Foreign Policy After Empire

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Explaining Georgia's and Ukraine's International Orientation from Independence until 2021

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Abstract
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What explains the foreign policy orientation of states with a background within empires? The dissertation explores this vital question by examining the foreign policies of Georgia and Ukraine – two states that became independent in 1991 after long periods within the Soviet Union. The dissertation develops a theory of foreign policy in post-imperial states, in conjunction with an empirical study that covers foreign policymaking in Georgia and Ukraine from independence until 2021.

Drawing on a rich body of sources, which includes elite interviews conducted by the author, news articles, primary documents, diplomatic cables and secondary sources, the dissertation's comparative approach sheds new light on almost 30 years of foreign policymaking in Georgia and Ukraine. The study finds that from the late 1990s, Georgia developed a surprisingly stable pro-western foreign policy that remained intact until 2021. Meanwhile, Ukraine's foreign policy was vague and incoherent in the 1990s, oscillating between the West and Russia, and remained so until 2014. Only in 2014 did Ukraine start to pursue a firm pro-western orientation, in a shift that contradicted the expectations of leading scholars of international relations, especially realists.

To explain these foreign policy dynamics, the author argues that the structure of the political arena that crystallizes in a country after an imperial break-up is vital to determining a state's ability to develop a coherent foreign policy. Furthermore, inspired by historical institutionalism, the author claims that formative moments, and whether they are violent, as well as the role played by the former imperial metropole in these periods are crucial to the foreign policy that is later developed by a state.

Taken together, the dissertation emphasizes the need for scholars to engage more deeply with the multifaceted challenges faced by post-imperial states. The study also highlights the limitations of realist and liberal approaches to explaining Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies. Finally, the book contributes to a shift in perspective from great powers and imperial hegemons to focus on smaller powers in post-imperial relations – a necessary shift, not least among the countries that once belonged to the Soviet Union.

Keywords: Foreign policy, post-imperial relations, Georgia, Ukraine, European Union, NATO, Russia, foreign policy change

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Contents

1. Introduction

The year is 1995. Eduard Shevardnadze, the second president of Georgia, has just survived an assassination attempt. Georgian television shows a shaken president with blood covering parts of his face (RFE/RL, 2014a). Shevardnadze, nicknamed the Silver Fox for his white hair and his ability to maneuver within political systems, chaired Georgia's Soviet Communist Party for over a decade before moving to Moscow to serve as the Soviet foreign minister between 1985 and 1990. In 1992, he returned to his native Georgia to lead it through a turbulent period following independence. In the first years of independence, Georgia signed multiple agreements with Russia. Shortly after the assassination attempt, however, Shevardnadze and his team began a process of moving Georgia gradually out of Russia's perceived sphere of influence. In 1999, Shevardnadze declared in an interview that Georgia would soon be "knocking very hard" on NATO's door. In Istanbul the same year his administration took a firm position against Moscow in negotiations on Russia's military bases in Georgia (Jack & Stern, 1999). His successor, Mikheil Saakashvili, continued on this path and even strengthened Georgia's western orientation. Saakashvili called US President Ronald Reagan a hero and became one of George W Bush's closest allies when the 2003 invasion of Iraq made Bush increasingly unpopular among several US partners. In turn, senior US officials frequently visited Georgia. Saakashvili and his team tried to join NATO and called on Russia to stay out of Georgia's national affairs. Georgia's overall pro-western orientation continued after Saakashvili stepped down.

Ukraine also gained independence in the context of the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. Ukraine would come to play a central role in European security in the 21st century. Today, Ukraine's foreign policy is firmly pro-West. Since 2019, an amendment to the constitution has even declared European Union (EU) and NATO membership to be strategic foreign policy goals. Ukrainians are currently fighting a war against Russia for their very existence. For a relatively long time, however, Ukraine's foreign policy wavered between Russia and the West. The foreign policy of Ukraine's second president, Leonid Kuchma, is illustrative. As discussed below, Kuchma won the 1994 elections on a pro-Russian platform but within a few years he was advocating long-term integration with the West. At the end of his ten-year presidency, when the EU and NATO had enlarged to Ukraine's western borders, Kuchma started to move closer to Russia. He ended his second term campaigning with

Vladimir Putin in support of Viktor Yanukovych as the candidate they both wanted to see as Ukraine's next president. There followed the Orange Revolution in 2004, when mass protests brought pro-western leaders to power in Ukraine in reaction to Yanukovych's attempt to steal the election. Experts assumed at the time that Ukraine had finally settled on a firm pro-West course. Already in 2010, however, a backlash followed.

Several questions must be asked based on the experiences of Georgia and Ukraine. Why did Georgia, a small former-Soviet republic on Russia's border, geographically located closer to the Middle East and Central Asia than to Western Europe, pursue a stable pro-West foreign policy orientation from the late 1990s until 2021, when this study ends? Why did Georgians identify the United States, located thousands of miles away, as a natural ally? Why, despite loud objections from Moscow, did a former-Soviet foreign minister and a former Kremlin insider suddenly support the idea of moving his native Georgia away from Russia? Relatedly, why did Ukraine's foreign policy waver for decades? Why did the Orange Revolution result in a backlash with Yanukovych as president, who first abandoned the goal of NATO membership and then in 2013 turned to Russia having rejected a partnership with the EU? Finally, why did a majority of Ukrainians eventually unite in a staunch pro-western orientation in 2014? These questions are central to this dissertation.

Georgia's and Ukraine's experiences illustrate a broader problem. How do states go about building relations with the outside world following imperial collapse? Why do states in post-imperial contexts choose different foreign policies, including on how to deal with the former metropole? Regardless of whether it is in the Middle East, Africa, Asia or the former Soviet Union, states that become independent after longer periods within empires face significant domestic and external challenges. This dissertation claims that these post-imperial circumstances are crucial to making sense of foreign policymaking in these states. During the transition to independence and its immediate aftermath, states often experience border disputes, separatism and domestic groups competing for power, at times by violent means. Moreover, in the aftermath of imperial collapse, states tend to be relatively weak and national identities unconsolidated after decades or even centuries within imperial structures (Cummings & Hinnebusch, 2011; David, 1991; J. Hughes & Sasse, 2002; Kuzio, 2002).

Relatedly, newly independent states face the challenging task of building relations with the outside world and consolidating independence. In this regard, the relationship with the former core of the empire has often been the most important one – but also the most difficult. In some cases, colonial powers disentangled themselves from their overseas colonies. Without downplaying the coercion and violence used by these empires to control their colonies, the United Kingdom and France were politically and economically weakened after World War II and faced resistance from independence movements in colonies far away from the core (Elkins, 2022; Spruyt, 2005). In other cases,

such as France and Algeria, close links and geographic proximity to the imperial core resulted in a break-up that was both bloody and painful. France has also maintained a close, but disputed, connection with several of its former colonies in Africa (I. King, 2022). Moreover, long after the formal empires broke down, successors to land empires such as Turkey and Iran have continued to interfere in the affairs of the smaller states in their neighborhoods through what Mankoff (2022) calls imperial geopolitics.

This dissertation contributes an approach to understanding foreign policy-making in states that become independent after decades or even centuries within empires. As this study shows, for Georgia and Ukraine to build functioning external relations and consolidate independence has been a major challenge. Imperial Russia, in contrast to the British and French overseas empires, was a large land empire with blurred boundaries between the metropole and the imperial peripheries (D. Lieven, 2011). The Soviet Union, the successor to the Russian Empire, has been described as "the most uniquely complex [empire] of the twentieth century" (Toal, 2017, p. 59), with over 50 ethnoterritorial units at the time of its collapse. Moreover, the Russian language was its lingua franca, and the Soviet system consisted of strong economic, infrastructural, military and political linkages between the imperial core in Moscow and the peripheries. After the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, many within Russia's political elite viewed the former-Soviet republics as a sphere of Russian privilege. Already in the early 1990s, Russian leaders were making clear they considered the former-Soviet republics to be Russia's "near abroad" (*blizhnoe zarubezhe*), implied that Russia perceived states in the near abroad as "less foreign and less fully sovereign" (Mankoff, 2012, p. 219) than states outside the region. In 1993, the Russian ambassador to the US told a senior US diplomat that relations between Russia and Ukraine were "identical to those between New York and New Jersey" (Talbott, 2003, p. 80), which illustrates a common view shared within Russia's political elite at the time. This understanding did not fade away when former KGB agent Vladimir Putin became president in 2000; in fact, it was strengthened still further.

Thus, newly independent states bordering the former imperial core face significant challenges, especially when the metropole refuses to accept the independence of the former periphery. For these small and medium-sized states, foreign policy is not just an instrument for influencing the outside world – it can be a matter of life and death.

Purpose and research questions

This dissertation seeks to explore the broader problem presented above by analyzing the development of the foreign policies of Georgia and Ukraine, two countries that became independent when the Soviet Union broke-up in 1991. The purpose is to develop a theory to explain the foreign policies of Georgia

and Ukraine from the move to independence until 2021. For this goal, the dissertation seeks to answer three main questions: First, why has Georgia pursued a stable pro-West foreign policy for approximately 25 years? Second, why did Ukraine's foreign policy waver between the West and Russia for over 20 years? Third, what made a majority of Ukrainians unite around a firm pro-West foreign policy orientation in 2014? From a broader perspective, the ambition is that the theory developed for this dissertation can expand our knowledge of foreign policymaking in post-imperial settings. The theory has been created with the aim of explaining Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies. I suggest however that the main principles of the theory could also be fruitfully applied to the study of foreign policy in other states with a background within imperial structures. Naturally, the theory's broader applicability will have to be assessed empirically by other scholars.

Following this introduction and two chapters that lay out the theoretical argument and methods, this dissertation presents theory-driven analytical narratives of the foreign policies of two states that have played important roles in the international politics of Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. A related purpose is therefore to contribute original research to help the reader better understand the challenges and outlooks of Georgia and Ukraine since independence in building relations with external powers. These two countries are important to study since they have been at the center of discussions on European and even global security at different points in the past three decades.

Much of the scholarship on foreign policy after imperial collapse has been centered on the former metropoles. In what was once the Soviet Union, many scholars have focused on Russia's role in shaping the region in competition with other larger powers –increasingly so after Vladimir Putin came to power.[1] A related purpose of this dissertation is therefore to contribute to a shift in perspective. Instead of putting imperial metropoles such as Russia at the center of the analysis, this dissertation focuses on two smaller neighbors. I argue that paying more attention to Georgia and Ukraine – two states often treated as objects of great power struggles – enriches our understanding not only of the two countries at hand, but also of international politics in the region and of foreign policymaking in post-imperial settings more broadly. Moreover, this dissertation contributes to the discussion of how Europe arrived at in 2022, as it faced one of its most serious security crises since World War II. While many analysts have jumped on the bandwagon to explain Russia's decision to go to war in 2022 and its immediate implications, this dissertation offers a detailed analysis of foreign policymaking in Georgia and Ukraine

[1] There are different approaches to explaining Russia's assertive behavior. Realists point to perpetual great power behavior and material factors (Mearsheimer, 2014) while others highlight Russia's (post-) imperial impulses (Grigas, 2016). Constructivists emphasize Russia's national identity and its search for status and respect (Tsygankov, 2022). Others have highlighted a particular geopolitical culture (Toal, 2017) or the role of elite ideas and leaders, including Putin's personality (McFaul, 2020).

from independence until 2021. This contribution helps to put current affairs in perspective. With these broader aims in mind, I discuss the three questions that structure and guide the analysis in more detail below.

First, why did Georgia pursue a stable pro-western foreign policy for approximately 25 years, since the late 1990s until this study ends in 2021? This question is especially relevant because Georgia is a small state located close to Russia and the Middle East, and geographically far away from Western Europe and the United States. It is far from self-evident that a small state should pursue a stable pro-West orientation in such an uncertain and volatile external environment – especially without firm western security guarantees. Moreover, the policy is surprising because of Georgia's vague historical connections to Western Europe and the West's relatively limited interest in offering Georgia NATO or EU membership during the period studied.

Second, why did Ukraine's foreign policy waver between the West and Russia for over 20 years? How can this foreign policy ambivalence be explained? Ukraine's foreign policy wavered even though it is geographically closer than Georgia to EU and NATO countries. Nor did Ukraine pursue a stable pro-Russian foreign policy, as some other post-Soviet neighbors did.[2] Moreover, foreign policy incoherence goes against an assumption common among leading theories of international relations in which states tend to be united on core national interests and pursue coherent foreign policies most of the time.

Third, what made a majority of Ukrainians unite around a firm pro-West foreign policy orientation in 2014? As discussed below, Ukraine's foreign policy since 2014 contradicts expectations, and especially the arguments made by leading realist scholars at the time. Moreover, as argued in Chapter 11, this shift was not automatic but must be explained in detail. In other words, it was not self-evident that Ukraine would pursue a firm pro-West orientation after 2014, including the goal of NATO membership.

To answer these questions, I develop a theory of foreign policy after empire, presented in Chapter 2, to explain how foreign policies after imperial dissolution are shaped and why patterns tend to reappear over relatively long periods of time (in this case, for approximately 20–25 years). One advantage, beyond the incorporation of a temporal aspect, is that both the theory and the method make it possible to compare cases. Most studies of foreign policy in the post-Soviet region have focused on a single case.[3] A problem with single case studies is that they risk ending up with explanations that fit the foreign policy of a specific country, often over a shorter period, but these explanations

[2] Armenia, Belarus and Kazakhstan are three examples of states that in the decades after 1991 joined Russia-led projects such as the military Collective Security Treaty Organization and the political-economic organization, the Eurasian Economic Union.

[3] In this dissertation, the term "post-Soviet" is used at times, which some may find provocative in the context of Russia's war in Ukraine. Nonetheless, despite the search for a more suitable term, "post-Soviet" is useful to characterize post-imperial relations in the region after 1991.

tend to make less sense over time or when countries are compared. Relatedly, a growing list of factors that could explain the foreign policy of individual countries risks ending up with a laundry list of factors that are not integrated and are of less value when doing comparative work (Götz, 2017).[4] In other words, if the literature is short term and single-case focused, there is a risk that we do not see the wood for the trees. A comparative approach conducted over time, on the other hand, allows us to see different things than if we are caught up in studying a single case for, say, five or ten years.

The argument in brief

I argue that two components are central to explaining the foreign policies of Georgia and Ukraine, which both became independent in 1991 after long periods within empires. These components are not unique to these two countries but could play a role in other countries with a background within imperial structures. First, I claim that the structure of the political arena that crystallizes in a country after an imperial break-up is important, especially in determining a state's ability to pursue a coherent foreign policy. Second, I argue that formative moments are crucial in how countries shape their foreign policies later in time. Although we can think of different types of formative moments, the break-up of an empire and the transition to independence are the most important ones. Whether this process is violent and the role the imperial metropole plays in it are vital for the kind of foreign policy a country develops later on.

The first part of my theory pays attention to the structure of a country's political arena and its importance for the formation of a state's foreign policy. Simply put, the more disagreement within the political arena regarding which external power(s) to align with, the more likely it is that a state's foreign policy will be inconsistent or ambivalent. Such disagreement depends largely on the structure of the political arena. How, then, are political arenas formed and what can the basis be for such disagreement? In part, I argue that political arenas are produced by historical antecedent conditions. States with a history within empires are often multilayered and complex entities. To expand and control their empires, metropoles throughout history have used a variety of approaches, including annexation of new territories, coercion and violence (Elkins, 2022). Moreover, imperial policies such as territorial subdivisions within the empire, granting autonomous status to regions, nationalities and

[4] The point here is not to argue that previous research based primarily on single cases has been irrelevant or of little value. Far from it, many of these studies have improved our knowledge of their specific topics. However, I claim that research on international politics and foreign policy in the former Soviet region and other post-imperial contexts can be improved by thinking more about similarities and differences across cases and over time.

language policies, and industrial projects have contributed to shape the arenas in what eventually became independent states.

As a result of these historical conditions, many countries with a history within empires have multiple political centers that compete for political power. In the Soviet Union, regions have played a particularly important role in this regard (J. Hughes & Sasse, 2002). Some regional borderlands, especially those adjacent to the imperial metropole, had closer ties to Moscow than was the case with other parts of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).[5] The reasons are multifaceted from economic and infrastructural links to security concerns, as well as language and historical ties. In some parts of the republics, links to Moscow were much weaker. Western Ukraine is a good example of the latter category. Western Ukraine had no previous experience of Russian rule and fought hard for its independence before ultimately being incorporated into the Soviet Union in the context of World War II. As a result, most people in Western Ukraine remained vocal critics of the Soviet Union and Moscow even after being incorporated into the empire. In states with arenas that include multiple centers with contrasting relations with the former hegemon, the broader struggle for political power within the state can be expected to tap into questions related to foreign policy and the country's geopolitical orientation.

States with several political centers, which are often regionally based, have what I define as a *multicenter political arena*. In these arenas, foreign policy contestation and incoherence can be expected to occur more often than in other arenas. Relatedly, questions linked to the country's international orientation can be expected to be polarizing and part of the broader struggle for political power. When political elites disagree on geopolitical orientations – and even politicize these divisions – it is difficult for a state to pursue a coherent and stable foreign policy over time. In states with few competing centers of political power, what I call a *single center political arena*, my theory expects foreign policy contestation and incoherence to be less likely. In these arenas, we can still see competition for political power, but it is less probable that these struggles tap into competing visions of the state's foreign policy and geopolitical orientation.

Political arenas, however, are not only shaped by historical conditions. I argue that the structure of the political arena can be changed in more recent times as well, during formative moments, which are also known by scholars as critical junctures (D. Collier & Munck, 2022). Political arenas can change dramatically during these relatively concentrated macro episodes of innovation. The idea that contestation during critical junctures can result in new types of political arenas is based on insights by Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier (1991) in their path-breaking book on regime dynamics in Latin America.

[5] These were formally known as the Republics of the USSR. Two such republics were the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Many scholars have been inspired by their work to apply the concept of critical junctures (D. Collier & Munck, 2022). Although I take inspiration from these ideas, I build a new theory for a different purpose, to explain foreign policy orientations in states following imperial break-up.

The multifaceted character of many states after decades or even centuries within empires means that they often face internal challenges during the transition to independence. The transition period can result in a reshaped political arena, depending on how political conflicts are handled at these critical junctures by political leaders in the host state (in my case Georgia and Ukraine), important domestic groups within that state and the imperial metropole (here Russia). I argue that an important source of such transformation is whether a state experiences separatism and as a result loses control of parts of its territory. Territorial loss of previously distinctive regions can shift the domestic balance of power and such shifts have implications for a country's foreign policy. This is especially likely if regions or other entities with close links to the former imperial metropole are, de facto, detached from the host state.

The second part of my theory holds that whether a state's transition to independence is painful and the role the imperial metropole plays in this process can change the perception of elites and societies. Such a formative experience is crucial for the type of foreign policy a country develops later in time. In fact, I claim that such formative experience can be influential on the thinking of foreign policy elites and societies for decades. This part of the argument builds on insights formulated by Robert Jervis (1976), who argued that processes such as how a country gains independence and whether a country experiences major wars deeply influence the perceptions of leaders and the foreign policy goals they pursue. While Jervis was primarily interested in how leaders learn from past events, I take this insight further and integrate it into a theory of foreign policy applicable to states that gained independence after a long time within empires.

Throughout history, decolonization processes and imperial break-ups have, in many cases, been violent, painful and traumatic. In other cases, the transition to independence has been peaceful, without armed conflict and allowed states to remain united (Spruyt, 2005). The role of the imperial metropole is important in this regard. In some cases, the former metropole has played a highly negative role. In others, it has withdrawn from its colonies without resorting to violence, although complicated and prolonged negotiations have often been necessary to achieve a peaceful withdrawal. I argue that the quality of formative moments, such as the transition to independence, and the role played by the imperial metropole in this process have important implications for the type of national interests and foreign policy goals a state develops after independence.

