Ukraine's Pro-Western Foreign Policy Stabilize?

As discussed in the introduction, it was not self-evident, *ex ante*, that Ukraine would pursue a unidirectional pro-Western foreign policy from 2014 onward, or that the policy would endure after the shift in government in 2019. Hence, it is essential to explain *how* Ukraine's pro-Western foreign policy stabilized after 2014.

A Shift in the Balance of Power in Ukraine's Political Arena

Ukraine's pro-Western foreign policy stabilized because of a shift in the balance of power in the domestic political arena.

Fragmentation of the Party of Regions

On the elite level, the influential Party of Regions (PoR) led by Yanukovich had played a key role in upholding the “Russian vector” in Ukrainian foreign policy. The PoR became the largest party in three consecutive parliamentary elections (2006, 2007, and 2012). After the Orange Revolution in 2004, Yanukovich advocated a pragmatic policy toward Russia, opposed NATO membership, and contributed to the resignation of the pro-Western foreign minister Borys Tarasyuk (Reuters 2007). When Yanukovich became president in 2010, he and his government worked more closely with the Russian leadership than any previous Ukrainian administration. While keeping EU cooperation on the table until 2013, Yanukovich said no to NATO, agreed to extend Russia's military presence in Crimea until 2042 in exchange for cheaper gas, appointed Russia-linked ministers and senior officials in the security and defense sphere, turned Ukraine in an authoritarian direction, and kept close ties with Putin and then-president Dmitri Medvedev (D'Anieri 2019a; Kuzio 2012).

In February and March 2014, influential PoR leaders fled Ukraine. Yanukovich settled in a house outside Moscow and many others with leading positions in the PoR followed his example (Ukrinform 2020). Among them were Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, Defense Ministers Pavlo Lebedev and Dmytro Salamatin, First Deputy Prime Minister Serhiy Arbutov, Interior Minister Vitaliy Zakharchenko, Prosecutor General Viktor Pshonka, Chief of the Security Service Oleksandr

Yakymenko, Head of the National Security and Defense Council Andriy Klyuyev, Minister of Education Dmytro Tabachnyk, and Minister of Revenues and Duties Oleksandr Klymenko (Gorchinskaya 2020). According to media sources, all of the abovementioned moved to Russia or Russian-controlled territory. The result was a political self-decapitation of the PoR.

In that connection, it is worth pointing out that the PoR was extremely hierarchically organized and controlled primarily by politicians and businessmen from Donetsk. In 2014, numerous deputies from Kharkiv, Dnipro, and Odesa that the PoR had co-opted defected, and some politicians in Crimea joined local or Russian parties (Kuzio 2015). In September 2014, just a month before the parliamentary election, former PoR officials remaining in Ukraine formed the Opposition Bloc.⁷ The Opposition Bloc included two groups supported by Rinat Akhmetov and Dmytro Firtash, respectively, two of Ukraine's wealthiest oligarchs, who previously had provided financial support to the PoR (Dreyfus 2020).⁸ However, the absence of key leaders from Donetsk contributed to fragmentation and weakness (Ogushi 2020). One sign of fragmentation came in late 2018 when the Opposition Bloc split into two parties, the Opposition Platform–For Life, led by Viktor Medvedchuk and Yuriy Boyko, and the Opposition Bloc–Party for Peace and Development, led by Oleksandr Vilkul and Yevhen Murayev (Lennon 2019). Furthermore, the Communist Party, which supported a pro-Russian foreign policy orientation, was banned in 2015. This further tilted the domestic balance of power in favor of pro-Western parties and politicians (The Guardian 2015).

Russian Occupation and Shift in Voting Base

Another unintended effect of Russia's occupation of Crimea and the most populous parts of Donetsk and Luhansk was that millions of core supporters of the PoR and the Communist Party stopped voting in Ukrainian elections. Since independence, Ukraine had demonstrated stark regional differences, including in terms of voting and foreign policy orientations (D'Anieri 2022; Frye 2015). Donetsk and Luhansk had been the home base for parties and presidential candidates that preferred closer ties to Russia. Donetsk city was first a stronghold for the Communist Party in the 1990s and then in the 2000s for Yanukovich and the PoR (D'Anieri 2019a). In the 2004 and 2010 presidential elections, 89 to 93.5 percent of voters in Donetsk and Luhansk voted for Yanukovich. A strong majority of voters in Crimea also supported these parties and a foreign policy closer to Russia.