Where a country experiences a violent transition with negative involvement from the imperial metropole, it is much more likely that its leaders will try to distance their country from the former metropole and use foreign policy to

cope with the traumatic formative experience. Even a smaller state with few resources and limited external support in terms of security guarantees can be expected to take risks to leave the former metropole's perceived sphere of interest. If the violent transition involves loss of territory, political leaders would be expected to link the country's foreign policy closely to goals related to sovereignty and reintegration of the state. Leaders of these states would be expected to seek alliances with strong patrons that can support them in the struggle against the former imperial metropole.

If on the other hand a country experiences a peaceful transition to independence – which can still involve difficult negotiations with the imperial metropole – my theory expects a more pragmatic relationship to emerge with the former metropole following independence. The reason for this difference is that violent and traumatic formative experiences shape perceptions of elites and societies, redefine national interests and can turn an external power into what has been termed a "radically different other" (Hansen, 2006). If a country on the other hand experiences a peaceful transition and has a "civilized divorce" from the imperial metropole, its leaders will be more inclined to develop a pragmatic relationship with the former imperial core after independence.

Certainly, even after peaceful transitions some leaders and parts of the population might be skeptical of having a close relationship with the former metropole. However, it is less likely that this view will become dominant or hegemonic. I propose that this is the case because leaders and societies learn from formative experiences. When countries experience a peaceful transition and a civilized divorce from the former metropole, a new formative period must, in my view, take place before that country is ready to abandon pragmatic relations with the former metropole. If such a process involves violence and negative involvement by the former metropole, elites and societies will fundamentally rethink previous relations with that metropole. They will be ready to drastically overturn earlier pragmatism, even at a high cost. The theoretical argument is presented in full in Chapter 2.

Why a new approach is needed

Why is a new approach to foreign policy needed that focuses on the consequences of imperial dissolution in terms of political arenas and relations with the former imperial metropole? After all, scholars have already proposed how states, including Georgia and Ukraine, should behave internationally and why leaders choose a particular foreign policy. In fact, significant shortcomings can easily be identified when these theoretical assumptions and expectations meet the realities on the ground – especially when comparing the foreign policies of the two states for almost 30 years, as I do in this dissertation. As one prominent scholar noted two decades after the break-up of the Soviet Union:

"There is still no definitive understanding of the post-Soviet states' international behavior" (Tsygankov, 2010, p. 196). This assessment is still valid more than a decade later, which is perhaps unsurprising. Many theories, levels and factors have been proposed to explain the foreign policy of states (for general overviews, see Alden & Aran, 2016; C. Hill, 2015; Hudson, 2013). I assess some of the most influential approaches below.

A realist approach

Let us start with realism, a leading school of thought in international relations. Realists are primarily interested in the behavior of great and regional powers but also offers expectations for how small and medium-sized states should behave. A starting point for most realists is that in an insecure anarchic world, great powers want to control their neighborhoods (Mearsheimer, 2003). No matter if we consider the United States and the Western Hemisphere, China and the East and South China Sea or Russia's so-called near abroad, great powers, in the realist understanding, try to establish spheres of influence under their control.

From this perspective, small and medium-sized states in a geopolitical environment with a resolute large neighbor like Russia have limited options. Most realists expect such states with no pre-existing firm security guarantees (such as NATO's Article 5) to accommodate the interests of the regional hegemon or to become neutral buffer states. For example, between 2014 and 2021, after Russia's annexation of Crimea, prominent realist scholars (Allison, 2014; Mearsheimer, 2014; Posen, 2016; Walt, 2015) and statesmen such as Henry Kissinger (2014) and Zbigniew Brzezinski (2014) all expected Ukraine to accommodate Russian demands and not to aim for NATO and EU membership. Nonetheless, Ukraine pursued a firm pro-West orientation (see Chapter 11).

Relatedly, Georgia's stable pro-West orientation since the late 1990s is difficult to explain from a realist perspective – especially since Georgia has had no firm security guarantees from NATO or the US and borders the regional hegemon, Russia.[6] Moreover, while Ukrainian leaders at times before 2014 pursued a "Russia pragmatic" or non-alignment policy, it would be a stretch to call it a coherent foreign policy. Most realists treat states as unitary actors that respond strategically to threats and opportunities in the external environment.[7] Scholars have discussed the risks involved when a state fails to respond

[6] A realist response might be that leaders in these states have acted irrationally. However, to treat behavior that goes against theoretical expectations as "irrational" does not take us very far. Instead, my dissertation provides an explanation for why leaders in these countries have behaved in the way they have.

[7] A particular version of realism known as "neoclassical realism" does take domestic factors into account but treats these as secondary. Over time, neoclassical realists assume that pressures from the international system will prevail (Ripsman et al., 2016). Moreover, adding a list of

to threats or to have a coherent foreign policy (Schweller, 2006). As noted by two scholars: "[f]or reasons of credibility…states strive to avoid overt inconsistencies or reorientations" (Mouritzen & Wivel, 2012, p. 20). As shown in this dissertation, Ukraine did not have a united, long-term foreign policy before 2014. On the contrary, Ukrainian foreign policy was often short-sighted and contested, and vacillated between Russia and the West. Instead of treating a wavering foreign policy as "irrational behavior", this dissertation builds a framework to explain it, and how after 2014 Ukraine could overcome incoherence and establish a stable pro-West foreign policy.

A liberal approach: democratic values and a European identity

Why, given the high risks involved, would states pursue a foreign policy that potentially goes against the interests of the regional hegemon? Or, to put it in the context of this dissertation, why would newly independent states seek a pro-West foreign policy orientation even at the risk of negative reactions from Russia? One answer to this question, popular among western politicians and experts, is linked to the West's normative appeal. In this understanding, the West represents values such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law, which, in turn, motivate political elites and societies in neighboring countries to integrate with the collective West.[8]

In a well-known article from 1989, Francis Fukuyama wrote, "What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War… but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 4). The peaceful democratic revolutions that took place in Eastern Europe at the time strengthened this interpretation (D'Anieri, 2019b). Thus, from this perspective, the end of the Cold War represented not only the West's victory over the Soviet Union, but also a triumph for values promoted by the US and Western Europe. A year later, Joseph Nye coined the concept of soft power, noting that "sometimes people influence others by ideas and attraction that sets the agenda for others or gets them to want what you want. Then carrots and sticks are less necessary or can be used more frugally because others see them as legitimate" (Nye, 2023, p. 36).

variables, which include ideational factors, comes with its own problems related to the coherence of the realist paradigm. On neoclassical realist applications to the region see (Gvalia et al., 2019; Oskanian, 2016).

[8] One can certainly problematize the idea that a united collective West exists in the first place, or that values such as democracy, human rights or the rule of law are "western values". The point I want to make here is simply that many officials in the US, the EU and NATO, and their member states, share an understanding that they stand for these values and that the West is a role model for other countries.

US and European leaders developed goals and strategies along these lines. With a belief in American exceptionalism and the American mission, democracy promotion became an important instrument of US foreign policy, especially after the Cold War (M. A. Hill, 2022). The goal of US President George H W Bush was to build a post-Cold War Europe "Whole, free, and at peace". His successor, Bill Clinton, declared, "Our goal is to help to build a Europe that is undivided, free, democratic, at peace and secure" (Clinton, 1998) and George W Bush initiated the Freedom Agenda to spread democracy across the world (Toal, 2017). Moreover, under US leadership, NATO enlarged to include former Eastern Bloc countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including three former Soviet republics (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania). As a vocal supporter of this US strategy noted in 2008: "Western leaders seized a historic opportunity to open the doors of NATO and the European Union (EU) to post-communist central and eastern Europe. By consolidating democracy and ensuring stability from the Baltics to the Black Sea, they redrew the map of Europe. As a result, the continent today is more peaceful, democratic, and free" (Asmus, 2008, p. 95).

The idea of anchoring former Eastern European communist countries in the West and consolidating democracy took root in the EU as well. Scholars acknowledged the EU's transformative power to change its neighborhood, to some extent through conditionality, but mainly through soft power (Grabbe, 2006), and how the EU's normative power could "redefine international norms in its own image" (Manners, 2002, p. 252). In 2004 the EU incorporated new members in Central and Eastern Europe in the so-called big bang enlargement. Democracy and the rule of law were important criteria for membership (the Copenhagen criteria). The enlargement agenda has been described as one of the EU's most successful foreign policy achievements, with important implications for the Union and its neighborhood (Schimmelfennig & Scholtz, 2008).

To return to the questions asked in this dissertation, the above perspective comes with an explicit or implicit assumption: Countries seek to join the collective West, including the EU and NATO, primarily because of the West's normative appeal. As a result, the foreign policy of candidate countries is, in important parts, driven by a commitment among political elites and societies to values such as democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Relatedly, leaders and populations in these countries identify with Europe due to perceived shared values and a common history (Kakachia & Minesashvili, 2015; White & Feklyunina, 2014). While this lens is helpful to some extent, I argue that it is problematic to assume this to be the main driving force for why post-Soviet states such as Georgia and Ukraine have pursued particular foreign policies.

First, the assumption that states are in an unstoppable transition to democracy has been critiqued. Critics have advised the democracy-promotion community to discard the "transition paradigm" and noted that what looks like

democratic breakthroughs can instead be semi-authoritarian regime cycles (Carothers, 2002; Hale, 2015). Relatedly, Levitsky and Way (2010) have used "competitive authoritarianism" to define states that hold elections but have significant democratic shortcomings. It is telling that democratic development has been in decline over the past two decades, including in the former Soviet region (Freedom House, 2022). Second, as is shown in this dissertation, political leaders have often spoken about the importance of democracy in support of a pro-West orientation in Georgia and Ukraine, but many of these leaders and their allies have used non-democratic means against their opponents when this was seen as necessary to remain in power. Thus, there are significant limits to the idea that the foreign policies of states located between Russia and the West have primarily been driven by the West's normative attraction. This assumption is especially problematic in the case of political elites – the actors mainly in charge of foreign affairs.

The role of leaders and elites: ideology or opportunism

Another set of explanations highlights the role of leaders and elites in the formation of foreign policy. Among these scholars, we find contrasting arguments for how leaders and elites can help to explain foreign policy trajectories. One group of scholars emphasizes the ideology of leaders and important elite groups. It claims that ideology within an elite group plays a significant role in shaping a state's foreign policy. In the context of this dissertation, scholars have for example argued that liberal ideas, role conceptions or democratic values explain the pro-West foreign policy of Georgia's President Mikheil Saakashvili after the Rose Revolution in 2003 (Gvalia et al., 2013; Kakachia et al., 2018; Nilsson, 2015). Gretskiy (2013) highlights the role of leadership in Ukraine's foreign policy, and Darden (2009) has argued that elite ideologies played an important role in the foreign policy of former-Soviet republics in the 1990s.

A brief survey of Georgian leaders illustrates the problems with this type of explanation. As discussed below in this dissertation, Georgia's foreign policy has overall been pro-West since the late 1990s, but its leaders have very different backgrounds and ideologies. As noted above, Georgia's second president, Eduard Shevardnadze, was for decades a communist party leader before being appointed foreign minister of the Soviet Union in 1985. He returned from Moscow to lead Georgia in 1992 and became president in 1995. His successor, Mikhail Saakashvili, was born four decades after Shevardnadze. Educated in the West and fluent in English and French, Saakashvili had little in common with his communist predecessor. Finally, Bidzina Ivanishvili, who founded the Georgian Dream party which won the parliamentary elections in 2012, is Georgia's richest man – an oligarch who made his fortune in Russia in the 1990s. It is possible to identify different foreign policy emphases among these leaders, but leader-centered explanations are weakened by the fact that

very different political leaders maintained Georgia's overall pro-West orientation from the late 1990s until the end of this study in 2021.

Others have argued that leaders of newly independent states tend to be opportunistic and flexible, with little ideological commitment. Such a foreign policy was common during the Cold War, especially among states that had recently gained independence from empires (Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, 2014). Many of these states chose not to ally firmly with either the United States or the Soviet Union. Instead, their leaders used a flexible foreign policy and shifted allegiance depending on the situation. The superpower rivalry gave smaller states leverage, and external powers could provide a regime with military and economic support. In this interpretation, the personal or sub-national interests of leaders and elite groups drive foreign policy choices. Relatedly, Steven R. David's (1991) omnibalancing theory underlines that in fragile, unconsolidated states, leaders must often consider multiple threats. Internal threats against regime survival can be more important for leaders than external threats, since losing power often comes at a significant personal cost. This has implications for foreign policymaking since leaders are likely to pursue opportunistic foreign policies to remain in power.

In the post-Soviet context, scholars have noted a tendency for opportunistic behavior and flexible "multivector" foreign policies (Gnedina, 2015). Leaders develop opportunistic and often short-sighted foreign policies to play great powers off against each other to gain personal benefits or profits for a narrow interest group (Cantir & Kennedy, 2015; Gnedina, 2015; Kuzio, 2005b). Miller (2006) has used omnibalancing to predict security policy and alliance behavior in the post-Soviet region. Miller argues that leaders whose political survival is at stake will turn to Russia for support, since the West will not accept the undemocratic behavior necessary for the leader to remain in power. Even a quick overview challenges Miller's predictions, however, as presidents such as Leonid Kravchuk and Viktor Yushchenko in Ukraine, as well as Eduard Shevardnadze and Mikheil Saakashvili in Georgia, did not switch to a pro-Russian foreign policy even when they faced serious threats to their political survival (and they all eventually lost power). In this dissertation, I agree that foreign policy flexibility has occurred among states in the post-Soviet region. However, it is far from the only approach used by the small and medium-sized states. In Chapter 2, I argue that to understand whether foreign policy flexibility is likely, we must consider the type of political arena leaders operate in and the formative experiences that occurred during the transition to independence.

As seen from this brief survey, the realist approach, the liberal approach – which focuses on the attraction of democratic values and European identity – and the various strands focused on leaders and elites suffer from shortcomings and anomalies when they meet the reality on the ground in Georgia and Ukraine. My point is not to say that these theories are irrelevant. They contribute to our knowledge and explain these cases to some extent, and are oc-

casionally discussed in this dissertation. However, the limits and inconsistencies of these approaches strengthen my motivation to provide a new approach to answering the questions asked in this dissertation.

Contributions

This dissertation makes several contributions, both theoretical and empirical. The first contribution is a theory of how to explain Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies from independence until 2021. The dissertation connects to a growing and diverse scholarship interested in the consequences of imperial collapse and, more specifically, foreign policymaking in states with a background within empires (Ash, 2023; Cummings & Hinnebusch, 2011; Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, 2014; Magu, 2021; Mankoff, 2022; M. C. Miller, 2013; Motyl, 2001; Spruyt, 2005; Tsygankov, 2022). My theory is inspired by several literatures and fields, such as comparative historical analysis, foreign policy analysis and constructivism. While inspired by multiple scholars, the theory presented in Chapter 2 has been developed by this author through an abductive process (see Chapter 3) and is the main theoretical contribution of this dissertation.

Previous studies interested in imperial collapse and its aftermath have primarily focused on the consequences for the former imperial metropoles. Other scholars have produced rich edited volumes that include multiple empirical case studies, but often without a unifying theoretical framework. My dissertation on the other hand contributes a coherent theory of foreign policy after empire for small and medium-sized states. First, it takes the territorial composition and the structure of the political arena into account, which connects to broader discussions on how domestic factors influence foreign policy (Kaarbo, 2015). It also offers a theoretical idea of how formative moments can shape a country's outlook in relation to significant external others, an idea linked to historical institutionalism and the role played by critical junctures (D. Collier & Munck, 2022). Moreover, the dissertation presents a research design for how to make comparisons when studying the foreign policies of states with a history within empires.

The dissertation also makes several empirical contributions. As mentioned above, the dissertation is a comparative study of Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies from independence until 2021. Scholars have written about these countries' foreign policies, but most of this literature consists of single-case studies. Single-case studies that cover shorter periods have the advantage of being rich in detail. The disadvantage of this approach is that it risks missing important similarities and differences with other cases. Therefore, this dissertation contributes a rare comparative analysis of the foreign policies of Georgia and Ukraine that spans a period of almost 30 years. As shown throughout this dissertation, a comparative approach helps us to see broader patterns of

development. Furthermore, I argue that many foreign policy studies in the region have not taken the consequences of imperial collapse seriously enough into account. This dissertation sees the decades after imperial collapse as complex processes of decolonization. I argue that relations between Russia and other former-Soviet republics such as Georgia and Ukraine are best understood by using this analytical perspective.

Moreover, this dissertation's analysis is based on a unique collection of data that includes several types of material. The data combines elite interviews by this author, diplomatic cables (previously classified), political documents, news media, polls, and secondary academic and journalist sources. With the help of this material, the dissertation provides theoretically guided empirical chapters on key periods that help to explain Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies from the 1990s until 2021. For the reader interested in the modern political history of Georgia's and Ukraine's relations with Russia and the West, the empirical chapters will be highly useful. It is important to emphasize that the purpose of the dissertation is to answer the questions asked above and not to provide a general overview of political developments in these two countries after 1991. Nonetheless, a thorough analysis of the developments in these countries is needed to provide evidence for the explanations put forward. The modern political histories of Georgia and Ukraine are complex and filled with important twists and turns. It is necessary to grasp an understanding of these beyond superficial stereotypes.

To write a dissertation that compares the foreign policies of two countries over time of course comes with its own challenges. For understandable reasons, the dissertation cannot go into the same detail about each period as a book of similar length that covers a five-year period in one country could. At the same time, I have used a rich number of sources, including elite interviews, I have read extensively about each period, and I have spent significant time in Georgia and Ukraine to deepen my knowledge about the politics and modern history of the two countries. With this ambition in mind, I have done my best to dig as deeply as possible into each period studied in order to avoid oversimplification.

Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 sent shockwaves around the world. Almost immediately, an academic debate began asking why Russia had invaded Ukraine (Götz & Ekman, 2024; Mearsheimer, 2022; Plokhy, 2023; Popova & Shevel, 2024; Walt, 2022). The purpose of this dissertation is not to explain why Russia attacked Ukraine, but the dissertation offers detailed accounts of Georgian and Ukrainian relations with Russia and the West after independence up until 2021. The focus on developments in Georgia and Ukraine is an important complement to studies focused primarily on Vladimir Putin, Russia or the interaction between Russia and the West. From this perspective, my dissertation provides insights into how we arrived at the situation in 2022 – one of the most serious security crises in Europe since World War II. While much attention has understandably been devoted to Russia and

Ukraine, it is important to emphasize that long before Russia launched a massive offensive against Ukraine, it had already fought a war against Georgia in 2008. Thus, by looking at developments from the perspective of Georgians and Ukrainians since independence up until the 2022 war, this dissertation contributes to the academic debates about Russia's war against Ukraine, albeit from a different angle than most other studies.

Finally, this dissertation contributes to the understanding of small and medium-sized states in a region facing great power rivalry. This is in part a normative undertaking. It is important to explore the modern histories and perspectives of Georgia and Ukraine, especially at a time when the Russian leadership questions the legitimacy of its neighboring states and their right to exist. Moreover, it taps into an increasing criticism of the domination of "Russia-centered" analysis when studying international politics in the region – a perspective that neglects the agency of neighboring states such as Georgia and Ukraine (Kuzio, 2020).

This is not just a normative endeavor. While this dissertation studies Georgia and Ukraine, I claim that the findings are of interest also to scholars mainly focused on Russian and western engagement in the region. To overlook developments inside small and medium-sized states and their interactions with great powers limits our understanding of international politics. Alexander Cooley (2012) has made a strong case for this view in the context of Central Asia. As will be seen throughout this dissertation, Georgia and Ukraine have had no choice but to take the behavior of Russia and other large powers into account. At the same time, Russian and western leaders have been influenced by developments in Georgia and Ukraine too. Thus, international politics in the post-Soviet region is not a one-way street where great powers dictate the behavior of the smaller states – great powers also have to react to what is going on in these smaller states.[9] It is therefore essential to study international politics in the region once called the Soviet Union from the perspective of Russia's neighbors, in this case Georgia and Ukraine.

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation comprises 12 chapters divided into four parts. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 presents the theory developed to answer the questions asked in Chapter 1. In Chapter 3, I discuss the research design and methods used in this dissertation. The chapter starts with a discussion on comparative process tracing, case selection and periodization. To make the analysis as

[9] It is important to emphasize that giving agency to Ukraine does not mean that I in any way hold Ukrainians responsible for Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. Russia's invasion was a decision made by Vladimir Putin and his close allies in the Kremlin, and they are the ones who should be held accountable.

transparent as possible, I then outline observable implications of key concepts and make case-specific predictions. The subsequent sections discuss field studies, data collection and the different types of material used. Here I present my approach to combining and assessing different streams of evidence, which include elite interviews conducted during four longer field trips to Georgia and Ukraine. The chapter ends with a discussion on the abductive approach to theory-building used in this dissertation.

Part II (Chapters 4–8) and Part III (Chapters 9–11) are theoretically guided empirical chapters. The structure of Part II and Part III follows from the theory and method chapters. In Chapter 4, the formation of Georgia's and Ukraine's political arenas are the focus. It starts with a discussion of how imperial structures and policies contributed to the shaping of political arenas in the Soviet republics. It then turns specifically to Georgia and Ukraine, with particular attention paid to important regional borderlands in both republics.

The final part of the chapter deals with Georgia's and Ukraine's transitions to independence and the immediate aftermath. It is argued that both Georgia and Ukraine faced challenges during the transition, involving regional challenges, appeals for separatism and interference from Moscow. In the end, Georgia experienced a traumatic formative experience of separatism, territorial loss and hostile involvement from Russia. Meanwhile, Ukraine avoided a violent transition, remained united and managed to negotiate what looked like a peaceful and civilized divorce from Russia. These contrasting formative experiences contributed to different political arenas in Georgia and Ukraine, and resulted in different lessons and experiences that would shape the foreign policies of the two countries for decades.

Chapters 5 and 6 deal with the period when Georgia's and Ukraine's political arenas became crystallized, from the mid-1990s until the early 2000s. Chapter 5 shows how Georgia's territorial loss of its most pro-Russian regions in the wars of the 1990s helped Georgians unite on a path to turning away from Russia. Interviews with key Georgian decision makers, diplomatic cables and media sources show how the formative experience of the first half of the 1990s had a strong impact on the Georgian leadership. As a result, the leadership started to build a firm partnership with the United States and gradually tried to limit Russia's dominance in Georgia.

Chapter 6 shows how Ukraine's multicenter arena and the peaceful transition to independence left its foreign policy more contested. Political groups with different geopolitical interests competed for power within Ukraine's political arena. While most Ukrainians agreed with independence, they did not agree on the foreign policy agenda. The result, I argue, became an ambiguous and vacillating foreign policy, the orientation of which depended on shifts in the political balance of power and the leadership's urge for political survival.

Chapters 7 and 8 turn to the Color Revolutions, when Georgia and Ukraine experienced mass protests in response to electoral fraud in 2003–2004. This resulted in pro-West leaders coming to power in both countries. Many experts

at the time viewed the Color Revolutions as critical junctures that would turn the two countries firmly toward the West and away from Russia. In contrast to this interpretation, I argue that the Color Revolutions did not change the underlying logic of Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policymaking. Georgia's pro-West foreign policy continued while Ukraine's foreign policy remained incoherent and contested. Russia's ambitions under Vladimir Putin, and the West's increased interest in the region, however, raised the stakes and put increased external pressure on both Georgia and Ukraine.

In Part III, Chapters 9, 10 and 11 deal with the 10–12 years preceding Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In Chapter 9, I explain why Georgia's overall pro-West orientation continued even after an oligarch who had made his money in Russia gained power. In Chapter 10, I explore why Ukraine's pro-West agenda faced a backlash in 2010. The chapter discusses how the Donbas elite in eastern Ukraine tried to take control of Ukraine's political arena and how foreign affairs became a central theme in the polarized political climate in Ukraine at the time. The chapter also analyzes the path toward the collapse of Ukraine's multicenter arena, a process that included the Euromaidan, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the war in eastern Ukraine that began in 2014.

Chapter 11 answers the question of how Ukraine's pro-West foreign policy stabilized in 2014. It is argued that a new formative period in 2013–2014 permanently changed the balance of power in Ukraine's political arena to the disadvantage of political forces that supported closer ties with Russia. This was partly linked to Ukraine's territorial loss of previously important regions that had sought close ties to Russia before 2014. Moreover, it is argued that Ukraine experienced a painful and traumatic formative moment in 2013–2014 that resembled the Georgian experience in the 1990s. Ukraine's formative moment fundamentally changed the dominant view of Russia in Ukraine. From the new dominant Ukrainian perspective, Russia turned from being a strategic partner to a radically different other.

Finally, in Part IV, Chapter 12 answers the questions asked in the introduction and discusses the implications of the study. These include what the findings can tell us about international politics in the region once called the Soviet Union and the implications for studying foreign policy in other post-imperial contexts. I also propose some avenues for future research. The dissertation ends with an epilogue in which I discuss Georgian and Ukrainian foreign policy in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

2. A theory of foreign policy after empire

In this chapter, I present the theoretical framework. My theory draws on political science research within comparative historical analysis, and includes concepts such as antecedent conditions, formative moments, critical junctures, and legacies. However, the framework itself, including the explanatory factors, how they are related, and how they influence a state's foreign policy, i.e., the actual substance of the theory, is a key contribution of this dissertation. Moreover, the theoretical framework is the result of an abductive process in which I have moved back and forth between more abstract thinking and empirics, in order to generate a relevant and original theoretical framework. The use of abduction as a way of conducting research in political science is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

The theoretical argument follows in several steps. The starting point of the theory is that foreign policy is made in political arenas. My theory distinguishes between two different types of political arenas that can emerge in countries during the transition to independence after a history within empires – single and multicenter political arenas. Depending on how these arenas are organized, a country's foreign policy is in turn expected to differ in terms of stability and coherence. As discussed in detail below, in multicenter arenas, foreign policy is expected to be characterized by greater fragmentation and less coherence. On the other hand, countries with a single center arena are expected to have more coherent and stable foreign policies.

Furthermore, I argue that formative periods, in particular the transition to independence, are important for how a country's foreign policy develops later in time. First, it is essential to understand how political arenas are formed. My theoretical framework seeks to explain the foreign policies of two states that became independent after extended periods within empires – political arenas that are a product of antecedent historical conditions. These conditions include the policies of the imperial metropole, such as nationality policies, border creation, and annexation of territories. The antecedent conditions in this study go back to Soviet times, and potentially even to earlier periods within empires. By the time the Soviet Union was coming to an end, these conditions had contributed to different territorial configurations and regional entities in many Soviet republics. While these historical conditions are important, I argue that formative periods at critical junctures, a concept defined by David Collier as

"(1) a concentrated, macro episode of innovation that (2) generates an enduring legacy" (D. Collier, 2022, p. 34), can reshape the political arena dramatically. Formative moments generate durable legacies that influence a state's foreign policy. The transition to independence is a formative period characterized by uncertainty and fluidity. Decisions made by political leaders during this period, both in the colonial peripheries and in the imperial metropole, can have long-term consequences.

In my theory, these formative periods can result in two major legacies that are important for a state's foreign policy. First, these contingent periods can result in shifts in the political arena. One example is when a state loses territory during this period. This can shift the political balance of power within the political arena, which in turn has implications for a state's foreign policy.

Secondly, the role that the imperial metropole plays in a state's transition to independence, and whether the process is violent, are expected to generate legacies for the foreign policy that a state later develops. I argue that the quality of formative moments such as the transition to independence, and the role played by the imperial metropole in this process, have important implications for what type of national interests and foreign policy a state develops after independence. If a country experiences a violent formative period with hostile involvement from the imperial metropole, its leaders are likely to distance the country from the metropole and set goals intended to help the country cope with its traumatic formative experience.

In contrast, if a country experiences a peaceful formative period, with less negative involvement from the former metropole, the state is expected to develop a more pragmatic foreign policy toward the metropole. In other words, the quality of the formative period has important implications for the content of the foreign policy. In sum, the type of political arena that emerges after independence, and the quality of the formative period in relation to the former metropole, provide a powerful explanation of a country's foreign policy that is relevant even decades after the collapse of the empire.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, I define what this dissertation seeks to explain, namely a state's foreign policy orientation and its stability over time. Secondly, I discuss how the making of foreign policy differs in the two types of political arenas, multicenter and single center, concepts I have developed in this dissertation. Thirdly, I turn to the question of why contrasting political arenas emerge in different countries and how formative periods matter for a state's foreign policy. I argue that we need to understand not only why different political arenas are formed but also how this process matters for later foreign policy orientations. In the final part of the chapter, I discuss what types of foreign policies we can expect in different political arenas depending on a country's formative experience.

Foreign policy – a definition

This is a study of foreign policy orientation and how it has varied between two post-Soviet states. How should foreign policy orientation be defined? To begin with, it may be helpful to clarify that I am not seeking to explain an individual decision, as is common in the research tradition of foreign policy decision-making. Christopher Hill defines foreign policy as "the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually but not exclusively a state) in international relations" (C. Hill, 2015, p. 4). This definition is deliberately broad and can include all decisions made by a state or other actor. This dissertation comes close to Hill's view, looking at the broader picture of a state's international orientation as it unfolds over time. Significant individual decisions will be discussed when they are important for the overall trajectory. International orientation is understood as a close affiliation or alliance with a particular geopolitical bloc. In the context of this dissertation, a state's orientation may be more toward Russia or more toward the West, as manifested, for example, in more or less formalized security or military alliances, political associations, or economic partnerships.[10]

Moreover, a foreign policy orientation can be stable over time, or it can waver and be incoherent. A third possible approach is to have what this dissertation views as an incoherent foreign policy, such as when a state pursues compromise, trying to just muddle through or engaging in a deliberately hedging foreign policy. The latter implies that a government makes vague promises to several external powers, without fully committing to any of them (Koga, 2018). On the point of stability or instability, my dissertation is inspired by Hermann's (1990) influential study of foreign policy change and his category of foreign policy defined as an "international orientation in world affairs". Hermann distinguishes between foreign policy change on four different levels: adjustment changes (changes in the level of effort, while the goals and purposes remain unchanged), program changes (changes in method, while the goals remain the same), problem and goal changes (replacement of the problem or goals), and international orientation change (a redirection of an "actor's entire orientation toward world affairs" (Hermann, 1990, p. 5)). This study is primarily interested in the latter two types. From this it follows that if the international orientation (a state's main foreign policy goals) remains the same over time, it is treated as a stable foreign policy orientation. If the international orientation and the main goals frequently shift, or if the foreign policy is ambiguous and flexible, it is treated as an unstable or incoherent foreign policy. Scholars seem to be more interested in foreign policy change, but some also discuss stabilizers of foreign policy and continuity (Doeser, 2011; Goldmann,

[10] Observable implications and operational definitions of central concepts are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. A state does not need to become a member of an organization to be classified as having a specific foreign policy orientation. The final decision on membership is, after all, taken by the preexisting members of an organization.

1988; Gustavsson, 1999; Haesebrouck & Joly, 2021; Nilsson, 2015; Tsygankov, 2022).

This dissertation primarily studies the position of key actors: presidents and their advisors, prime ministers (if involved in foreign affairs), foreign and defense ministers, and major players within the ruling coalition and the opposition.[11] Taken together, these are important actors in the political arena, a key concept borrowed from Collier and Collier (1991) and explained below. Public opinion is discussed where relevant. The broader society is expected to play an indirect but at times important role in foreign affairs. Having defined the concept of foreign policy orientation, we now turn to the theoretical argument on how to explain a state's foreign policy, including its stability.

Political arenas and foreign policy

How the political arena within a country is organized plays a central role in the theory. A state's political arena consists of political actors (supported by economic actors) who compete for power in national politics. In my theoretical framework, we can think of more cohesive, homogeneous states as having political power that is primarily organized in the center, with weaker peripheries. By "center", I do not mean an ideological position, but to political power primarily being situated in the country's capital or another city that dominates politics. This is what I call a *single center political arena*. The opposite is a *multicenter political arena*, where a state is less cohesive and more heterogeneous, with stronger peripheries. What do I mean by heterogeneity and strong peripheries? In states that become independent after long periods within multinational or colonial empires, groups concentrated within a regional territory are an important source of heterogeneity. In many states in Africa, the Middle East, and the former Soviet Union, influential sub-national political actors tend to be regionally based (Boone, 2007; J. Hughes & Sasse, 2002). Moreover, some regional centers within a country tend to have closer post-independence ties to the former imperial metropole than others (for reasons I discuss later in this chapter). Therefore, regionally based groups, especially regions with ties to former imperial metropoles, play a particularly important role in my theory. Later in this chapter, when discussing how different arenas are formed, I will argue that historical conditions, such as policies developed by the imperial metropole, shape the political arena. I will also argue that the structure of the political arena can change in more modern times as well – during formative moments also known as critical junctures (Collier & Munck 2022). In what follows, I will discuss how political arenas can change during

[11] In Georgia and Ukraine, for example, presidents and their advisors have for long periods been the key decision-makers in the realm of foreign affairs. In Georgia, this changed after 2012 when the role of the president became less important.

critical junctures, which is why the state's territorial configuration and the experiences embedded in the transition are important, and why the process itself matters for a country's foreign policy orientation. First, however, I discuss why we can expect different degrees of foreign policy stability in a multicenter as opposed to a single center arena.

Multicenter arenas and foreign policy

In multicenter political arenas, my theory expects foreign policy incoherence or instability to be more likely. We can identify two closely related types of foreign policies in a multicenter arena. One type is a sort of compromise or muddling through. The other is repeated foreign policy swings. Here a change of government is followed by a shift in foreign policy. Over time, both types can be seen as unstable or incoherent foreign policies.

Why are ambivalent and wavering foreign policies expected to be more common in multicenter arenas? According to my theory, for a state to maintain a stable foreign policy over time, elite groups have to reach an overall consensus on alignment, threat perceptions, and other major issues related to foreign affairs. This is much more difficult in more heterogeneous states, which are characterized by lower levels of elite and societal cohesion (Alden & Aran, 2016; Hagan, 2001; Schweller, 2006). For example, if a state contains multiple political centers with allegiances to opposing external powers, this increases the complexity of reaching a foreign policy consensus. If there is a balance of power between contending domestic political groups, this is a major obstacle to reaching agreement on a focused and coherent foreign policy. We can expect compromises and half-measures to be the most frequent outcome, because they are the path of least resistance. How is this outcome produced?

First, in states with lower cohesion, complex bargaining is often needed to build political coalitions. Scholars have shown that in less cohesive countries, foreign policy issues often tap into the struggle for political power (Hagan, 2001; Schweller, 2006). A multicenter arena increases the likelihood of blocking coalitions, gridlock, and policy paralysis. In less cohesive states, Schweller argues, "a bargaining process among competing elite groups will generate blocking coalitions, resulting in [foreign] policy inertia or the adoption of unfocused half measures or both" (Schweller, 2006, p. 59). Similarly, Hagan (2001) observes that in fragmented states, alternative and contradictory policy positions can coexist, sometimes even within a government, which risks paralyzing decision-making. Influential groups, including regional elites, will attempt to block foreign policies that run counter to their interests. Thus, in the multicenter arena, we can expect gridlock and policy paralysis to be a fundamental part of political life. In these situations, ambiguity is often the default foreign policy strategy, since vagueness can be a way to overcome political conflicts and reach agreement. Such ambivalence and half-measures, however, rarely translate into a coherent foreign policy over time. Instead, elites

tend to build short-term coalitions with an impact on a state's foreign policy.[12] History provides examples of this logic. During the interwar period, for example, French and American decision-making was constrained by strong domestic divisions. The political arenas in the United States and France were so fragmented that it was impossible to build a foreign policy consensus. As a result, their governments failed to respond adequately even to the emerging severe threat from Nazi Germany (Hagan, 2001).

Secondly, in multicenter arenas, political polarization increases the probability of foreign policy incoherence. Given the high stakes between contending groups, multicenter arenas often experience political polarization.[13] In states with lower cohesion, and at least two available foreign policy alternatives, we can expect foreign policy to be highly contested. Political polarization tends to emerge out of what Somer and McCoy (2019) call formative rifts. This refers to deep-cutting divisions that were not resolved during the formation of the modern state and have become built into the social fabric of the new country. Polarization that arises because of such underlying regional, ethnic, or other cleavages risks becoming both divisive and long-lasting, because such disputes are difficult to resolve without major reconfigurations of the state.

How does political polarization complicate the establishment of a coherent foreign policy? First, it hinders cooperation between rival political groups by increasing the cost of compromise (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2019). It is also expected that polarization can lead to policy swings, for example after a change in government (Hermann, 1990). Controversial decisions related to geopolitical orientation and foreign affairs can exacerbate underlying rifts within the elite and society, which in turn mobilize the opposing sides. When there is solid opposition to a particular foreign policy, it only takes a small shift in the balance of political coalitions to tilt the policy in the other direction (Schultz, 2017). In line with these assumptions, my theory expects foreign policy swings to be more frequent in a polarized, multicenter political arena. Relatedly, foreign policy swings make it difficult to establish long-term commitments to an external partner.

Thirdly, a core finding of Steven David's (1991) work is that leaders of countries that gained independence after periods within empires have often used foreign policy as an instrument to gain political power or to remain in office. Hermann (1990) predicts that foreign policy change is more likely

[12] Based on the assumption that foreign policy issues are salient in national politics.

[13] Political polarization has conventionally been defined as the distance between major political parties (and between voters) on important policy issues and has generally been linked to ideology in terms of left-right (Frye, 2010). More recently, scholars have begun to conceptualize political polarization differently (Carothers & O'Donohue, 2019). In this view, polarization: "is a process whereby the normal multiplicity of differences in a society increasingly align along a single dimension, cross-cutting differences become reinforcing, and people increasingly perceive and describe politics and society in terms of 'us' versus 'them' " (Somer & McCoy, 2019, p. 13). It is the latter definition that is used in this study.

when international affairs become central to the broader struggle for political power. However, both David and Hermann see this as a general phenomenon in developing countries and do not specify how this logic might play out differently in different arenas. I suggest that the conditions generated by a multicenter political arena, in which people are divided along geopolitical lines (among other things), provide political leaders with two alternative ways of using foreign affairs to win political support. To begin with, the political leader could make vague or shifting promises about foreign affairs to mobilize elite groups and voters in order to win elections or hold on to political power. Supporting a vague foreign policy or maneuvering between different orientations can appeal to a wide range of interests. In other words, it can help leaders to build a broader base of domestic support. Such a flexible approach can also help mobilize other domestic groups if the leader becomes unpopular with another sector of society. Compared to keeping all options on the table, a one-sided foreign policy could result in narrow political coalitions and alienate voters whose support a political leader or party needs to remain in power.