Paul D'Anieri (2019b, 2022) has made calculations for the 2019 presidential election. His analysis identifies a 3.5 million Ukrainian voter loss as a result of occupation (that is, in the areas outside Ukrainian control at the time, in Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk) compared to the 2010 elections. In other words, because of territorial loss, millions of voters were *de facto* excluded from voting in the Ukrainian elections in 2014 and 2019. This group constituted 16 percent of the total voters in the 2010 presidential elections, and 87 percent of these voters, in turn, supported Yanukovich in that election. In comparison, the number of voters outside Ukrainian

control roughly corresponded to the number of voters in Galicia – Ukraine’s most pro-Western part (D’Anieri 2019b).

After 2014, leaders from the Opposition Bloc/Platform, such as Boyko, Vilkul, and Medvedchuk, continued to promote accommodative policies vis-à-vis Russia and frequently met with Putin and other senior Kremlin officials. In statements and through media platforms under Medvedchuk’s control, as discussed above, they criticized Ukraine’s pro-Western direction, particularly the signing of the EUAA, advocated Ukrainian neutrality, and followed a narrative popular in Russian state media that labeled the conflict in eastern Ukraine a “civil war” (BBC Monitoring 2016; Carroll 2018; PBS 2018). The two parties continued to receive support in parts of eastern Ukraine. In the parliamentary election in 2019, the Opposition Platform came in first in Ukrainian-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk (Lennon 2019). However, before the critical juncture in 2013–2014, parties that preferred closer ties to Russia received 35–40 percent of the total votes in parliamentary elections and had a presidential candidate on the ballot with a high probability of winning. In the 2014 and 2019 elections, by contrast, pro-Russian parties and candidates received only 10–15 percent of the votes nationwide (D’Anieri 2022). In the 2014 presidential election, Poroshenko, who clearly did not support pro-Russian positions, won in the first round, and in 2019 neither of the two finalists, Zelensky and Poroshenko, ran on a “pro-Russian” platform. This was a break with the past. For two decades one of the two candidates in the presidential elections’ second round had supported either hedging or a foreign policy closer to Russia.

In sum, one legacy from the critical juncture in 2013–2014 was the weakening of parties in Ukraine that supported closer ties with Russia. The escape of key figures from the PoR, and the fact that significant parts of the party’s core voting base ended up outside Ukrainian-controlled territory, contributed to the fragmentation and weakening of “pro-Russian” parties. Although other factors likely contributed to the weakening of these parties as well, the departure of key politicians and voter loss (due to territorial detachments) clearly played the most significant role. This argument is strengthened by the fact that successor parties to the PoR continued to receive support in parts of eastern Ukraine even after Russia’s invasion in 2014. Overall, however, parties that preferred a pro-Western foreign policy were now in a much better position to implement and sustain these policies than had been the case before 2014.

The Watershed Moment and Its Impact on Ukraine’s Foreign Policy Narrative

An equally important factor was that the watershed of 2013–2014 significantly affected the balance of power on Ukraine’s marketplace of ideas, particularly regarding the country’s foreign policy course.

EU Integration as a Civilizational Choice

Before 2014, Ukrainian narratives articulated support for European integration through economic prosperity arguments and, in some cases, by referring to democratic values and to Europe as a civilizational choice. However, influential parties like the PoR criticized “Euro-romanticism” and pursued

hedging with the ambition to get the best deal from both the EU and Russia (Deutsche Welle 2005; Dragneva and Wolczuk 2015). Before 2014, an influential foreign policy discourse viewed neither Russia nor Europe as a radically different “other,” and choices were based on pragmatic calculations rather than normative attraction (White and Feklyunina 2014, 155).

Although democracy and economic prosperity arguments remained predominant in the discourse after 2014, Ukrainian politicians increasingly started linking a European choice with independence and survival. In this rhetorical rendering, Ukraine’s European path was described as a civilizational choice, a separation from its colonial past and a return to the European home. For example, in a meeting with EU’s foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, President Poroshenko noted that “Ukraine has been paying too high a price for its independence and for the right to choose its civilizational path of development on its own” (quoted in BBC Monitoring 2014).

In a similar vein, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk argued in the Ukrainian Rada that by signing the EUAA, “[w]e are fixing the 350-year-old mistake: Ukraine is Europe,” and underlined the sacrifices made on the Euromaidan and in the conflict with Russia. “It is a shame,” he stated, “that this agreement is sealed with blood. But that was the choice. That was the price of independence” (quoted in MacFarquhar 2014).

After 2014, the emerging mainstream narrative also associated Ukraine’s European choice with an exit from imperial Russia. Poroshenko argued that the visa-free regime signed with the EU symbolized Ukrainians’ return to their history: “That is why today’s decision of the EU is so important. A long process has been completed. I am sure that this day, June 11, will go down in the history of Ukraine as a final exit of our country from the Russian empire and its return to the family of European nations” (quoted in RFE/RL 2017). This kind of reasoning was put forward not only by Poroshenko and Yatsenyuk. In 2019, Poroshenko’s successor, Volodymyr Zelensky, declared that Ukraine in the EU would be “the death of the Russian imperial project” (quoted in Financial Times 2019).

Another recurring theme after 2014 was that Ukraine was defending not only itself but also European values and the European continent from Putin’s ambitions. In Poroshenko’s words, “the actual reason of this war is the right of the Ukrainian people to live under European standards, with European values, in the European Union” (quoted in Herszenhorn 2015). Yuriy Lutsenko, a leading figure in the Poroshenko bloc, likewise argued that “we are not just defending the Donbas. Putin does not need the Donbas, or even Ukraine. He needs Europe” (quoted in BBC Monitoring 2015). To be sure, arguments about Ukraine’s civilizational choice had to some extent existed before 2014, but they had been a minority opinion and not part of Ukraine’s dominant foreign policy narrative (White and Feklyunina 2014).

President Zelensky’s administration confirmed Ukraine’s strategic course of membership in the EU and NATO. As Deputy Prime Minister Dmytro Kuleba (foreign minister from 2020) asserted, Ukraine would reject any proposal short of membership (BBC Monitoring 2019). Zelensky’s approval

of a document prepared by Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, "On the Strategy of Ukraine's Foreign Policy," confirmed Ukraine's westward orientation (BBC Monitoring 2021). In Zelensky's view, the EU was not only Ukraine's main trade partner but "our key partner in restoring sovereignty and territorial integrity" (quoted in BBC Monitoring 2020). Thus, both the Poroshenko and the Zelensky administrations linked EU membership to Ukraine's survival and declared European integration to be irreversible.

NATO as a Guarantor for Ukraine's Security

From 2014, Ukraine's predominant foreign policy narrative articulated NATO as a "guarantor for peace and security" and as a protector against Russian imperialism. In contrast, a hedging strategy (referred to in Ukraine as a multi-vector policy or non-bloc status), popular before 2014 and proposed by prominent realist scholars also after 2014, was now portrayed by Ukrainian politicians as a "deadly trap." As President Poroshenko argued in 2014:

Only Ukraine's integration in the Euro-Atlantic space guarantees peace, security and independence for Ukraine and higher living standards for the Ukrainian people. Each of these achievements is proof of our departure from the colonial past. Each of them is a step towards our complete freedom from the empire. We have finally exited the labyrinth of multi-vector policies and have narrowly escaped the deadly trap of non-bloc status, and, since 2014, we have firmly been marching along our own path, the path to the European Union and NATO. (quoted in BBC Monitoring 2014)

Prime Minister Yatsenyuk viewed NATO as "the only vehicle" to protect the country as Putin wanted to "eliminate" Ukraine (quoted in RFE/RL 2014a). He also argued that Ukraine should enter NATO to protect common values: "[T]he Alliance is to get another member, which, together with the free world engages into defending freedom and democracy from aggressors" (Yatsenyuk 2015). Radical Party leader Oleh Lyashko argued that the result of Ukraine's parliamentary election in 2014 was "a unique opportunity for the first time to get a Ukrainian parliament that would lead Ukraine to Europe and towards NATO" (quoted in RFE/RL 2014b). Several influential Ukrainian politicians described the decision to include the goal of NATO (and EU) membership as an amendment to the Ukrainian constitution (supported by 334 of 385 registered deputies at the session) as a historical, irreversible, and strategic choice (BBC Monitoring 2017). In 2014, for example, even opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko argued for NATO membership as a foreign policy priority, and ahead of the 2019 presidential election large billboards in Kyiv pictured Tymoshenko with NATO-friendly messages.⁹

President Zelensky also declared NATO membership a key goal, although he initially stressed that Ukrainians critical of NATO first had to be informed about the benefits of membership, followed by a referendum (Talant 2019). When early attempts to achieve peace with Russia failed, however, Zelensky's administration started to portray NATO membership as an urgent priority rather than a long-term goal. In early 2021, Zelensky declared a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) to be Ukraine's "immediate goal" and noted that "NATO is the only way to end the war in Donbas. Ukraine's

MAP will be a real signal for Russia" (quoted in Olearchuk and Foy 2021). Zelensky, initially portrayed by his opponents as a "Russia-dove," articulated by 2021 a similar position on NATO as the Poroshenko administration.