Although an ambivalent foreign policy is often expected in multicenter arenas, leaders and governments sometimes pursue a one-sided orientation for instrumental or principled reasons (in this study, either pro-West or pro-Russia). For example, leaders may capitalize on domestic divisions and use foreign policy issues to mobilize partisan political support. At the same time, this is likely to increase the level of political conflict over foreign policy. In a political climate where leaders benefit from a high level of political conflict, it becomes even more difficult to establish a stable and coherent foreign policy over time. Given the lack of elite and social cohesion in a multicenter arena, a controversial foreign policy decision – such as seeking membership in a particular alliance or distancing the country from a great power – can be expected to be followed by a counterreaction. Due to the structure of the multicenter arena, with strong domestic opposition, it does not matter much if a government pursues a deliberately vague foreign policy or if it aims for a one-sided foreign policy tied to a particular geopolitical bloc. The long-term outcome in this arena is likely to be an unstable and incoherent foreign policy, characterized by half-measures and ambivalence.

An assumption shared by several theories of international relations is that states are generally united when it comes to core national foreign policy goals, especially, when they face a threatening external environment (See discussions in Legro & Moravcsik, 1999; Schweller, 2006; Zakaria, 1992). Others have shown how flexible or ambivalent foreign policies can be useful for leaders when it comes to handling domestic divides and easing pressures from rival external powers. In some cases, they can even result in favorable agreements with contending external powers and in personal gains for state leaders (Gnedina, 2015). Without downplaying these possible advantages of vagueness and swings in foreign policy, it is important to note that they can also lead to serious problems for a state.

First, a wavering or ambiguous foreign policy can result in a situation where a government is neither willing nor able to respond to serious threats that arise in the external environment (Schweller, 2006). In countries with multicenter arenas, there is a risk that governments, due to the lack of domestic agreement, will fail to undertake appropriate policies to defend the country from rising external threats. This leaves the state vulnerable to coercion, subversion, and external aggression.

Secondly, joining an international organization such as NATO or the EU is a demanding task that requires a long-term commitment. The process of joining a military alliance is preceded by preparations, joint military training, coordination, and reform of the armed forces. Joining an organization like the EU requires the acceptance of strict rules, laws, and regulations, as well as the implementation of these rules (Cremona, 2003). Moreover, in addition to adapting to standards and regulations, a candidate country must build political capital and establish trust with the organization and its member states. Joining an organization such as the EU can be a decades-long political process. States with shifting or ambivalent foreign policies can be expected to have difficulty building political capital, making long-term commitments, and implementing necessary reforms (Schultz, 2017). This, in turn, can lead to frustration among potential allies. Finally, scholars have long argued that international negotiations occur on two levels (Putnam, 1988). In these negotiations, leaders must take relations with external powers into account, but they often also need to consider domestic politics. In an arena with multiple competing domestic political centers, it will be more difficult to agree on a purposeful and coherent foreign policy in the international arena. To sum up, states with multiple centers of power can be expected to have more ambiguous or shifting foreign policies, and consequently are less likely to have a focused foreign policy.

Single center arenas and foreign policy

In the single center political arena, my theory expects higher elite and societal cohesion. When multiple territorially based entities such as distinct regions are not present, due for example to marginalization or separation from the host state during the formative period (see below), I expect less contestation and political polarization linked to foreign policy issues. Although political actors may still disagree to some extent, the existence of fewer political centers within a country increases the possibility of reaching a long-term foreign policy consensus.

In these arenas, we can also expect less political polarization associated with geopolitical orientation. When a state has fewer political centers with ties to external powers, there is less risk of foreign policy becoming a salient conflict in national politics. This, in turn, lessens the incentives for political entrepreneurs to use foreign policy instrumentally, since the choice of external partners is a less salient issue in the contest for political power.

Thus, in a single center political arena with higher elite and societal cohesion, opposition to a particular foreign policy orientation is expected to be lower than in a multicenter arena. The absence of multiple, regionally based political and economic networks with ties to an external power makes it easier to establish a foreign policy consensus. Moreover, a lower level of polarization regarding the international orientation makes foreign policy swings less likely after a new government comes to power. For these reasons, we can expect a state's foreign policy to exhibit more traits of coherence and stability over time in single center arenas. The concept of political arenas suggests that foreign policy decisions cannot be understood by looking only at the actions of a particular political leader or elite group. Instead, I argue that political leaders operate in a broader domestic context that constrains the options available to an individual leader in different ways in different arenas.

Before moving on, it is important to underline that the political arena of a state can shift from being closer to the multicenter type to being more of a single center type and vice versa. Hence, as mentioned above, we need to understand how political arenas are formed and how they can change. My theory proposes that political arenas are formed or can be dramatically reshaped at critical junctures. The formation process is discussed below. Moreover, I have so far primarily considered the coherence and stability of a state's foreign policy. What still needs to be clarified is the geopolitical orientation, or content, of a state's foreign policy. In the context of this dissertation, why do some states that were once part of the Soviet Union, lean more toward Russia, while others lean more toward the West? Furthermore, although my theory expects more stability in single center arenas, we can theoretically conceive of situations where the leaders within these arenas decide on an ambiguous strategy, for example, if a dominant leader with a transactional view of foreign policy comes to power. Why is this less likely to occur in some countries than in others? To answer these questions, we need to understand how political arenas are formed. My theoretical framework emphasizes the experience of the transitional period itself, from imperial decay to independence, and in particular how relations with the former imperial metropole played out during this period. If violence, brutality, and pain accompany this process, their legacy will be important for the future foreign policy orientation of that state.

The formation of political arenas – critical junctures and the challenges of modern state formation

So far, I have argued that the political arenas that emerge after independence have important foreign policy implications. This leads us to the question of how political arenas are formed. In my theoretical framework, political arenas are a product of (1) antecedent historical conditions, such as policies produced

by the imperial metropole, including nationality policies, the creation of borders, and the annexation of territories; and (2) more recent formative periods, primarily the transition to independence, but potentially also other critical junctures after independence, such as wars. While historical conditions are important, formative periods at critical junctures can dramatically reshape the political arena. The transition to independence is a period of fluidity, and decisions made by political leaders during this period often have long-term consequences. Thus, my theory suggests that experiences during formative periods tend to have long-lasting implications for a country's foreign policy orientation. What matters most is whether the formative period was violent or peaceful and what role the imperial metropole played in the process.

The theory treats periods of imperial decline followed by a rapid transition to independence as shocks followed by critical junctures with significant consequences for the formation of political arenas. As discussed in previous scholarship, formative periods are characterized by high levels of uncertainty and fluidity in which events and choices by political elites have important implications for the shaping of the political arena (Capoccia, 2015). In this study, the transition to independence is treated as the most critical period to analyze, but as discussed below, turbulent periods that occur later and result in conflict can also reshape the political arena.

Given the importance of critical junctures in this dissertation, it is worth discussing them in more detail. The concept, which is a basic starting point of this study, forms the backbone of comparative historical analysis and was developed by Ruth Berins Collier and David Collier (1991) (See also Capoccia, 2015; D. Collier & Munck, 2022; Lipset & Rokkan, 1967; Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). In fact, the idea that watershed moments can have a profound influence on a state's development and put countries on divergent trajectories has been widespread in the social sciences for a long time. Max Weber (1946, p. 280) illustrated this way of thinking with the metaphor of historical switchmen who select the "tracks along which action is pushed" (see also Collier & Munck, 2022). During these formative moments, states develop in ways "that fix in place basic political orientations and institutions" (Ikenberry, 2016, p. 541).

As noted above, David Collier defines a critical juncture as "(1) a concentrated, macro episode of innovation that (2) generates an enduring legacy" (D. Collier, 2022, p. 34). Scholars debate the degree of discretion that agents have during critical junctures, but they agree that developments during shorter periods can put countries on distinct and possibly divergent trajectories. The preceding shock or crisis may occur when an old political order or system begins to break down.

Periods of innovation often have significant political consequences for decades or even centuries afterwards, and the legacies are often considered path-dependent and difficult to reverse (Capoccia, 2015; Mahoney, 2000). Relatedly, John Ikenberry (2016), has argued that during order-building moments,

great powers have strong opportunities to shape international politics. At these moments – often in the context of major wars – leading states make choices that have crucial implications for the world order that follows. With the same underlying logic, my theory suggests that contrasting formative periods can create legacies that influence the foreign policy trajectories of small and medium-sized states such as Georgia and Ukraine.

Two components: territorial composition and transitional trauma

According to my theoretical framework, two components are of particular importance when it comes to shaping the political arena formation, which in the next step influences a country's foreign policy. One component, as discussed above, explains whether the foreign policy is stable or shifting over time, and the other component explains the direction or content of the policy, i.e., its geopolitical orientation. Together, the two explanatory components shed light on crucial aspects of a state's foreign policy.

Territorial composition

First, the territorial composition of the political arena increases or decreases the possibility of reaching political consensus on a foreign policy orientation. As mentioned above, many states with a background in multinational and colonial empires are heterogeneous, and influential sub-national groups tend to be territorially based. There are no "clean slates" or tabula rasas to start from, in political and social processes. In comparative historical analysis, most scholars agree that the shock and the critical juncture occur against the backdrop of *antecedent conditions*. Antecedent conditions specify relevant structural conditions in the environment "that set the parameters for subsequent change" (Collier & Munck, 2022, p.13). These conditions provide the range of alternatives during a critical juncture, but do not in themselves determine the outcome.

In line with this understanding, I argue that political arenas are, in part, a result of longer processes of historical development. Identifying antecedent conditions is therefore vital to understanding the context as well as the relationship between prior structural factors and agency during the critical juncture (D. Collier, 2022).[14] In this dissertation, imperial policies, such as how

[14] For example, Collier and Collier's (1991) analysis of the incorporation of labor in Latin America is performed against the backdrop of antecedent conditions such as global capital and a rising working and middle class. This cleavage created a demand for change and a voice in many Latin American countries. However, elites in various countries responded differently to these antecedent conditions during the critical juncture, resulting in different political arenas and regime dynamics.

borders were drawn and how territories were distributed and defined, are important antecedent conditions.

However, states may respond differently to these conditions during the transition to independence (the critical juncture). Below, I discuss the relationship between antecedent conditions and critical junctures, how political arenas are formed, and how these things, in turn, matter for a state's foreign policy.

Antecedent conditions

States with a history within empires are often multilayered and complex. To keep empires under control and expand their influence, imperial metropoles have used a variety of approaches throughout history, including the annexation of new territories, coercion, and violence. Moreover, imperial policies such as territorial subdivisions within the empire, the granting of autonomous status to regions, nationality policies, and industrial projects have contributed to shaping the arenas in what later would become independent states (Kupchan, 1996; Smith, 2013; J. Snyder, 1991)

Many states that became independent after long periods within empires, including within the Soviet Union, have experienced territorial cleavages. In particular, regional divides have been observed to be a defining feature of many states, for example in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union (Boone, 2007; J. Hughes & Sasse, 2002; Mazzuca, 2021). As previous research has shown, regionally based groups can complicate the transition to independence and play an important role in post-independence politics.

For reasons discussed below, regional political centers are often the most important alternative centers of power outside the capital. Therefore, we now turn to a more detailed discussion of regions, how they are defined in this study, and why they are important in shaping the political arena.

There are many possible ways to define a region. This study seeks to identify regions with important characteristics that make regional elites distinct actors in a country's political arena. A region, as discussed in this dissertation, has a formal territorial status or softer boundaries that distinguish it geographically from other parts of the country. The region has the capacity, either on its own or in cooperation with domestic or external partners, to play a role in national politics, or to distance itself from the government of the host state. Moreover, in many cases, regional elites (and often the regional population) have an interest in cultivating or sustaining a relationship with an external power. This interest can primarily be traced to the following underlying motives: (1) security and protection, (2) political and economic support, and (3) historical and cultural ties, for example, language or ethnicity (Brubaker, 1994; Toft, 2003). These three motives are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the interest in cultivating a relationship with an external power is often based on a combination of all three.

Border regions – territorial entities within a state that share a border with the former imperial metropole or with other powerful neighbors – are expected to play a particularly important role. Regions that share a border with the former metropole are more likely to have distinct interests that tap into geopolitical orientations. Moreover, we can expect strong linkages between border regions and an external power, for example in terms of shared historical experiences, cross-border trade, or linguistic or ethnic ties. External powers, especially the former metropole, tend to have a strong interest in border regions. Borderlands have played an important role for former imperial powers such as Russia, Iran, China, and Turkey as springboards for projecting power and influence abroad (Mankoff, 2022). In the post-imperial context, former imperial metropoles often portray themselves as "protectors" of border regions in neighboring states and use political, diplomatic, economic, and even military tools to influence the development of these borderlands (Toal, 2017). Sometimes external powers are responding to actual requests from regional elites. In other cases, the "protection" of regional populations can serve as a pretext for military intervention, subversion, or occupation.[15] A prediction in line with Mylonas's (2013) research is that a region bordering an external patron is, on average, more likely to receive external support. The connection between regions and an external power, which has potential implications for foreign policy, is thus assumed to be more important in regions bordering a former imperial metropole, and in areas with competition between great powers.

How do regions become influential in the political arena of a state? For a region to become influential, it must have the capacity to pursue its interests. Beyond the support of an external patron, we can think of additional sources of regional capacity. First, an effective political organization is important for coordinating and channeling regional interests and influencing national politics. Regional elites with an effective political organization can form alliances with other domestic groups and expand their influence in the arena, or organize resistance against rival groups that seek to dominate national politics. A region with economic resources, such as hydrocarbons, agriculture, or industrial capacity, can, in turn, build political-economic networks. Thus, a well-organized political and economic regional elite can strengthen its influence in the political arena (Boone, 2007, p. 67; Hale, 2015). Conversely, if a region lacks a strong political organization and economic resources, it is likely to play a less important role in national politics.

Secondly, autonomous or territorial status can strengthen a region's importance and influence. Elites in regions with autonomous status can mobilize the population into a distinct "we" that strengthens regional cohesion. Further-

[15] During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union both attempted to destabilize states belonging to the rival bloc by supporting sub-state groups in opposition to the government.

more, regions with autonomous status can present legal arguments to the international community to gain the support of one or several external powers. However, autonomous status also increases the risk of secession and conflict. External powers may "support" these regions as a pretext to gain influence within the region's host state (Cornell, 2002b).

Thirdly, settlement patterns are important for group capacity. Larger and geographically concentrated groups are, on average, more powerful than smaller groups scattered throughout the country. A large, concentrated regional group can control resources and play a more important role in national politics or mobilize resistance against the government (Toft, 2003). In sum, a region with a large, geographically concentrated group that has a strong political organization backed by economic resources and autonomous status is expected to be an influential domestic actor in a state's political arena. Border regions tend to have closer ties to the former imperial metropole or other external powers and are thus important for a state's external relations. For all these reasons, we can expect border regions to be important areas to analyze.

To broaden the picture somewhat, it is important to note the link between distinct regions and modern state formation. In a landmark study, Lipset and Rokkan (1967) highlighted the importance of cleavages along a territorial axis in state-formation processes. As noted above, these tend to have a regional dimension. Often, they can be traced back to the period of modern state formation and imperial breakdown – a time when regionally based groups were incorporated and consolidated into the newly independent states (Hinnebusch & Ehteshami, 2014). In the African context, for example, scholars have shown how institutional and geopolitical legacies play an important role in defining the actors and the playing field. As noted by Boone, "the new territorial politics follows fault lines and divisions that were carved into national bodies politic by the modern state itself" (Boone, 2007, p. 61).

Moreover, state formation since 1945 has often taken the form of a relatively rapid process of decolonization, especially when compared with state formation in Western Europe, where state and nation-building developed over long periods of time (Fukuyama, 2014). The post-1945 principle, with few exceptions, has been *uti possidetis juris*, which suggests that the borders of newly independent states should correspond to previous colonial boundaries (A. Hughes, 2004).[16] As a result, the international community has generally recognized states within former colonial boundaries, a principle often supported by dominant elite groups within the newly independent states. Another challenge in the post-1945 era has been the absence of capable states and the

[16] The motives behind this principle are complex, but it has served as a way to avoid further territorial expansion by external powers and to prevent states from disintegrating into even smaller entities. Despite attempts by sub-state groups, and sometimes by external powers, to alter post-colonial state borders, the international community has rarely deviated from this principle. Eritrea and Ethiopia, as well as Sudan and South Sudan, are examples of exceptions to this rule.

efficient bureaucracies needed to provide goods to sub-national groups, which otherwise might have increased the legitimacy of the states (Wimmer, 2020). For these reasons, modern state formation, with a rapid transition to independence within pre-existing colonial boundaries, has tended to result in heterogeneous states with strong sub-national loyalties.

Weak states and fixed territorial boundaries recognized by the international community have also given rise to what Jackson (1990) has labeled quasi-sovereign states, i.e., entities recognized as states de jure, but whose governments are not in full control of the state borders. Another entity of this era is the so-called de facto state, which lacks international recognition but possesses state-like characteristics, such as control of borders and political institutions (Lynch, 2004). Sub-national groups – and regionally based groups in particular – often played an important role in shaping the political arena during modern state formation and continued to do so for decades after independence.

To summarize, regions often play an important role both during the transition to independence itself and in the post-colonial period. First, distinct and capable regions, especially if they have close ties to the imperial metropole, constitute a challenge for governments during the transition to independence. Secondly, if distinct and capable regions are integrated into the political arena during the transition, this can lead to less cohesion within the state after independence, with important implications for a country's foreign policy. Therefore, in my theory, it is important to ascertain whether a state has distinct regional entities when it enters the period of transition to independence.

As presented above, this theory distinguishes between two ideal types of political arenas that can emerge after independence – the single center and the multicenter arena. Multicenter arenas are more diverse and heterogeneous, with multiple centers, often regionally based, that compete for power in national politics. States with a single center, in contrast, have weaker regional peripheries. As mentioned above, the reasons for the formation of different political arenas depend in part on historical conditions established during the era of multinational and colonial empires. While the territorial composition of the political arena is partly shaped by structural, historical conditions that are difficult for individual actors to influence, these conditions are not entirely deterministic. During formative periods, the composition of the political arena can change in modern times as well. One important way in which the political arena can change is through the inclusion or exclusion of alternative political centers (primarily regions) during critical junctures. This affects the balance of power in the political arena and can move a state closer to the single or the multicenter ideal type. Exactly how this works is discussed below.

Shock and critical juncture

The breakdown of imperial orders has often been volatile and violent, with a high degree of uncertainty (Beissinger, 2002; Cummings & Hinnebusch, 2011). Imperial decline can be understood as a shock or crisis, for example,

when nationalist movements challenge the old order. Rivalries may emerge between the imperial metropole and the peripheries over claims of independence, between newly independent states, or between rival groups within a newly independent state. External powers (especially the former imperial metropole) may seek to exploit such volatile situations and interfere in the process (Levitsky & Way, 2022). The uncertain situation tends to persist for some time after independence. Cummings and Hinnebusch sum up the difficulty that states face during the transition to independence and its immediate aftermath: "Sovereignty is especially contested or precarious in the states left behind by empires, with state-builders struggling to establish internal sovereignty and defend against encroachment on their external sovereignty by great powers" (Cummings & Hinnebusch, 2011, p. 1). Thus, leaders often face significant challenges during this period. However, although we know from historical examples that transitions to independence are often violent and traumatic, the transition to independence can also be peaceful.

Scholars who have employed the concept of critical junctures are interested in how powerful political actors choose between different alternatives during these junctures in response to shocks. As mentioned above, antecedent conditions are seen as providing potential alternatives but not determining the outcome (Capoccia, 2015). Instead, decisions made by powerful agents during critical junctures, including the unintended consequences that follow from these decisions, contribute to producing distinct legacies.