Moreover, Zelensky reiterated Poroshenko's position that Ukraine deserved to be a member as it defended sacred democratic values promoted by the EU and NATO. "There can be no doubt," he argued, "that Ukraine is an integral part of Europe in terms of its value foundation. Now, in the new situation in Europe, we need a logistical plan for Ukraine's accession to the Alliance in the near future. NATO is a way of maximum protection for our country" (Zelensky 2021a). Zelensky also declared that Ukrainians died in the Donbas "for all the principles preached and upheld by NATO and EU leaders" (Zelensky 2021b). The Head of Ukraine's President's Office, Andriy Yermak likewise stated, "I hope that the process of Ukraine joining NATO will be speeded up to the maximum. Ukraine is at war, our country is the main outpost for the protection of democratic values. This is why we deserve to become a part of the family of NATO member states" (Yermak 2021).

Another important trope in Ukraine's dominant foreign policy narrative was that agreements with Russia regarding Ukraine's territorial integrity, such as the Budapest Memorandum and the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty, had failed. Written agreements and pragmatic relations with Moscow were described as unsuccessful – and in a sense useless – in guaranteeing Ukraine's sovereignty. Ukraine's high-profile Foreign Minister Kuleba, for example, criticized Ukraine's previous approach: "We need to break free from the orbit of [Russia's] political interests, stop jolting to the left or to the right, which is something we have been doing for the past 30 years. We keep speeding up European integration, then slowing it down, first moving towards NATO and then proclaiming non-alignment. This jerking around must be stopped" (quoted in BBC Monitoring 2019). Moreover, Kuleba strongly opposed Russian demands for Ukrainian neutrality: "Back in 2014, Ukraine was a neutral country, both on paper and in reality . . . If neutrality failed to stop Putin from launching a war in 2014, it is hard to see why it would stop him now" (Kuleba 2021).

In sum, the predominant foreign policy narrative portrayed Ukraine's independence and freedom as closely linked to NATO membership and articulated urgency to speed up the process. Ukraine's previously popular hedging strategy, with pragmatic and close ties to Russia and neutrality instead of NATO membership, was discredited. Although the Opposition Bloc/Platform still promoted this narrative, it became a minority position after 2014.

Russia as an Imperial Radical Other

A third important theme in Ukraine's foreign policy narrative from 2014 was a view of Russia as a radical other. Scholars on identity and foreign policy argue that articulating difference is just as important as articulating belonging. Articulation of difference tells decision-makers who they are, but also who they are not and where their country does not belong. Constructions of the other can be either radical or non-radical (Hansen 2006).

Before 2014, politicians such as President Yanukovych argued that Ukraine should “become a bridge between Russia and the West. [...] We should not be forced to make the false choice between the benefits of the East and those of the West” (Yanukovych 2011). This view had policy implications: political crises with Moscow prior to 2014 (for example, frequent gas conflicts, the Tuzla Island dispute in 2003, Russian demands to have its Black Sea Fleet based in Crimea, and trade disputes) were solved by pragmatic, often ad hoc top-level negotiations between the Ukrainian and Russian leaderships (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2015; Hurak and D’Anieri 2022). Even outspoken pro-Western politicians such as former president Viktor Yushchenko called Russia “a strategic partner” (Kyiv Post 2009). Moreover, before Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea, the Ukrainian population held, in general, positive attitudes toward Russia and the Russian leadership (see below).

From 2014 onward, however, Ukraine’s predominant foreign policy narrative identified Russia as a radical other with imperial ambitions. Ukraine’s strategic course toward the West was, as mentioned, portrayed as a civilizational choice away from Russian imperial control, leaving Ukraine’s colonial past behind. In the words of Poroshenko, “Putin wants the old Russian empire back. Crimea, Donbas – he wants the whole country. He sees himself as a Russian emperor, and his empire cannot work without Ukraine. He regards us as a colony” (quoted in Ronzheimer 2018). At the Munich Security Conference in 2017, Poroshenko stated that Vladimir Putin “hates Ukraine” and “sees no place for Ukraine on the political map of Europe” (quoted in Gutterman 2017). Prime Minister Yatsenyuk likewise called Putin “a new Russian emperor” who opposed the West and was on a mission to “collect lands.” Moreover, he argued that the Kremlin had constructed a (nonphysical) wall that strengthened and consolidated the differences between Russia and Ukraine:

We have not built this wall. This wall was erected by the Russian regime and personally Vladimir Putin. We have not attacked Russia – Russia invaded Ukraine. He [Mr. Putin] wants to capture territories and to impose his ideology. But we do not want it. We have our own values, language, culture. We have our own history. Another myth that Russia has always tried to invent is about our common history. (Yatsenyuk 2014)

Another example of the construction of Russia as the radical, imperial other is found in the rhetoric of Tymoshenko. In 2014, for example, she openly declared that “[w]e must put the Russian aggressor in his place! We cannot give up Crimea for lost, nor should we surrender a single square meter of our country. We must steadfastly refuse to play the role of the victim in the history books of the future!” (quoted in Follath and Schepp 2014).

Large swaths of Ukraine’s political community shared the overall perception of Russia as a radical other. A majority in the Ukrainian parliament supported a statement in 2014 that declared Russia “an aggressor state” and the administrations in Donetsk and Luhansk as “terrorist organizations” (RFE/RL 2015). This understanding was reiterated in a law adopted by the Ukrainian Rada in 2018.

Relatedly, Ukraine’s dominant foreign policy narrative articulated clearly that no brotherly relationship existed

between the two countries. In response to Putin’s declarations along these lines, Zelensky stated that the relationship “most certainly cannot be called ‘brotherly.’ After the annexation of Crimea and aggression in [the eastern Ukraine region of] Donbas, the only thing we have left ‘in common’ is the state border [...] Russia must return the control of every inch of the Ukrainian side” (quoted in Peel and Olearchyk 2019). A similar response was made to Putin’s 2021 essay that presented Ukrainians and Russians as “one people.” Zelensky compared Russia’s behavior to the Biblical figure Cain, who killed his brother Abel (Semko 2021).

Linked to this dominant trope was an understanding that Ukraine had made its civilizational choice of EU and NATO integration to leave the “Russian world” behind. Ukraine would no longer accept living in a colonial relationship with its former imperial master. Zelensky’s administration initially had a softer rhetoric vis-à-vis the Russian leadership, likely in an attempt to achieve a lasting peace. However, when negotiations stalled, Zelensky started to reiterate Poroshenko’s arguments. Zelensky and his administration declared the same red lines. All territory lost since 2014, including Crimea, had to be returned; Russia had to fulfill the Ukrainian interpretation of the Minsk Agreements; and Ukraine would achieve peace through strength – a strong army, close cooperation with the United States and the European Union, and through membership in NATO (Kuleba 2021).

Foreign Policy Attitudes on the Mass Level

So far, I have analyzed the shift in the elite narrative after the critical juncture of 2014. But what about public attitudes? Before 2014, few Ukrainians worried about territorial integrity, and support for NATO membership rarely reached more than 25 percent (KIIS 2012). In surveys from 2015–2017, by contrast, 64–78 percent of participants in a hypothetical referendum would have voted for NATO membership, while 17–28.5 percent would have voted against membership (Haran and Yakovlyev 2017, 122). In a survey published by KIIS (2021b) a few months before Russia’s large-scale attack on Ukraine in February 2022, 59 percent supported Ukraine’s accession to NATO, while 28 percent were against it. A significant shift in attitudes toward Ukraine’s integration with the EU also occurred. As late as February 2014, 41 percent of Ukrainians were ready to vote for membership in the Russian-led Customs Union (CU). Less than ten months later, in December 2014, only 18 percent supported membership in the CU. Support for EU accession had meanwhile increased from 42 percent to 53 percent (KIIS 2015). In 2021, 67 percent of Ukrainians supported accession to the EU, while 21 percent were against it (KIIS 2021b).

Surveys also indicate that Ukraine’s national identity became more salient after Russia’s annexation of Crimea, in part a result of increased alienation from Russia (Kulyk 2016). Until 2014, 80–90 percent of Ukrainians had very or mostly good feelings about Russia. This number dropped to 34 percent by December 2014. The positive feelings increased in 2019 to about 50 percent, likely because of hopes for a peaceful resolution of the conflict. However, from the end of 2020, the positive attitudes fell again to around 40 percent (KIIS

2021a). Such numbers can still be considered relatively high, but the drop compared to before 2014 is dramatic.