In its simplest form, scholars of state and nation-building have identified two strategies by which political leaders handle domestic cleavages and pressures coming from the imperial metropole during the transition to independence (Fukuyama, 2014; Mylonas, 2013). Governments pursue either a strategy of domination or a strategy of accommodation toward domestic alternative political centers, such as regional groups.[17] A strategy of domination can take the form of assimilation, political exclusion – such as denying political rights to a regional group – and in some cases, even physical exclusion from the state. A strategy of domination can trigger what Mahoney (2000) has called a reactive sequence, in which regional groups respond with political or violent resistance, including separatism, sometimes supported by an external patron. The outcome of such a dynamic can be expected to be regional marginalization, continued resistance within the political arena, or separation from the host state (de facto or, less often, de jure).

A strategy of accommodation, in contrast, seeks to bridge domestic divisions and incorporate alternative centers of power into the country. Because of the difficulty of quickly building a shared national identity in states with lower levels of cohesion, we cannot expect noticeable unifying effects in the

[17] Some scholars, such as Mylonas (2013), have identified three strategies: exclusion, assimilation, and accommodation. For my purposes, exclusion and assimilation play a similar role and are thus seen as different versions of domination.

short or medium term. Thus, a strategy of accommodation can contribute to a peaceful transition to independence, but is likely to incorporate pre-existing divisions into the newly independent state.

How can we expect the interaction between the host state government, regional elites, and the imperial metropole to shape the formation of the political arena during the transition to independence? This dissertation does not seek to explain why political leaders and regional elites choose certain strategies during critical junctures. As noted by scholars in this field, critical junctures are often contingent (Capoccia, 2015). However, the strategies chosen are expected to influence the formation of different political arenas. When distinct regions are excluded or marginalized from the political arena – either through a deliberate strategy or as a result of a failed transition, where a reactive sequence ends in secession or external occupation of these regions – the result is expected to be increased cohesion within the state.[18] In these cases, my theory expects the outcome to be closer to a single center political arena. In states with an accommodation approach, in which regions are incorporated into the political arena during the transition, we expect lower state cohesion, i.e., something closer to a multicenter arena. In other words, the inclusion or exclusion of regions (or other alternative centers of power) during concentrated periods of innovation (critical junctures) shapes the territorial composition of the political arena.[19] As discussed above, the degree of state cohesion, in turn, influences a country's foreign policy coherence.

If, for example, an influential region with links to an external power is separated from the political arena (or marginalized for other reasons), this also excludes political actors that otherwise could act as a counterweight to a particular foreign policy orientation. In other words, the territorial configuration of the political arena depends in part on antecedent conditions, but also on the outcome of formative periods at critical junctures. In what follows, I show different paths leading to a single center and multicenter political arena during the transition to independence and its immediate aftermath.

Paths to a single center arena (stable foreign policy):
a) *Antecedent conditions*: Multiple political centers as a result of the imperial era. *Critical juncture*: A dominant strategy during the transition to independence triggers a reactive sequence. Alternative centers are separated from the host state (de facto, but not always de jure) during the critical juncture. For example, as a result of separatism and/or external occupation.

[18] Another path to increased state cohesion would be the successful promotion of a national identity that makes regional divisions irrelevant. However, this path often takes generations to complete (Fukuyama, 2014; Mylonas, 2013).
[19] Theoretically, we can think of states that due to antecedent conditions do not have distinct regions before the transition to independence. In these cases, I expect a state's transition period to result in a single center political arena after independence.

b) *Antecedent conditions*: Multiple political centers as a result of the imperial era. *Critical juncture*: Alternative political centers are marginalized during the critical juncture due to actions of the host state's government (no or failed regional resistance).
c) *Antecedent conditions*: No alternative political centers during the transition to independence due to historical conditions. The country becomes a single center arena immediately after independence.

Paths to a multicenter arena after the transition to independence (unstable or incoherent foreign policy):
a) *Antecedent conditions*: Multiple political centers as a result of the imperial era. *Critical juncture*: Accommodation and compromise during the transition to independence. Alternative centers are included in the political arena.
b) *Antecedent conditions*: Multiple political centers as a result of the imperial era. *Critical juncture*: Alternative political centers are included after a conflict with the host state, but alternative centers are not marginalized.

Painful or peaceful transitions

So far, I have argued that the inclusion of sub-national entities in the political arena complicates the task of forming a coherent foreign policy. However, a second component of my theory concerns the content of foreign policy, and how formative periods at critical junctures, such as the transition to independence, can transform society and deeply affect the perceptions of external powers among both the country's elites and large swathes of the population (Becker, 2014; Ekman, 2020, 2024; Lerner, 2022). According to my theory, painful watershed moments can result in profound identity transformations that, in turn, influence a country's foreign policy. Formative periods create legacies since they provide experiences and lessons for foreign policy elites and generate shared memories within the society. Taken together, these experiences and lessons shape conceptual boundaries and serve as guidelines for the content of a state's future foreign policy.

While many analysts, including realists, view foreign policy in terms of "rational calculations" in response to "objective" political, security, and economic concerns, others highlight the social aspect of foreign policy making, and stress that threat perceptions and questions of who to align with are not objectively given (Hansen, 2006; Weldes, 1999; Wendt, 1999). It is common in rational choice theory to view cognitive bias and emotions as "mistakes" deviating from a rational baseline. In reality, however, even in such models, many assumptions depend on psychological and emotional factors (Kahneman, 2011). As noted by Jonathan Mercer:

> Revolutionary research in the brain sciences has overturned conventional views of the relationship between emotion, rationality, and beliefs. Because

> rationality depends on emotion, and because cognition and emotion are nearly indistinguishable in the brain, one can view emotion as constituting and strengthening beliefs such as trust, nationalism, justice or credibility. (Mercer, 2010, p. 1)

The point, then, is not that leaders and foreign policy elites are irrational, but that their understandings and responses are deeply embedded in social structures, including shared experiences and memories. To make sense of the world, foreign policy elites draw on shared lessons and experiences that are based, at least in part, on past interactions with external powers. Some scholars argue that relatively mundane, day-to-day interactions play an important role in shaping such understandings (Hopf, 2012). This dissertation, on the other hand, sides with those who see formative periods and painful moments as particularly important in producing memories and lessons (Becker, 2014; Lerner, 2022).

According to this latter view, elites and societies are especially affected by two types of events or processes: (1) the transition to independence, and (2) major wars, especially the most recent war that a country has experienced (Jervis, 1976). Drawing on the seminal work of Robert Jervis, my theory expects memories and lessons from such events and processes to be essential to a country's future foreign policy. While Jervis was primarily interested in how individual leaders learn from past events, I extend this insight below.

Why do experiences during the transition to independence shape a country's foreign policy for decades to come? First, during the transition to independence, states often have a limited diplomatic history that can inform their political leaders about how to act in the international arena. To be clear, this does not mean that these states have no history of their own. In some cases, genuinely new states may be formed after imperial collapse, and in other cases, a state's diplomatic history may have been suppressed or manipulated, for example after decades or centuries of occupation or incorporation into multinational and colonial empires. Countries with a long history as independent states, on the other hand, have "built up a certain diplomatic personality" (Guzzini, 2012, p. 51). A diplomatic history helps policymakers formulate responses to problems that arise in relations with external powers. In states that become independent after long periods of interrupted statehood, this kind of diplomatic history is often vague, ambiguous, or even contested. To be sure, older revitalized historical narratives, or analogies drawn from the experiences of other countries can play a role in the formation of foreign policy (Khong, 1992). Yet, I agree with Jervis that salient events experienced firsthand during the transition to independence and in its aftermath establish crucial understandings and lessons for dealing with external powers. As Jervis argues, these events have a particularly strong impact compared to other events:

> Later events, although not without impact, are seen within a more established framework and so leave an impression that is not only reduced but also influenced by the earlier events (Jervis, 1976, p. 250). Major events not only affect….large numbers of people, they influence people deeply. Just as people believe that big events must be explained by big underlying causes, so they act as though events with major consequences must contain more information about the way the world works than do less dramatic happenings. Indeed the resulting lessons are apt to be so salient that they will be passed down to those who did not experience the events. (ibid, p. 262)

Moreover, formal foreign policy institutions tend to be established during and immediately after the transition to independence. In other cases, institutions linked to foreign policy existed before independence, but only began to play a more important and autonomous role after independence. Associated organizations in the sphere of foreign policy, such as universities and think tanks, are often established or become more active at this time as well (Hopf, 2012). During these formative years, essential lessons are learned within the broader foreign policy community.

Secondly, the transition to independence and its aftermath establishes an understanding of who are friends, rivals, and enemies. As noted by Wendt (1992), early interactions with external powers are important in shaping later relations. In the post-Soviet context, close relations existed among the Soviet republics before 1991. Developing relations as independent states, however, was another matter entirely, especially with the former imperial metropole of Russia.

Thirdly, the transition to independence is a crucial period for a country's national identity (Becker, 2014). Older historical myths can also play a role in shaping a country's national identity. However, wars and experiences during the modern state formation period often shape deep understandings of a country's purpose, including its relations with external powers. Therefore, it is important to analyze the problems, understandings, and lessons learned during these concentrated periods, since they are expected to shape a state's foreign policy further down the road.

My theoretical framework suggests that contrasting formative experiences can provide different sets of lessons and understandings in different countries, and that these in turn tell decision-makers what foreign policy goals should be considered appropriate and legitimate, or illegitimate and taboo. With respect to the transition to independence, I distinguish between concentrated periods that are (a) highly painful and even traumatic for the political elite and society – especially if they involve elements of violent conflict and territorial loss – and (b) more benign and peaceful transitions that occur without major violence.

Although national movements often view independence in a positive light, the transition process tends to be complex. It can include painful experiences

such as violent conflict and loss of territory, as well as difficulties in constructing a unifying national identity. Trauma as a concept is used in different contexts, and it is important to define how it is used in this dissertation. Trauma is a particularly deep form of painful experience. It occurs "when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways", as defined by Alexander (2004, p. 1). This is an important clarification since it differentiates individual from collective trauma. Sztompka (2004) also distinguishes between individual trauma, often studied in psychology, and collective trauma, emphasized in sociology. Collective trauma tends to occur relatively rapidly, is wide and comprehensive in scope, is often unexpected, and is connected to core aspects of social life. Some of the most traumatizing events at the macro-level result from forceful imposition or domination by an external power. In the context of foreign policy, it is useful to think of such events in terms of collective traumas. Political elites and nations are expected to be deeply impacted by traumatic experiences. These are hypersensitive moments that "should be considered a uniquely important and deeply emotional form of identity creation and transformation" (Becker, 2014, p. 62). Earlier scholarship has shown how wars, major terrorist attacks, and genocides can influence identities and collective memories for generations to come (Bell, 2006; Langenbacher & Shain, 2010).

Although painful watershed moments and traumas have been studied before, it is only more recently that they have been applied specifically to the study of foreign policy. As Becker (2014) notes, the connection between trauma and foreign policy is under-researched but highly important. At the same time, we can point to multiple examples where shocking and traumatic events have influenced a state's foreign and security policy. In the American context, the attack on Pearl Harbor and the terrorist attacks of 9/11 have been understood as shocking events with a high impact on subsequent US foreign policy (Langenbacher & Shain, 2010). Miller (2013) argues that India's and China's similar international outlooks, despite their historical differences, are at least in part driven by collective trauma, victimhood, and a post-imperial ideology – an international outlook that can be traced to a legacy of outside domination and colonialism.[20] This outlook includes a hypersensitivity to questions of territory and sovereignty. Lerner claims that Israel, after its modern state formation, developed a "victimhood nationalism" that "shaped the young state's international orientation into the future" (Lerner, 2022, p. 22). Finally, Hermann (1990) argues that foreign policy shifts often occur after

[20] According to Miller, "the Chinese see the modern history of colonialism in China as two-pronged—the carving up of Qing China into foreign spheres of influence by Western powers and Japan (1842 –1905), and the later domination by Japan during World War II (1931–45)" (Miller 2013, p. 13). This period is understood in China as the century of humiliation.

attitudes or beliefs within the dominant constituencies of a society undergo a profound change, which is consistent with the idea of a shocking event followed by trauma.

What is the link between traumatic events and foreign policy making? From my theoretical perspective, painful and traumatic formative periods generate lessons, experiences, and memories. These lessons and experiences, in turn, help agents make sense of who their friends and enemies are in the international arena. It also helps agents to define foreign policy problems and priorities. The lessons provide guidelines for what foreign policy choices are considered legitimate, appropriate, or even self-evident within a political elite and the broader society.

Here, trauma stories and narratives play an important role in linking the formative periods and events to later foreign policy choices (Lerner, 2022; Subotić, 2016). In the aftermath of traumatic events, certain storylines and narratives are formed that help answer questions such as: What is the nature of the trauma? Who is the victim of the trauma? What external power (if any) is the perpetrator of the trauma? Which external power is considered a friend, a hero, or a rescuer? What is our mission as a country in relation to the traumatic experience?

These dominant storylines and narratives make certain choices possible and legitimate, while marginalizing other alternatives. It is within these broader understandings and boundaries that political leaders have the discretion to navigate and maneuver. This does not mean that a particular painful formative experience determines a specific foreign policy response. Rather, it means that some possible choices are perceived as legitimate and appropriate. At the same time, traumatic experiences can also constrain actors by making certain other choices or arguments unthinkable or taboo (Tannenwald, 1999). A political leader who does not share the dominant narrative on a personal level must still act within that narrative to maintain legitimacy within the elite and society. Thus, the understanding of the trauma defines which foreign policy choices are considered legitimate or taboo. In the German context, for example, realpolitik arguments were long unacceptable in mainstream policy circles because of the role they played in Germany's political history (Langenbacher & Shain, 2010).

In this sense, how foreign policy elites perceive the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator is highly important. Lene Hansen (2006) distinguishes between different degrees of "otherness", by which an external actor can be viewed as a radically different other or as a non-radical other. My theory expects a negative actor in a country's trauma story to be seen as a "radical other", which makes cooperation difficult.

It is essential that elites answer the above questions when defining appropriate foreign policy responses to international threats and opportunities. This does not mean, however, that a traumatic formative period completely closes off debate related to foreign affairs. For example, a strong majority of the US

foreign policy establishment defined the Soviet Union as the main enemy during the Cold War. Still, within this overall understanding, debates took place on how best to deal with the enemy in the international arena (Weldes, 1999). Similarly, in the post-Soviet context, we can expect more assertive or defensive foreign policies in response to a particular trauma, even if the perceived perpetrator remains the same. Returning to Hermann's definitions discussed above, such foreign policy debates tend to be primarily about the appropriate methods, not whether an actual threat is present or not. Without a prior fundamental shift in the trauma story, it would be very difficult to suddenly present the perpetrator as a friend or a partner.

States can use different coping strategies to deal with traumatic events (Becker, 2014). One such strategy is to handle the trauma through active or offensive foreign and security policies aimed at revising a status quo that is perceived as illegitimate. This can include aligning with external powers that recognize the state's self-perception of victimhood in relation to the traumatic event. It may also involve military armament and diplomatic pressure directed at the perceived perpetrator. Another coping strategy is to escape the trauma and try to distance oneself from the perpetrator. In these situations, we can expect a state to align or cooperate with external partners in exchange for protection and security guarantees. Such external partnerships can help to alleviate trauma.

How, then, can a traumatic formative period be expected to influence a country's foreign policy orientation? One way to formulate this question is to ask: What would make a state accept the risk and cost of trying to distance itself from a former imperial metropole (in this case, Russia)? Why not remain close to the former hegemon, or at least pursue a delicate balance, navigating between great powers (the West and Russia)? Here, this dissertation sides with scholars who see radical foreign policy shifts as rare, occurring only under certain conditions: "Foreign policy is most likely to change dramatically when leaders expect the status quo to generate continued painful losses... The choice for change, in short, is commonly a painful choice" (Welch, 2005, p. 16). My theory suggests that a traumatic formative period is such a situation. Suppose an external power is seen as the perpetrator in a country's trauma story. In this case, it strengthens the motivation to escape from that external power's sphere of influence or, if no other option is perceived as possible, to fight against the perpetrator as a way to cope with the trauma.

In this dissertation, the role of Russia will be important in analyzing a potential trauma story. As discussed in the introduction, Russia had ambitions to remain the regional hegemon after the end of the USSR. The way that elites in Georgia and Ukraine perceived Russia's role during the transition to independence and its aftermath, and possibly at other critical junctures, is expected to have cast a long shadow on their foreign policies.

Traumatic experiences are expected to have a profound impact on a country's national identity and, consequently, on its foreign policy as well. If the

victim continues to experience a trauma over and over again, this could take the form of ideational path dependence (Guzzini, 2012). At the same time, there is also room for agency and reinterpretation among influential political actors. They can introduce new ways to cope with the trauma. This means that within the broader agreed foreign policy framework, we can still expect tactical shifts and reinterpretations, depending on the political leadership. Yet, as long as the trauma is not healed, it will continue to mark a country's identity and foreign policy in significant ways.

The transition to independence does not need to produce traumatic experiences in the ways discussed above. We can also conceive of more benign formative experiences without conflict, violence, territorial loss, or imposition by external powers. A peaceful transition is expected to have less impact on a country's national identity and, consequently, on its future foreign policy. Yet, even a more benign and peaceful formative experience is expected to produce a legacy of lessons for the foreign policy elite. If the formative experience is peaceful, and the former metropole recognizes the territorial integrity of the new state, then we can expect lessons that suggest a pragmatic foreign policy toward the former metropole is possible in the future. Moreover, if political disputes are settled through international agreements and not imposed by the former metropole, political elites are expected to learn from these experiences. A political elite that does not experience a traumatic formative period is less likely to perceive the post-independence situation as illegitimate. A benign formative period is expected to provide foreign policy elites with lessons that pragmatism and compromise work – since such policies have served the country well in the past. Some within the foreign policy elite may be skeptical about the possibility of pragmatic relations with the former imperial metropole. However, a peaceful formative period makes it more difficult to convince a majority that foreign policy pragmatism is problematic.

To conclude this section, traumatic formative events that involve painful and violent experiences during critical junctures generate memories and lessons for elites, and these cognitive frameworks serve as guidelines for foreign policy for decades to come. Because of their profound impact on identity formation, traumatic experiences are expected to have long-term consequences. If the former metropole has played a negative role in this trauma, it may become taboo to pursue a foreign policy that is closely tied to that external power, a taboo that may persist for generations. Traumatic formative experiences define and restrict a state's perceived foreign policy options. Some alternatives become taboo, while others are perceived as highly legitimate. If, on the other hand, the transition to independence is more benign, and an external power is understood to have played a more constructive role in the process, it provides a different set of lessons and memories for the foreign policy elite. Such experiences and lessons are expected to result in a more pragmatic foreign policy toward the former imperial metropole.

Summing up: the political arena, formative experiences, and foreign policy

This chapter has presented a theory of post-imperial foreign policy. The theory will guide and structure the empirical analysis in answering the questions posed in the introductory chapter. In the theory, the political arena is an important factor in explaining a state's foreign policy. Political arenas, in turn, are shaped by more recent transitional experiences set against the backdrop of antecedent conditions shaped by many decades of being a part of empires. According to my theory, the antecedent conditions contribute to forming the political arena, making states more coherent or fragmented at the time of the imperial collapse. At critical junctures, such as the transition to independence and its aftermath, political arenas can change rapidly depending on the inclusion or exclusion of alternative political centers during this period. Moreover, the degree to which the formative period is painful and traumatic or benign and peaceful creates a legacy that influences a state's foreign policy. What crystallizes after a critical juncture as (a) either a single- or a multicenter arena, and (b) memories, images, and lessons of the formative experience in relation to the former imperial metropole, influence the coherence and content of a country's foreign policy. A final important question then concerns the relationship between the two influential factors: the territorial configuration of the political arena and painful or peaceful formative experiences. How can the combination of the two be expected to influence a state's foreign policy?