In a survey from 2008, a majority (56 percent) of Ukrainians approved of Russia's leadership. In 2013, 43 percent approved, while 31 percent did not. After the annexation of Crimea, a dramatic shift occurred. In 2018, approximately 80 percent disapproved of the Russian leadership, while well below 10 percent approved (Gallup 2019).

Although survey results between 2014 and 2021 differ somewhat depending on the research team and time period, the overall trend is clear: Ukrainian support for NATO, and to a lesser extent the EU, increased dramatically after 2013–2014 and stabilized as the most popular foreign policy orientation within Ukraine. At the same time, support for Russia declined dramatically among Ukrainians. This attitudinal-normative shift concerning what foreign policy was considered legitimate strengthened political forces promoting a pro-Western orientation. Over time, most mainstream politicians stopped promoting a hedging or pro-Russian foreign policy, either because it was no longer thinkable for them or because they feared being politically sidelined.

One question that remains is how to assess the relative weight of the factors that I argue explain Ukraine's foreign policy from 2014 onward. In other words, how important are the changes in domestic power structures – the split of the Party of Regions and the loss of important parts of the voting base as a result of Russian occupation – compared to shifts in national identity following the critical juncture in 2013–2014? While it is difficult to fully discriminate between the two, I argue that changes in both domestic power structures and national identity contributed and, when added together, explain Ukraine's stable pro-Western orientation after 2014.

According to polls made after 2014, in comparison to Ukraine's West and Center, many in Ukraine's East and South still seemed skeptical of Ukraine's pro-Western direction. In 2017, for example, KIIS (2017) surveys show that 39 percent in the East and 29 percent in the South supported accession to the EU, while 44 percent in the East and 63 percent in the South preferred either nonalignment or joining the Russian-led Customs Union (the rest remained uncertain or refused to answer). Similarly, support for NATO was quite low in the South (24 percent in support of membership and 56 percent against) and the East (29 percent in support of membership and 43 percent against, the rest were undecided). It is important to note that these polling results exclude people living in Crimea and the occupied parts of Donetsk and Luhansk after 2014 – in other words, the parts of Ukraine that, at least before 2014, had been the strongest supporters of the Party of Regions and the most critical of NATO and the EU. If we think of a counterfactual with voters in Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk remaining in Ukraine's political arena, it is likely that support for parties against Ukraine's pro-Western orientation would have been stronger.

On the other hand, if Russia's leadership had not occupied Crimea and parts of Donbas in 2014 and instead had taken a less aggressive approach after Euromaidan, it is likely that the view of Russia among dominant Ukrainian elites and important parts of the population would have been less negative. Russia's occupation of Crimea and parts of Donbas firmly

established Russia as a radical other and strengthened the motivation for dominant Ukrainian elites and parts of society to take drastic steps to cut Ukraine's previously relatively close relationship with Russia. Especially notable is the increased support for NATO membership. This significant shift in public opinion cannot be explained only by the loss of parts of the southeastern electorate. In sum, the shift in domestic power structures weakened the opposition against Ukraine's pro-Western orientation, while the transformation in national identity strengthened the motivation for the same foreign policy. When added together, these factors produced a stable Ukrainian pro-Western orientation. However, the shift leading to this development was more complex than suggested by those assuming an automatic change in 2014 without specifying the factors and mechanisms at work.

Conclusions and Implications

In 2014, Ukraine abandoned its ambivalent stance that since the 1990s had characterized the country's foreign affairs. Before the critical juncture in 2013–2014, Ukraine's shift to a firm, pro-Western orientation was neither predetermined nor obvious. In line with scholars in the foreign policy analysis tradition, the findings of this article suggest that responses to external threats are by no means automatic. Russia's annexation of Crimea did not make all Ukrainian politicians and citizens advocates of the EU and NATO. Support remained, especially in parts of eastern Ukraine, for parties that preferred pragmatic ties with Russia, said no to NATO, and wanted to put the economic agreement with the EU on hold. Yet, the breakup of the Party of Regions and the loss of millions of its core voters after Russia's occupation of Crimea and parts of the Donbas significantly weakened these political forces and resulted in a permanent shift in Ukraine's political balance of power.

Counterfactuals are difficult to make. Still, suppose the Kremlin had decided not to occupy Crimea and parts of Donbas in 2014. In that case, it is quite likely that a powerful Ukrainian political opposition against the pro-Western orientation – backed by voters in the East and South – eventually would have reemerged in Ukraine, just as it had in the past. However, the Kremlin's actions in 2014 permanently weakened the pro-Russian parties in Ukraine and strengthened the pro-Western forces. Thus, territorial change mattered for the stability of Ukraine's pro-Western foreign policy after 2014.

Moreover, this watershed moment strengthened the resolve and determination of Ukraine's pro-Western political forces. Ukraine's post-1991 development had, until 2013–2014, been peaceful without significant violence. Following the painful and violent experiences on the Maidan and of Russian occupation, Ukraine's predominant foreign policy narrative shifted. It increasingly portrayed Ukraine's pro-Western orientation as a civilizational choice, with the country's existence at stake. Russia went from being a strategic (if difficult) partner to being an imperial radical other that could not be trusted. This shift in the predominant foreign policy narrative delegitimized hedging or pro-Russian policies among Ukraine's mainstream parties and politicians. Thus, to abandon the pro-Western

direction and instead adopt neutrality or take a more accommodative approach toward Russia after 2014, as suggested by leading realist scholars, was not an option for Ukrainian governments. Unlike the critical juncture framework proposed here that considers developments within Ukraine, many neorealists, such as Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, primarily consider great and regional powers as significant actors in the international system and downplay developments in small and medium states.

The article's findings also help us to better understand why the Orange Revolution in 2004 did not result in a stable pro-Western foreign policy. At the time, the Orange Revolution was seen as a momentous shift in Ukraine's domestic and foreign affairs, away from President Leonid Kuchma's hedging strategy and toward the Euro-Atlantic community. Yet, after 2004, the Party of Regions remained a powerful political force, with a large voting base, and backed by the Communist Party. This contributed to the return of Yanukovich and the Party of Regions, especially when the Orange coalition failed to push its reform agenda forward and deliver on its promises. In other words, the conditions that contributed to a stable pro-Western orientation in 2014 were absent in 2004.

A final takeaway from this analysis is that while political leaders tend to play important roles during critical junctures, their decisions can result in unintended consequences. Yanukovich and his inner circle most likely made decisions in November 2013 and during the Euromaidan to remain in power but failed to foresee the reactive sequence that unfolded from these decisions. In turn, Putin and his inner circle likely made decisions during this period intended to strengthen Russia's influence in Ukraine. Still, as shown in this article, the decisions taken by the Russian leadership significantly contributed to Ukraine's firm pro-Western foreign policy from 2014 onward.

Notes

1. In defense of his decision, Barack Obama argued that Ukraine is a core Russian interest, but not an American one, and that Ukraine "is going to be vulnerable to military domination by Russia no matter what we do" (quoted in Goldberg 2016).
2. "Pro-Russian" parties are here defined as parties that favor close economic and political relations with Russia, are against NATO membership, and are critical of too close relations with the EU. It is important to note that support for a foreign policy closer to Russia is not the same as support for separatism or joining Russia. Polling by KIIS (2021a) between 2012 and 2021 shows that support for the latter was generally low in Ukraine.
3. It is worth noting that the KIIS surveys were not produced for this article but have been used by the author to trace dynamics in public opinion. KIIS full results and methods are found on <https://www.kiis.com.ua>.
4. A survey by KIIS in mid-November 2013 showed that 41% of Ukrainians wanted to join the Customs Union (54% and 64.5% in Ukraine's South and East, but only 16.5% and 29.5% in Ukraine's West and Center) and 39.5% wanted to join the EU (66.5% and 43.5% in Ukraine's West and Center, but only 31.5% and 18.5% in Ukraine's South and East).
5. Paradoxically Russian leaders also criticized the arrest of Tymoshenko. They argued that the gas agreements, negotiated with Tymoshenko in 2009, were in accordance with Russian and Ukrainian laws (Obydenkova and Libman 2014).

6. Lucan Way, for example, calls the Euromaidan Revolution and the following months a "Black Swan" event that was "heavily shaped by a range of contingent choices" (Way 2015, 81).
7. Technically the Opposition Bloc had been created in 2010 but became active only in September 2014.
8. Akhmetov reportedly also supported Petro Poroshenko.
9. These billboards were observed by this author in Kyiv in late 2018.

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