A state with a single center arena that did not have a painful formative experience involving the former imperial metropole (or whose memories of such historical experiences have faded) is expected to develop a stable foreign policy with relatively close relations to the former imperial metropole. A state with a single center arena that experienced a traumatic formative period involving the former imperial metropole (or in which the elite and society collectively strongly remember a historical trauma) is expected to treat the metropole as a "radical other". The foreign policy strategy for coping with the trauma – for example to escape or to fight – depends on the leader and government in power, as well as previous experiences of using a particular strategy. In a single center arena, the trauma is generally expected to increase ingroup cohesion, which helps stabilize the overall foreign policy orientation.

If the transition to independence is comparatively peaceful and results in a multicenter political arena, we can expect foreign policy instability and incoherence. Because of the benign formative experience with the former imperial metropole, we can expect a comparatively pragmatic policy towards the metropole. If the formative period is traumatic and results in a multicenter arena, the situation becomes more difficult to predict. In many cases, we can expect intensified divisions within the elite and society, which also translate into conflicts over foreign policy. In extreme cases, this can lead to the disintegration of the state. In other cases, for example when a state faces a large-

scale attack by an external power, the nature of the trauma may increase the cohesion of influential groups within a country. The exact outcome is difficult to predict theoretically. It depends on whether actors are loyal to the state (or allied with the invading power), the nature of the trauma, and how the trauma is interpreted within the elite and society.

A violent formative period can, of course, result in both traumatic experiences and territorial reconfiguration. A war that ends in territorial loss, for example during the transition to independence, can both change the territorial configuration of the political arena and be a traumatic formative experience. In this situation, a country can be expected to move closer to a single center arena, and its foreign policy to be stable and directed against the external power, which is seen as a "radical other" in the trauma story.

These expectations are derived from the theoretical argument outlined above and need to be confirmed or refuted by studying empirical cases. The next chapter will discuss methodological choices, including how the theoretical framework presented in this chapter will be applied.

3. Method and research design

This chapter presents the dissertation's research design and methodological choices. It starts with a discussion on comparative process tracing, case selection and periodization, which is followed by observable implications of key concepts and case-specific predictions. A section on field studies, material and data collection follows. Here, I discuss challenges and solutions when it comes to combining and assessing different streams of evidence, how to navigate a rich collection of empirical data and the types of material I have used, and for what purposes. The chapter concludes with a critical reflection on the research process and how it has been inspired by an abductive approach to research and theory development. Besides the aims of transparency and to offer the reader insights into the choices made during the research process, the ambition of the chapter is to serve as inspiration for how to conduct comparative research on foreign policy in post-imperial settings.

Comparative process tracing

This study explores foreign policy processes in two countries: Georgia and Ukraine. I apply what Bengtsson and Ruonavaara (2017) call comparative process tracing (CTP). Process tracing has become popular in qualitative studies, and scholars use it explicitly and implicitly (Beach & Pedersen, 2019; Bennett & Checkel, 2014).

While process tracing has often been used for within-case analysis, this study is inspired by scholars who see important synergies between process tracing and case comparisons (Bennett & Checkel, 2014). CPT is useful for investigating empirical-historical puzzles when making systematic comparisons of two (or more) cases. CPT can be divided into two steps, although these steps are interrelated (Bengtsson & Ruonavaara, 2017). The first within-case step identifies critical junctures and political focal points in each case. The second between-case step is a focused comparison between the cases.

A powerful analytical tool in comparative analysis is counterfactuals – "what if" questions that compare history in one case with what happened in another case (Capoccia, 2015). CPT makes it possible to use empirical observations from the other case(s) as a kind of counterfactual. In my analysis, I

refer to empirical observations in the other case as a counterfactual, for example, during critical junctures. This approach can be contrasted with single case studies where such arguments rely on analytical constructs.

Portability, context and periodization are three additional tools for structuring the analysis. Portability, as understood here, means that explanatory factors and mechanisms should be abstract enough to be generalizable in a limited sense (Bengtsson & Ruonavaara, 2017). Given the context-dependence of many social processes, these portable factors and mechanisms must be applied with sensitivity and knowledge of the regional and local context.

Selecting the cases

Two cases were selected for this study: Georgia and Ukraine. To be more specific, the cases are not the countries per se but these countries' foreign policies. Georgia and Ukraine can be included in a broad definition of political Europe after 1991, geopolitically placed between Russia and the West. To better understand the rationale behind the case selection, it is useful to briefly discuss potential cases not selected. The five former-Soviet republics in Central Asia, for example, are not among the 47 states in the Council of Europe. For reasons of political geography, they have, to my knowledge, never been included in discussions on a future NATO or EU enlargement. Thus, political geography is an important structural constraint. I also excluded the Warsaw Pact members belonging to the Eastern Bloc that were not Soviet republics. In the context of World War II, Joseph Stalin forced countries such as Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia into the Soviet sphere of influence (Applebaum, 2012). In the late 1980s, Poles, Czechs, Slovaks and Hungarians had an active collective memory of a time before Soviet occupation. They had also experienced uprisings and resistance against Moscow, in Hungary in 1956, in Czechoslovakia in 1968 and during the rise of Solidarity in Poland in the 1980s. These countries' decisions to distance themselves from Russia after 1991 and seek EU and NATO membership were therefore perhaps predictable. The three Baltic states – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania – were Soviet republics but shared many experiences with the non-Soviet Eastern Bloc countries.

If we exclude the aspiring regional hegemon, Russia, there are six states that became independent after the break-up of the Soviet Union and within a decade were included in the Council of Europe: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, geographically located in the South Caucasus, close to the Middle East; and Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, geographically placed closer to Central Europe. These six countries had previously been incorporated into the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union.[21] Their history left them closely linked to Russia after 1991 but their geopolitical location also made it possible

[21] There were regional exceptions within these countries, for example in Ukraine.

to at least in principle aim for long-term European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Thus, it was far from evident in 1991 which foreign policy trajectory these states would pursue in the future. Moreover, Soviet or pre-Soviet legacies made several of these countries, including Georgia and Ukraine, regionally diverse entities, as is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

This dissertation includes one smaller country from the South Caucasus, Georgia, and one medium-sized country from Eastern Europe, Ukraine. One objection could be that the two are different in size and located geographically in somewhat different environments, with Ukraine being closer to Central Europe and Georgia closer to the Middle East. My first counterargument is that in contexts such as the post-Soviet region after 1991, the difference in size was less important than is sometimes argued by scholars who highlight the uniqueness of smaller states (Gvalia et al., 2019; Kakachia et al., 2018). When a state located between competing great powers tries to design a foreign policy, the task is not that different for smaller (Georgia) or medium-sized (Ukraine) states. In wartime, however, such as Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine in 2022, factors like size, military organization and morale are probably relevant to a country's ability to resist. This is not the focus of this dissertation, however, and I will demonstrate that both Georgia's and Ukraine's leaders have for decades treated Russia as a large power.

Second, both Georgia and Ukraine share a border with Russia. If we could predict anything based on geographical placement, we would expect Ukraine's foreign policy to have been consistently more pro-West than Georgia's after 1991, given Ukraine's geographic proximity to Central Europe. As is demonstrated in the empirical analysis, however, such a simplified argument does not hold water. Georgia and Ukraine became independent in 1991 after many decades within the Soviet Union. Together with other republics, they were dependent on Moscow due to the penetrating top-down political and economic system. As a result of Moscow's dominance within the USSR, Georgia and Ukraine were still closely linked to Russia after 1991. In 1996, for example, both Georgia and Ukraine had Russia as their dominant import/export trading partner and were seen as transit countries for energy and other goods (World Bank, 2024). Russia also had a military presence in both countries and close ties with the Georgian and Ukrainian military and security services.

The two countries started establishing ties with the West, but at the outset these links were comparatively weak, although both received notable aid from the US, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1990s. An alternative case selection strategy could have picked adjacent countries, such as the three relatively small states in the South Caucasus. I decided, however, that if my theory could shed light on the foreign policy of two former-Soviet republics with differences in size and geographic placement, it would strengthen its explanatory power.

Another consideration for case selection was relevance outside academia. As has become obvious since Russia's invasion in 2022, Ukraine is highly important for the European security order, but Georgia has also played an important role in the region's development. As noted by an expert on Ukraine, many scholars in the West have relied mostly on secondary sources but less on interviews with key actors and on primary documents (Kuzio, 2018). This can lead to misunderstandings and the neglect of important information – a problem that this dissertation seeks to avoid.

Finally, I had to consider the time and resources at my disposal. Some methodological standards recommend selecting three cases or more in comparative case studies. However, tracking foreign policy processes in two countries over several decades is time-consuming. Adding a third case would have lowered the quality of the empirical investigation in each case. At the same time, if the theory can shed light on foreign policy processes in two countries, it can be considered more robust than if a single-case strategy had been chosen.

Periodization

Periodization is another aspect to consider in temporal analysis. Periodization means dividing a long process into relevant phases or periods to make "a temporal comparison on the basis of similarities and differences considered essential" (Bengtsson & Ruonavaara, 2017, p. 57). Periodization is not neutral, but a choice based on a researcher's assumptions and should be theoretically informed. The periodization in my empirical analysis is based on the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2. Figure 3.1 visualizes the periodization that structures the empirical analysis.

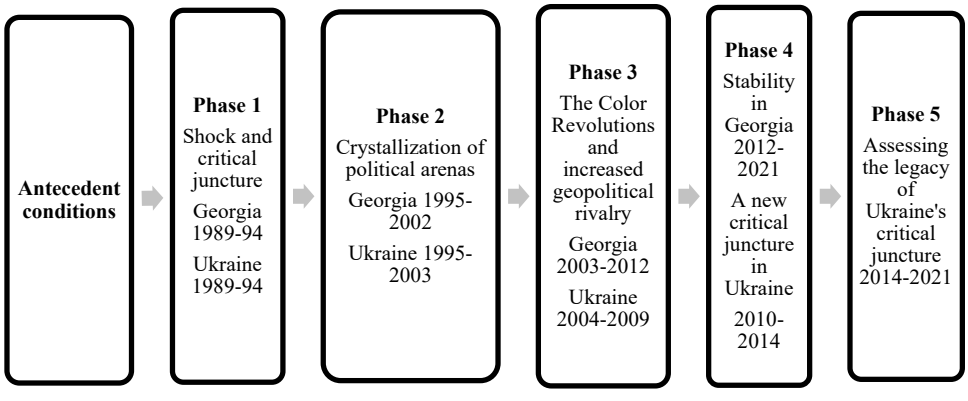

Figure 3.1. Comparative process tracing: outline of periodization

One challenge is to decide when to start and end the analysis, and how to identify critical junctures to achieve analytical equivalence (Collier & Munck, 2022). My empirical analysis starts by providing a brief historical context and identifies relevant antecedent conditions. Thereafter follows an analysis in five phases.

The first phase is the shock of the Soviet collapse, followed by the critical junctures that are compared in the two cases. After the break-up of the USSR, the Soviet republics gained or regained their independence after a long period within a highly authoritarian system. Scholars have compared the period after 1991 to a quasi-natural experiment or a "grand natural laboratory" (K. A. Darden, 2009; Hale, 2015). The Soviet system was definitively hierarchical and authoritarian. The Soviet leadership used, among other things, ideology and propaganda, violence, industrialization, collectivization, education and housing policy, the Russian language and its vast security apparatus to establish a more uniform Soviet Union.

However, it is important to underline that each Soviet republic also had unique characteristics, such as national symbols, languages and local political elites (Bennich-Björkman & Grybkauskas, 2021). The high standards required for a research design to mimic a natural experiment are too demanding for comparison of complex political processes in different countries. Nonetheless, landmark studies in comparative historical analysis have faced similar challenges. One advantage of my study is that the Soviet break-up occurred at the same time in all the republics and in a similar international environment, making it easier to identify comparable critical junctures in different countries. It is also important that a critical juncture "takes distinct forms in different cases" (D. Collier & Munck, 2017, p. 3). As argued in Chapter 4, the transition to independence (the critical juncture) in Georgia and Ukraine is analytically equivalent, but these junctures occurred in different ways in the two countries.

The second phase traces the crystallization of the political arenas in Georgia and Ukraine after the critical juncture. As noted by scholars in this tradition, it might take some time before events at these junctures materialize into distinct political legacies (Collier & Munck, 2022). The analysis therefore assesses whether, and if so how, different formative experiences started to contribute to divergent foreign policy trajectories in the two countries. These legacies are analyzed in subsequent phases up until 2021.

The third phase is a comparison of the Rose and Orange Revolutions and their aftermaths. During this period, I study consolidated political arenas, the legacies of different formative experiences and their influence on the foreign policies of Georgia and Ukraine. This phase also includes a robustness test in relation to other theories and shifts in the external environment. During this phase, great power competition between Russia and the West was higher compared to previous periods. NATO and EU borders moved eastward following the so-called big-bang enlargement in 2003–2004, while at the same time Russia's military and economic strength increased, accompanied by Putin and his

affiliates' strengthened grip on power (Tsygankov, 2022). Notwithstanding these shifts in the geopolitical environment, it is argued in Chapters 7 and 8 that there is much continuity from earlier periods when it comes to Georgia's and Ukraine's overall foreign policy.

In the fourth phase, the analysis turns to a period of increased domestic and external pressure on Ukraine's political system, which, it is argued, resulted in a new critical juncture. Here, Georgia functions as a contrast with its overall continued pro-West orientation despite the new leadership in power. The final phase investigates the legacy that followed Ukraine's critical juncture in 2013–2014. The analysis ends before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This endpoint is motivated for two reasons. First, although Russia had been attempting to shape the post-Soviet region to its advantage since 1991, the 2022 invasion was a very different approach compared to previous attempts, which has had major implications for the countries in the region. Second, the war is ongoing and, at the time of writing, the situation on the ground is changing rapidly. Future studies will have to assess the implications and consequences of Russia's war against Ukraine.

Observable implications of key concepts and case-specific predictions

To make the analysis as transparent as possible, it is central to answer questions such as: How do we distinguish between a single and a multicenter arena in practice? How do we recognize a collective trauma when we see it? What are the observable implications, or the empirical manifestations, in the material and the case-specific predictions for whether my theory is accurate (Beach & Pedersen, 2019)? What kind of evidence would strengthen my theory? What type of evidence would downgrade confidence in my proposed explanation? Answers to these questions also connect to a discussion on the material I have used in the empirical analysis, including the advantages and limitations of these choices.

Foreign policy orientation

In Chapter 2, I elaborated on definitions of foreign policy orientation and stability. As mentioned, the dissertation looks at three broad areas of foreign policy: security and military alliance/partnership, political association and economic partnership. In the context of this study, the available military alliances are NATO or the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Close military partnerships with major powers such as the United States and Russia are also assessed. When it comes to political associations, the alternatives are to sign or declare an intention to sign an association agreement with, or become a member of, the EU; or membership of the Russia-led

Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Close high-level partnerships with major powers such as the United States and Russia are also assessed. The CIS lacks institutional depth compared to the EU. Thus, being a CIS member does not automatically mean a country should be considered "pro-Russian". Instead, an overall assessment of a country's diplomatic relationship with Russia and the West is discussed on a case-by-case basis.

Economic partnership involve the EU's Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) or the Russia-led Customs Union (CU), which in 2015 became the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), as well as earlier versions of these partnerships. Some degree of bilateral trade with neighboring countries is normal and occurs even among countries in conflict. Thus, moderate trade with an external power does not in itself make a state's foreign policy pro-Russia or pro-West – the focus here is primarily on the institutionalized economic agreements. However, if bilateral trade is very high, for example with Russia, it will be seen as a close partnership in the economic sphere.

What about differences in foreign policy declaration and behavior? If there is a significant gap between a declared foreign policy orientation and a government's actual foreign policy behavior, this will be discussed and assessed in the empirical sections. For each period, I make an overall assessment of Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies. I consider it overly pro-West, overly pro-Russian or ambivalent and wavering. For example, it is helpful to study when a new government comes to power to see whether a foreign policy shift takes place. If a shift takes place after a new government comes to power, it is considered an unstable foreign policy.

Formative period and political arenas

The main formative period in this dissertation is the transition to independence and its immediate aftermath. The analysis starts in the late 1980s when the Soviet Union showed signs of significant decay and ends a few years after independence when the situation in most newly independent states, including Georgia and Ukraine, had stabilized. By this time, most newly independent states had adopted a constitution, organized one or several elections, and the conflicts that had occurred in some of these states had (at least temporarily) de-escalated. In Chapters 10 and 11, the analysis also identifies a second critical juncture in Ukraine that, in important ways, resembles a formative moment. During the formative period, the analysis zooms in on the dynamics between government and regional elites, and relations with the former imperial hegemon. The transition to independence is considered a critical juncture in which governments can choose more dominant or more accommodational policies in response to domestic and external pressures. An important part of the analysis is to identify critical decision points (Capoccia, 2015). As outlined in Chapter 2, we expect a formative period to be fluid and contingent, where choices made by political leaders can have significant consequences for the formation of political arenas and for later perceptions of external powers.

How to distinguish between single and multicenter arenas in practice? The important difference is not the number of political parties per se but the territorial configuration and presence of influential political-economic groups. As discussed in Chapter 2, territorially based groups, such as regional elites, are more likely to have specific interests than other groups. Moreover, border regions are more likely to have closer connections to an external power, with more robust economic and identity linkages. This increases the likelihood that regional elites will have distinct foreign policy interests. Thus, it is useful to incorporate border regions into the analysis. A multicenter arena has at least two or three territorially based groups (beyond political groups not linked to a territorial entity). A territorially based group should have the capacity to make an impact in national politics either by itself or in cooperation with others, or the capacity, either by itself or with the support of an external patron, to defend itself against domination from other domestic political groups. If a state, for example, has one or two relatively weaker territorially based groups without the capacity to influence national politics, the state is not treated as a multicenter arena. Heterogeneity within a state in a more general sense, for example, multiple ethnic groups or if several languages are spoken, can be significant in terms of identification and belonging. As discussed in Chapter 2, however, we must still identify multiple political centers in the arena to classify it as a multicenter arena. People with a distinct ethnicity or language may be scattered across the country and suffer from weak coordination or an ineffective political organization.

If a state has a dominant party without the presence of several territorially based groups, we are closer to the single center type. In the single center arena, political opposition and competition can still exist, but we do not find influential territorially based parties. Moreover, if a territorial entity such as a region is de facto separated from the host state (due to secession or external occupation), it is no longer treated as part of the political arena. This should not be seen as moral approval of this development. Prevailing international norms, including the UN Charter, do not support the occupation of an internationally recognized state's territory. In practice, however, such action can have significant consequences for a state's political development. Thus, the choice is analytical, not an endorsement of such actions. As is often the case when theory meets reality, the distinction between the two types of arenas can be clear in some instances and less so in others. Nonetheless, the above criteria are intended to make it possible to decide whether a state is closer to a single or a multicenter arena at a particular time.

My theoretical framework expects it to be more likely that a foreign policy consensus will emerge in a single center than in a multicenter arena. According to this dissertation, a consensus on foreign policy orientation is when the main political parties support either a primarily pro-West or a primarily pro-Russian foreign policy. A consensus on foreign policy orientation is considered stable if it survives a shift in the ruling coalition. One example might be

if a state's foreign policy, such as the goal of EU and NATO membership, remains the same after a new government comes to power. Political elites might disagree on the exact method of how to reach a foreign policy goal but there should be no major disagreement on the overall orientation itself. Such a position is expected to resonate also within wider society. Although government officials are responsible for foreign policy, low societal support or major societal divisions over foreign policy weaken the view that a consensus has materialized. If my theory is correct, we would expect the opposite in a multicenter arena: difficulties in forming a consensus on either a clear pro-West or a pro-Russia foreign policy and frequent changes or ambivalence. The political landscape should be characterized by multiple political centers competing for power, and shifts in government would be expected to result in ambivalence and frequent shifts in foreign policy. Correspondingly, the proposed explanation is weakened if we see ambivalence and frequent foreign policy shifts in the single center arena or long periods of foreign policy stability in the multicenter arena.

Collective trauma

The assessment of collective trauma is an analysis in two steps. First, we must identify possible moments, such as the transition to independence, and evaluate whether the period can be considered highly painful for a state and society. Given the context-dependent nature of collective trauma, a narrow operational definition would not be helpful. We can, however, expect such a process to be shocking for society and to include violence that has an impact beyond a limited number of individuals.[22] Military conflict, territorial loss or other major events, such as mass protest with violent outcomes, are examples to look for, and there should be a clear "before and after" the painful moment. In the context of this dissertation, it is important to assess the role of Russia, the former imperial metropole, and how political elites in Georgia and Ukraine perceive Russia's involvement during these periods. As discussed in Chapter 2, most transitions to independence are significant shifts, but not all are necessarily painful, violent or traumatic. Therefore, potential watershed moments must be analyzed in detail, especially the transition to independence. Once a traumatic event has been identified, the second step is to assess how it influences a country's foreign policy. In this dissertation, I use evidence from interviews with key officials in several administrations, government officials' speeches, diplomatic cables and statements in the media (see below).

How do I identify traits of trauma in interviews and statements by political elites? In her article, Nina Tannenwald (1999) refers to "taboo talk" as a way

[22] An example from the Soviet history is the Prague Spring and its brutal crushing, which became a collective trauma not only in Czechoslovakia but also to part of the broader Soviet sphere and for its younger generations.

to provide evidence that a norm of nuclear taboo, in contrast to material explanations can explain why nuclear weapons have not been used in war since 1945. Similarly, this analysis looks for "trauma talk" and manifestations in interviews, speeches and media statements, and expects references to the traumatic event and its consequences to be apparent. Government officials should explicitly or implicitly talk about experiences, lessons and interpretations that connect with the traumatic event. In line with the theoretical literature, states are sensitive to issues such as sovereignty and territory, and government officials should discuss foreign policy goals for coping with trauma. A negative external power in a state's trauma is expected to be treated as a "radical other" and state officials would be expected to define their own country in stark contrast to the radical other after the traumatic experience. The theory also expects government officials to emphasize "existential" rhetoric and present the country it represents as a victim of external forces. It should also be possible to identify emotional statements that express humiliation, distrust, disappointment, pain and anger. Language embedded in emotions as motives for foreign policy choices is more difficult for other theories, such as modern versions of realism, to explain (Schmidt & Wight, 2023). We would also expect state officials to identify external powers as potential heroes and saviors that can help states cope with trauma, such as by restoring territorial integrity and providing military support.

What would not be expected from a state that has experienced trauma with the negative involvement of an external power? A trauma should have constraining effects and make certain choices seem inappropriate and illegitimate. Therefore, we should not expect governments to orient their foreign policy toward an external power that has previously been identified as a radical other in a state's trauma, or to conduct transactional and pragmatic relations with that external power. As with all theoretical concepts translated into observable implications, there will be moments of ambiguity. I have therefore been sure to be as transparent as possible with uncertainty in the empirical chapters and to explain why I have reached a particular conclusion.

Field studies, data collection and material

This dissertation combines multiple types of material, including interviews. The interviews were conducted during four longer field trips to Georgia and Ukraine. In total, I spent eight months in the field interviewing politicians, diplomats and experts. I visited Georgia in February–March 2017 and March–April 2019, and Ukraine in September–October 2017 and in 2018. In addition, I spent six months in Washington, DC in 2019–2020 as a visiting scholar at the Institute for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, George Washington University. In Washington, I had the opportunity to interview a number of senior US diplomats who had worked in the region.

During the field trips, I talked to people and studied the modern political history of the two countries to get a better understanding of the broader context. I also traveled around Georgia and Ukraine and spent time in different regions to get a sense of daily life. Beyond longer stays in Tbilisi and Kyiv, I visited two port cities on the Black Sea coast, Batumi and Odesa, and two Ukrainian border cities: Lviv, close to the Polish border in western Ukraine, and Kharkiv, close to the Russian border in eastern Ukraine. I also spent some time in Georgian cities such as Kutaisi, in the Caucasus mountains, and joined an EU patrol to visit the boundary line dividing Georgia and South Ossetia. The trips around the countries contributed a deeper understanding of Georgia and Ukraine. During evenings in Ukraine, I also took language classes to improve my language skills. In line with Kvale & Brinkemann's (2014) recommendations, I summarized important findings and impressions gathered from my interviews in a field diary.

Material: How to combine and assess different streams of evidence

This dissertation uses a combination of different types of material, such as elite interviews, official documents and statements, news articles, diplomatic cables, secondary academic literature, memoirs and expert reports. This follows recommendations to identify diverse and independent streams of evidence (Bennett & Checkel, 2014). The theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2 guides the analysis. As with most studies that use large amounts of empirical material, trade-offs and choices have to be made. Moreover, as everyone with experience of field studies and interviews knows, the process is rarely as straightforward as is sometimes presented in method books. The ideal material is not always possible to find. In some periods, for example, my access to respondents was more limited, which made it necessary to compensate with other types of material. I discuss the material I have used in different parts of the analysis and its strengths and weaknesses below. Further below follows a discussion on elite interviews, selection strategies, how to deal with bias and how the interviews were conducted. Table 3.1 presents an overview of the main and supporting material used for the different phases of the empirical analysis.

Table 3.1. Types of main and supporting material used in the different phases

Overview of material	**Georgia**		**Ukraine**	
Period	*Main material*	*Supporting material*	*Main material*	*Supporting material*
Antecedent conditions	Academic books and articles		Academic books and articles	
Phase 1 – Shock and Critical Juncture	Academic books and articles, news articles, diplomatic cables	Reports by NGOs (for ex. International Crisis Group & Human Rights Watch), elite interviews, memoirs	Academic books and articles, news articles, statements by leaders in media, diplomatic cables	Polls (not constructed by this author)
Phase 2 – Crystallization of political arenas	Elite interviews, news articles, academic books and articles	Diplomatic cables	Academic books and articles, news articles, statements by leaders in media	International treaties, diplomatic cables, elite interviews
Phase 3 – The Color Revolutions	Elite interviews, academic books and articles, news articles, statements by leaders in media	Reports (for ex. International Crisis Group, OSCE, World Bank), diplomatic cables	Elite interviews, statements by leaders in the media, diplomatic cables, news articles	Academic books and articles
Phase 4 – Stability in Georgia. A new critical juncture in Ukraine	News articles, statements by leaders in media, elite interviews	Academic books and articles, foreign policy documents, polls by IRI & NDI, reports (for ex. International Crisis Group, Freedom House)	Elite interviews, news articles, investigative journalism (Der Spiegel & Reuters), academic books and articles	Polls (by KIIS), statements by leaders in media, diplomatic cables, memoirs
Phase 5 –			Statements by leaders in	Elite interviews, Polls

Assessing the legacy of Ukraine's critical juncture			the media, news articles, investigative journalism, academic books and articles	(KIIS, DIF & Gallup), reports (Freedom House, International Crisis Group)

The analysis of the historical antecedent conditions drew on existing academic books and articles. Throughout this study, I have tried to avoid becoming dependent on one scholarly account at any point in time. A scholar may use evidence for a particular aim or framing, while new evidence can lead to conclusions overlooked by earlier accounts. To minimize such risks, I have, wherever possible, identified several influential works covering a particular period or event. I have used international expertise but also works written by prominent Georgian and Ukrainian scholars when available. Where contrasting interpretations of an important event or period exist, I indicate this in the text and explain why I have come to a particular conclusion. As a rule of thumb, I treat interpretations acknowledged by several scholars and information provided by non-partial expert organizations with a higher degree of confidence than findings from a single study or reports produced by partisan organizations.

The formative periods rely on secondary academic sources, news articles, including statements by leaders in the media, diplomatic cables, policy documents and, where available, interviews with decision makers who were in power at the time. Several important actors are either no longer with us or were not accessible for an interview. This is a limitation of the study but I have tried to compensate for this by using the above-mentioned materials. When I could not get access to an important respondent, I used statements by leaders in news media, combined with then-classified notes from meetings between US diplomats and Georgian and Ukrainian leaders. Secondary academic literature and reports by international organizations help to triangulate accounts from interviewees and statements made by leaders at the time. Interviews with a few US and EU diplomats with long experience in the countries have also been used to triangulate information.

To capture the crystallization of Georgia's and Ukraine's political arenas in Phase 2, I relied on a mix of elite interviews, secondary academic sources, news media, policy documents, diplomatic cables, survey results and voting patterns in national elections. Elite interviews provide the views of government officials and influential members of the opposition on political dynamics and their interpretation of key events. Secondary academic sources and news media put the actors in a broader political context and provide a critical assessment. For Phase 2, I had significant access to key Georgian politicians and

advisors but more limited access to Ukrainian politicians. In Ukraine, I compensated by using statements from leaders, diplomatic cables, and multiple academic and expert sources covering the period.

In Phase 3, I had greater access to decision makers in both Georgia and Ukraine and to previously classified diplomatic cables. Furthermore, the analysis includes statements by leaders, secondary academic sources and expert reports to triangulate the material.

In Phase 4, I had limited access to leading figures in the Georgian Dream (GD) political party. To compensate, I interviewed GD advisors and one leader in the GD coalition, and analyzed statements by GD leaders and interviews about foreign policy made at the time. I also analyzed academic articles, news articles and expert reports to triangulate official declarations. In Ukraine, I had access to high-level respondents during the period. I also relied on news articles, investigative journalism and secondary academic sources to strengthen the account.

For Phase 5, I had planned a final trip to Ukraine to interview members of the Poroshenko and Zelensky administrations. However, the outbreak of war in 2022 meant that I could not travel. Instead, I have relied on statements by leaders in the media, news articles, secondary academic sources, investigative journalism, opinion polls and, to a lesser extent, elite interviews. It would have been ideal to interview senior Ukrainian officials in the two administrations. While not perfect, I believe my approach compensates quite well for these limitations. I do not think that additional interviews would have revealed a fundamentally different understanding than the one presented in Chapter 11, but additional interviews could have added more depth and color to the analysis.

Some general comments are required about documents, news media, diplomatic cables and opinion polls. Overall, statements and documents complement and balance potential problems with elite interviews. Furthermore, the analysis includes a rich number of reports by international and local media, and interviews with important actors made by journalists. BBC Monitoring, for example, is a valuable media source that delivers local news translated into English. The reports are searchable in Factiva's news database, and I studied these reports in detail. Key words were used to identify important events such as political and armed conflicts, political crises, elections and important foreign policy decisions. I also relied on other respectable news agencies, for example in the US, the UK and Germany. Local media, such as the *Kyiv Post*, *Ukrainska Pravda*, *Unian*, *Ukrinform* and *Civil Georgia*, were also used. Media sources are essential for understanding the context in which official documents and statements have been produced. Another advantage is that I could crosscheck my own interview material and compare it with official statements and media reports made at the time.

Where available, I also used declassified diplomatic cables and reports. Here, I have relied on recently declassified US documents from the 1990s and

early 2000s, as well as US diplomatic cables from WikiLeaks, which primarily cover the period 2005–2011. These cables include notes from meetings between US leaders and senior Georgian and Ukrainian decision makers, as well as insightful reporting of political dynamics in the two countries and their relations with the US, the EU and Russia. Although not a panacea, private conversations and reporting expected to be classified for decades are considered valuable since they can reveal intentions, facts and details not available elsewhere (Bennett & Checkel, 2014). However, even this information must be treated with some caution. Georgian and Ukrainian officials probably tailored their messages to fit a particular audience, and meetings have been summarized and analyzed by US diplomats. In other periods, such as after 2011, I did not have access to diplomatic cables, which is a limitation of the study. Instead, I relied on interviews, official statements and secondary sources.

Polls and voting patterns have been used to identify potential differences within the population, for example, whether voters in a region vote for a regionally based party and whether a particular part of the population supports a specific foreign policy orientation. The polls referred to in this study were produced by respected organizations for other purposes and consumed by this author. For data on foreign policy and "trauma talk", I relied primarily on my interviews with key officials, official statements, news media and diplomatic cables. I now turn to a more detailed discussion on how elite interviews were used in this study.

Elite interviews

The dissertation seeks to explain the direction of foreign policy orientations and why they have remained stable or changed over time. It is my conviction that interviews with the people responsible for foreign policy and their advisors are helpful for gaining an in-depth understanding of these complex processes. After all, human beings are the ones who make foreign policy decisions, and not abstract, black-boxed states (Hudson, 2013).[23] Thus, we need to understand the beliefs and perceptions of members of foreign policy elites, and we rarely get a comprehensive picture exclusively from books or formal documents (Richards 1996). By interviewing Georgian and Ukrainian officials active at different periods, the analysis compares similarities and differences among foreign policy elite groups, both within and between the two countries. A list of the respondents interviewed is found at the end of the dissertation.

The main purpose is to use the interviews together with the other types of material to reconstruct events and drive the theoretically informed narratives forward. It is worth emphasizing that interviews add value and depth to the

[23] This of course does not mean that human decision makers are unconstrained by the environment, including material and ideational structures.

analysis but are not automatically treated as more important than other material, such as the declassified diplomatic cables. For this dissertation, I used different types of respondents. First, I interviewed key foreign policy actors such as presidents, prime ministers, foreign and defense ministers, members of the security council and influential members of parliament. I chose respondents strategically since they were responsible for major foreign policy decisions and played a direct role in these processes. Information from particular key officials can provide important clues and "smoking gun" evidence that is difficult to obtain elsewhere (Bennett & Checkel, 2014). I view information and explanations from key officials as significant due to the respondents' centrality and involvement in major decisions. The flip side of this coin is that these actors, in part for accountability reasons, might distort the information or may have forgotten details – challenges I discuss below. In addition, I interviewed deputy ministers and foreign policy advisors, diplomats and civil servants who often have in-depth knowledge of the details.

Each country's organizational structure is different (George & Bennett, 2005). In Georgia after 2003, for example, a narrow circle close to the president and the security council strongly influenced foreign policy issues. Hence, identifying actors and organizations that had influence over foreign policy was a central task. To figure this out I studied the existing literature and asked local and international experts. When conducting elite interviews, it is important to be well prepared and to know the cases well (Richards, 1996). Political elites are busy and expect only to answer questions not already covered in the media or in previous interviews.

Before my field trips, I read up on the theoretical literature and empirical material related to the topic. Especially during my first field trip to a country, I started by talking to local experts, such as researchers and journalists. These conversations deepened my knowledge, provided me with useful contacts and broadened my perspectives. When I got the opportunity, I also interviewed foreign diplomats with working experience of the two countries (see "Other respondents" at the end of the dissertation) The latter group gave me an informed outsider perspective that helped me verify and triangulate the information received by Georgian and Ukrainian elites. The decision makers and their advisors gave their subjective accounts of key decisions and events.

How to identify, select and get access to respondents

Identifying and getting access to decision makers can be challenging, especially when you have no previously established network in a country (Richards, 1996). First, I had to identify the people to interview. At the very top, at the ministerial level, identification was relatively straightforward but getting access was difficult. In some cases, senior leaders were either dead, such as President Shevardnadze in Georgia, or had fled to Russia, such as President Yanukovych in Ukraine. In these cases, I accessed people who had worked closely with them. Other respondents, such as foreign policy advisors,

deputy ministers and influential diplomats, were somewhat more difficult to identify but generally easier to access. To identify the latter group, I combined internet searches and a constantly expanding network of people met during my field trips. I created lists of people to interview and tried to identify alternatives if a specific individual was unavailable.

Securing interviews required determination and the ability to work on multiple tracks simultaneously. In some cases, an email address or phone number was available online, but I often had to rely on other methods, such as Facebook and Twitter. Personal connections also matter. One of the most successful ways to access decision makers was when personal contacts, such as researchers and journalists, helped me by email, phone or social media. I also got help from people I had already interviewed. This demonstrates the importance of building a reputation, being respectful and making a positive impression during interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014).

The goal was to get access to senior officials from different governments in both countries. The so-called snowball technique, a strategy in which one interview leads to the next, is effective but can also be unreliable. There is a risk the researcher ends up interviewing a narrow group of friends, a problem that can also arise when relying on one fixer to arrange all the interviews. To handle this challenge, I started several snowballs simultaneously and tried to use a variety of contacts with access to different political circles. During my second field trip to Georgia, I followed the advice of Rivera et al. (2002) and secured an institutional affiliation at the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies, a respected think tank in international relations. The foundation helped me to contact and set up meetings with people on my list. During my field trips, I attended conferences and workshops where politicians and diplomats were present, which helped me secure additional interviews.

One takeaway from extensive elite interviewing is the need for patience and determination, and to not give up even when you see few early results. During my first three weeks in Ukraine, I secured virtually no interviews with influential decision makers, which corresponded with the information I had received before the trip – getting access to current and former decision makers in Ukraine might be difficult. This motivated me to work even harder. In the meantime, I interviewed researchers and journalists who provided both valuable information and contacts. I politely reminded people and used creative ways to contact the right individuals. This determination and creativity eventually paid off. That said, some political leaders either had no time to talk or no interest in talking to scholars like me. I then used the strategies described above, interviewing people close to that leader or using other supplementary types of material.

Conducting the interviews

Interviewing is a craft and this was my first experience with elite interviews. During my first year as a PhD student, I conducted a pilot study in which I

interviewed Swedish diplomats who had worked in Georgia, Ukraine and Russia. The pilot study allowed me to practice the interview situation, test different types of questions and, of course, to interview diplomats. As a bonus, I picked up facts and cultural knowledge. Some diplomats even helped me to connect with people in Georgia and Ukraine.

The interviews in this dissertation are semi-structured. In other words, I did not use a standardized form for all the interviews. Standardized forms are helpful in some studies but in my view not for interviews with senior officials. However, I prepared some general grand tour questions and themes that came up in most interviews, but I also tailored specific questions to the interviewee, in what Nilsson (2015) calls a twofold interview structure. The format was flexible enough to give the respondent a chance to present important information that I otherwise could have missed. This aligns with an abductive approach (see below): researchers should be sensitive to new information and alternative explanations. I also used counterfactuals in the interviews. For example, if I asked a senior official about a particular decision, I followed up by asking whether other options had been considered and why those alternatives had been abandoned (Capoccia, 2015). Another question could be why alternatives, possible at least in theory, had not been considered. Counterfactuals were thus helpful for obtaining a more in-depth understanding.

Before each interview, I created a short biography, collected information about the respondent and updated myself on important events that occurred when that person was in office. Where available, I studied statements and earlier interviews, and watched video clips to get a sense of the person's style and personality.

The interviews usually lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. Following ethical guidelines, I always asked for consent and informed the respondent about the research project and the purpose of the interview. I asked for permission to record the interviews and if I could quote the person and use their name in print. In almost all cases, respondents thanked me for letting them share their views and wanted me to quote them. On a few occasions, however, we agreed I could publish their quotes but without using their name.

There are disadvantages to consider when using a recording device and quoting people by name. Some respondents might, for example, be more careful with what they say. The main advantages of my approach are accuracy and transparency – a common criticism of qualitative studies is the lack of transparency (George & Bennett, 2005). Even though I do not claim to have resolved all these problems – for example, only I have access to the full interview transcripts and recordings, which are securely stored according to standard practice – I have used quotes extensively in the analysis.

Moreover, the respondents are experienced politicians and diplomats who have done many interviews in the past. Power asymmetry, which can become a problem when a researcher interviews a person in a vulnerable position, was, in my view, not an issue here. Senior decision makers are used to media and,

as mentioned above, many respondents explicitly thanked me for being interested in the topic and encouraged me to share their interpretations of events.

I conducted most of the interviews in English, which was not a problem because most of the respondents work in the field of international affairs and speak English. The fact that English is not my first language or the mother tongue of most of the respondents might reduce the quality of the conversation. At the same time, I preferred this to the alternative of using a translator since the latter can make the atmosphere less relaxed and open.

Flexibility and improvisation are two assets for elite interviews, especially in Georgia and Ukraine. Few respondents wanted to schedule interviews far in advance. I frequently changed my schedule and conducted interviews in government and parliament buildings, party offices, restaurants, cafés and universities. People even invited me to their homes to share their stories. On a personal note, people's generosity positively surprised me, and doing the interviews provided some of the most rewarding, interesting, demanding and joyful moments of my doctoral studies and has given me memories I will never forget. I transcribed all the interviews manually. Although time-consuming, this helped me reflect during the process. I read and re-read the final transcripts and used markers to code information into relevant categories. After my first two field trips, I analyzed the material, improved and revised my questions, and identified additional people to interview for the remaining trips.

Elite interviews have many advantages but, as with any method, there are also challenges (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014; Richards, 1996). The most obvious challenge is how to handle different kinds of biases and reliability problems. If the interview takes place years or even decades after a respondent's time in office, the person may be more open to talk about sensitive issues, but the respondent may also not remember the exact details. A respondent can also hide sensitive information or with the benefit of hindsight tell an improved or distorted narrative to put that person in a more positive light or to elevate the person's importance. Any study that uses elite interviews must engage with these challenges, and I have used several strategies to try to handle these potential pitfalls.

First, I always tried to avoid being overly dependent on information from any single individual. The data is more reliable if several persons present similar accounts independent of one another. Moreover, by interviewing competing groups, I could always get the opponent's view. Because I rarely relied on a single individual and used different types of interviews, I could triangulate and crosscheck information. As discussed, I also used printed material to triangulate data from the interviews. A useful approach was to go back and check with news articles, declassified documents, such as diplomatic cables, and other sources to assess whether the information received from an interviewee seemed reliable.

The interviews in Ukraine were made in 2017–2018, a few years after Russia's annexation of Crimea and during an ongoing war in eastern Ukraine,

although on a lower scale than in 2022. The political landscape was quite tense, with major ongoing protests outside the Ukrainian Parliament. During both trips, I lived close to the presidential administration and could see the security forces on high alert, ready to counter any potential subversion or instability. Given this context, I worried before I traveled whether senior officials in previous administrations would be willing to talk about earlier periods without referring to Russia's recent action. I cannot guarantee that this development did not influence my respondents, but my assessment is that Ukrainian politicians and diplomats had no problem talking about the past in an informative way, including sensitive topics such as previous cooperation with Russia.

Another issue concerns language. Most of the interviews and printed materials used in this dissertation are in English (sometimes texts have been translated from Georgian, Ukrainian and Russian into English). I understand and speak Russian and Ukrainian up to a point, but I do not understand Georgian since it is a completely different language. There might be information I have not picked up on due to language limitations. Moreover, there is always the risk that respondents might have tailored their answers to me as an academic from the West, or have left out some important information. These problems should of course be taken seriously, but my impression is that most respondents wanted to talk even about difficult topics. Being an outsider and academic can also be an advantage since you are not associated with a political camp. You can ask almost any question since, as an outsider, you are not expected to know all the details, and you have some distance from the processes compared to someone who grew up in the country. While it is difficult to resolve all the challenges discussed above, the fact that the dissertation uses a large amount of material and independent streams of evidence at least mitigates many of these problems. Finally, it is important to emphasize that elite interviews are only one type of material used in this dissertation. As seen in Table 3.1 and in the reference list, this dissertation uses multiple types of material, which in my view is a strength.

Final reflections: an abductive approach to theory building

This dissertation is inspired by an abductive approach to research. An abductive analysis is a research strategy particularly suitable for qualitative research that differs from both inductive and deductive approaches. Sociologists and political scientists have demonstrated the value of the abductive approach, especially for theory construction (Josefsson, 2020; Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). As I understand the approach, it can be described as a movement back and forth between theory and empirics. Joe Soss has elegantly portrayed the research process as:

> an evolving dialogue of fieldwork and framework in which site-specific experiences and observations are put into conversation with broader understandings of theory, history, and social structure […]. As we go along, we consider alternative frameworks and try them on for size, thinking about various ways we might move from what we are studying toward larger analytic questions and generalizations. (Soss, 2021, p. 25)

My research process did not start with fixed hypotheses derived from previous theories to "test" on my cases. Instead, the process could better be described as a movement back and forth between empirical insights and theoretical literatures. I went on my first field trip with some ideas in mind and conducted my first elite interviews. I then returned to the office, reflected, worked on theory and planned the next field trip. This movement between empirics and theory continued with additional field trips carried out in Georgia and Ukraine. I describe the abductive approach in more detail below.

To situate the concept of abductive analysis, it is useful to make a comparison between abduction, inductive approaches such as grounded theory, and deductive approaches. Grounded theory was a critical response to the deductive logic that dominated social science in the 1960s. From this perspective, a problem with deduction was that it risked "forc[ing] data into the straightjacket of preexisting concepts" (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 169), which would leave little room for discovery. Grounded theory instead encouraged researchers to go into the field to observe and collect material. Then, in a second step, the researcher would theorize and identify themes based on the insights gained from the material collected (Tavory & Timmermans, 2019). Grounded theory cautioned against imposing stock theoretical ideas and urged the researcher to be sensitive to patterns and emerging themes while in the field, and not to assume in advance what would be found. Other scholars have in turn criticized grounded theory for a lack of theory development and problems with relating identified themes to pre-existing results in relevant research fields.

Abductive analysis seeks to avoid the problems associated with deduction, that is, imposing stock theoretical ideas on the material, and the problems associated with induction, such as the creation of multiple thinly abstracted (often descriptive) themes unconnected to pre-existing theoretical ideas. Timmermans and Tavory define abduction as: "an inferential creative process of producing new hypotheses and theories based on surprising research evidence" (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p. 170). Abductive analysis calls for an extensive familiarity with a wide range of theories and literature at the beginning of a research project. This can be contrasted with grounded theory, which often recommends that the researcher interact with theory only at the end of the research project. An abductive approach requires in-depth knowledge and engagement with empirical cases. In the field, the researcher should ask: what is going on here? However, this question is asked in light of

a broad palette of theoretical literatures. It is also in relation to pre-existing theories that a researcher can see what is surprising in the empirical material.

Theoretical familiarity includes not only theories typically associated with a particular issue or problem. At the start of this research project, for example, I was familiar with theories and methods for understanding historical and temporal processes. Such theoretical ideas, not always associated with foreign policy explanations, turned out to be very helpful for explaining surprising research evidence that did not fit with prior theoretical accounts. In this way, familiarity with a wide range of theories at the outset helped to produce a novel explanation of foreign policy. If I had already decided before going into the field to test one or two "standard" foreign policy explanations, there is a risk I would have missed important insights. Moreover, my knowledge of existing foreign policy explanations helped me identify surprises and gaps in these theories. In this sense, the goal has been to construct a theoretical explanation of my own while at the same time relating it to relevant theoretical literatures.

What, then, can we say about the methodological approach used in this dissertation? I have used different types of material to capture political processes over time in two countries. I have also tried to triangulate information, which means that "a researcher cross-checks the causal inferences derived from his or her process tracing by drawing upon distinct data streams (interviews, media reports, documents, say)" (Bennett & Checkel, 2014, p. 28). Triangulation and data reliability will always be a challenge, but I have done my best to tackle these problems by using a variety of materials and a wide-ranging number of sources.

The eclectic approach of using different types of material was a strength in the sense that it helped me study the processes from a variety of angles. An inspiration for this eclectic approach has been Berins Collier and Collier's (1991) seminal work, which relied on previous scholarship and official documents for data. In their book, the theoretical framework guided and structured the data collection and the narratives in their analysis, and this has inspired my dissertation too.

One potential criticism of my approach could be that a detailed comparison of two countries over time is too extensive. A study covering one country during a shorter period or studying a particular decision can go into more detail. In response, I contend that previous research studying the foreign policies of Georgia and Ukraine has not paid sufficient attention to comparisons and temporal processes. If we do not compare, and pay attention to temporality and political arenas, we risk missing important factors in and dimensions of the foreign policy in two states.

Another potential criticism could be that it is difficult for an outside observer to evaluate my approach, including how I selected the material and the data I did not use. There will always be a degree of subjectivity in the selection and interpretation of data in this type of study. I have presented my approach and the material used for different phases. As noted above, I had richer

amounts of data for some periods, for example, after the Color Revolutions, and more limited material in other periods, for which I have tried to compensate with alternative materials. My ambition has been to accomplish what Mahoney and Thelen (2015) have described as getting the cases right. In contrast to "mini-cases", which are applied for illustrative purposes, comparative case studies: "must be able to withstand scrutiny when one brings more details of the case or cases at hand to bear [and they] should not fall apart when these cases are examined again or by other scholars (including specialists) at close range" (Mahoney & Thelen, 2015, p. 13). To uphold these standards, the researcher has to become an expert in the cases, an endeavor I have tried to accomplish. With this in mind, I have read and interviewed broadly, tried to make a balanced assessment based on available information, and done my very best to live up to those high standards. Chapters 2 and 3 have presented this dissertation's theoretical framework and methodological approach. It is now time to turn to the empirical analysis.

4. Georgia's and Ukraine's formative periods: Antecedent conditions and the transition to independence

This chapter provides a brief political history of Georgia and Ukraine, followed by a more detailed account of their transition to independence. First, it discusses important antecedent conditions including the Soviet nationalities policy, the quasi-federal structure of the Soviet system and how these contributed to shaping the political arenas of Georgia and Ukraine before independence. The analysis then turns to the transition to independence and its immediate aftermath, periods considered critical junctures in this study. The chapter shows that both countries faced challenges during the transition to independence, but contingencies and the choices made by leaders during these formative periods resulted in a painful transition with territorial loss in Georgia and a peaceful transition in Ukraine.

Antecedent conditions: Soviet quasi-federalism and Soviet nationalities policy

To understand the importance of regions and territories for post-Soviet states, it is essential to start with a brief discussion of important antecedent conditions. The Bolsheviks took the decision to structure the Soviet Union as a (formally) federal system, divided into ethno-territorial units, and to define citizenry in terms of ethnic nationalities. These foundations cultivated national identities based on language, ethnicity and territory. Contrary to the Bolsheviks' intentions, the institutional foundation eventually contributed to the collapse of the Soviet system (Brubaker, 1994; Bunce, 1998; Roeder, 1991). Moreover, the ethno-territorial federal system created challenges for the elites in the Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) during and after the transition to independence.

Soviet nationalities policy and ethno-territorial federalism

After Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin and the other Bolshevik leaders seized power, they needed a solution for how to preserve the territory of the collapsed Russian Empire in an era of nationalism (T. Martin, 2001). The Bolsheviks

faced strong resistance. Entities that had belonged to the Russian Empire, such as Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, created independent states. Although the Bolsheviks soon re-established control over these short-lived independent states, this demonstrated that nationalism had become a powerful force. The leadership realized that a new organizing principle was needed to bring the USSR together, which included territories with multiple ethnicities, languages, religions and regions. Lenin worried about nationalist movements, especially in Ukraine, and took the nationalities question seriously.

The Soviet leadership could have organized these territories and peoples into a single Soviet nation or even a Russian nation state. However, as several empires collapsed in the context of World War I, a formal empire was not the preferred option. Instead, the Bolsheviks established a new nationalities policy and created a federal system with political-administrative units defined in nation-territorial terms (Brubaker, 1994, p. 51; Bunce, 1998, p. 328). Support for ethnic identities and nationalism seemed to contradict Marxism, but Lenin and Stalin viewed national consciousness as a consequence of capitalism. Nationalism was therefore considered an unavoidable step that would precede socialism. Nationalism, they argued, would exist in parallel with socialism for a long time, but would ultimately end in class conflict and a fully developed socialist system. Important reforms were passed in 1923. The Soviet Union would support four national forms within the Soviet framework: territories, languages, elites and cultures. At the top of the Soviet nation-building agenda was the nationalities policy termed *korenizatsiia*, or indigenization (T. Martin, 2001). A difficult trade-off for the early Soviet leadership was to strike a balance between centralized control and cultivating distinct nations.

Territory, nationalities and borders

Territory was an important component within the Soviet structure. The federal system was hierarchical, complex and based on ethno-territorial entities. It has been described as resembling a Matryoshka doll: a system based on four hierarchical levels that, in its final days comprised 53 ethno-territorial units (Nodia, 2005). At the top were the 15 SSRs that after the collapse of the Soviet Union would transform into independent states. In Brubaker's words, the SSRs: "were defined as quasi-nation states, complete with their own territories, names, constitutions, legislatures, administrative staffs, cultural and scientific institutions, and so on" (Brubaker, 1996, p. 18). The Soviet constitution even gave the SSRs the right to leave the USSR, although for a long time this was only a theoretical possibility.

Below the SSRs were 20 Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republics (ASSR). The ASSR was part of an SSR but had its own constitution and formally a relatively high degree of autonomy. Further below were eight Autonomous Oblasts (AO), without their own constitutions and more limited autonomy than the ASSRs. Finally, *okrugs* existed in certain SSRs with even less autonomy (Roeder, 1991).

Borders within the USSR were at times drawn in highly questionable ways. Many have interpreted this as a divide-and-rule strategy used by the Soviet leadership, while others have highlighted the difficulties of drawing distinct borders on ethno-territorial lines in areas of ethnic, linguistic and historical diversity (Cornell, 2001). Either way, territorial boundaries and migration left significant minorities within SSRs and populations outside their 'homeland', the most significant example being the 25 million ethnic Russians living outside Russia in 1991 (Toal, 2017).

Titular nations

Within a territory, certain groups were considered the titular nation. The titular nation's culture was institutionalized, and the language of the titular nationality often became the official language. National symbols and ethnographic museums were established, and the Soviet leadership promoted native languages to spread socialist and anti-bourgeois ideas more effectively (Toal, 2017, p. 62). Moreover, a national elite cadre was established and trained in each territory, and nominated to leading positions in the party, government, national academy and industry. The titular elite was overrepresented and held key positions in the SSRs, while minorities occupied relatively few positions. The national elites received benefits and rewards but were at the same time kept under strict central control. No matter the founders' intent, this political strategy eventually helped to "create ethnically distinct political elites within formally autonomous homelands" (Roeder, 1991, p. 204).

The citizens of the Soviet Union were divided into over 100 distinct ethnically based nationalities, which became a significant marker in all bureaucratic documentation, including in the internal passport system (Brubaker, 1994). A titular nationality could give a citizen access to attractive jobs and higher education, while other nationalities were often disadvantaged. Moreover, nationality was based on descent and not where a person lived. This, together with state-ordered mass migration and arbitrary border demarcations, blurred the boundaries between national territories and nationalities.

Stalin, repression and the great terror

Stalin ended the era of *korenizatsiia* as the original theory of fading nationalism had not proceeded as expected. Instead, Stalin replaced *korenizatsiia* with increased centralization and a "socialist offensive", which included forced industrialization and collectivization, followed by an era of repression and man-made famines, most catastrophically Holodomor which killed millions, especially Ukrainians, as well as ethnic cleansing, mass arrests and the Great Terror of 1937–38 (Applebaum, 2017). The Kremlin increasingly viewed the Russian language and culture as the glue to keep the Soviet Union together. Closer ties among Soviet nationalities and "friendship of the peoples" became the new maxim (T. Martin, 2001).

As a result of World War II, Soviet control reached into Central Europe. Occupation and annexation of territory added, among other entities, western Ukraine, the three Baltic states and Bessarabia to the USSR.[24] This development created a complex picture of SSRs composed of a variety of regions with different ethnicities, languages, religions and historical backgrounds.

Stalin pursued a ruthless strategy but he did not formally abandon the ethno-territorial federal system. The foundation of the Soviet Union with its nations, languages, cultures and elite cadres, and the territorial hierarchic system remained, although it was often treated as unimportant by 'Sovietologists' at the time. To an extent, this neglect was understandable. The Kremlin and the Communist Party in Moscow dominated the agenda, and nationalities, culture and languages were often suppressed. Moreover, the local party bosses and security services were often loyal to Moscow and the SSRs had limited autonomy in Soviet politics. In this sense, the federal system was a facade. Even so, the structure of the Soviet system contributed to its own collapse, and to the complexity in terms of ethnicities, languages and distinctive regions with autonomous status.

The break-up of the Soviet Union and the Soviet structure

Few experts predicted the end of the Soviet Union. While the structure of the Soviet Union does not provide the full answer, many scholars today agree that the system contributed to its own collapse. The foundations of the Soviet system, including nationalities and territorial boundaries, shaped and reshaped national awareness and connected these identities to administrative structures and territories (Beissinger, 2002; Bunce, 1998).

The Soviet federal system and the nationalities policy resulted in an interethnic peace during Soviet industrialization, but this only delayed the age of nationalism in the Soviet Union until a later stage. Gorbachev's *glasnost* and *perestroika* reforms changed the opportunity structures for elites and masses within the SSRs. To explain the rapid Soviet collapse, scholars have, among other things, highlighted the quasi-federal system (Brubaker, 1994; Bunce, 1998), the role of political entrepreneurs (Roeder, 1991) and the importance of nationalist movements (Beissinger, 2002). A view shared by these scholars is that the elites and masses within the SSRs were mobilized around a national cause, and that the international community suddenly recognized the territorial boundaries of the SSRs as state borders.[25]

[24] The historical lands of Bessarabia are located within modern-day Moldova and Ukraine.
[25] By 'recognized' I mean here in a legal sense. In practice, however, the willingness of Russian governments to accept the borders of their neighbors as real state borders has for understandable reasons been called into question.

The challenge for the successor states

As a result of the pre-existing conditions discussed above, many Soviet republics were highly diverse in 1989. This created challenges during the transition and the early years of independence, as portrayed by two scholars:

> Post-Soviet state-building in a context of territorialized multi-ethnicity tended to begin with a de-institutionalization of the legacies of the old system. Thus, the ethno-territorial structures of "institutionalized multinationality" inherited from the Soviet period had a major impact not only on the collapse of the USSR, but also on post-Soviet state-building (J. Hughes & Sasse, 2002, p. 233).

Elites within the SSRs had to deal with two complicated core-periphery tasks. First, they had to position themselves vis-à-vis the Soviet center in Moscow. Second, the titular elite had to develop strategies for handling heterogeneity within the SSRs, including the regional elites. These two interrelated tasks were arguably the most important challenges facing the elites in the final years of the Soviet Union. The antecedent conditions discussed above, and the specific contexts in Georgia and Ukraine in 1989 discussed below, are important factors these elites had to consider. In line with the theory outlined in Chapter 2, it is important to point out that the outcomes of these transition processes were not predetermined, but in part a result of elite decisions and contingency, as well as the responses of regional leaders and the Kremlin – a process that took place between 1989 and the first years of the 1990s.

Shock breakdown of the Soviet system

In the final years of the 1980s, the Soviet Union was showing significant weaknesses. Following poor economic performance, Mikhail Gorbachev introduced *perestroika* and the *glasnost* reforms (Suny, 1994). Economic problems in combination with increased openness, however, resulted in public criticism of the Soviet system. Moscow's reduced capacity to control citizens and political elites in the republics provided opportunities for national movements and opened up political frontiers within the republics. A side-effect was that domestic divisions previously seen as irrelevant or kept under control by the Soviet authorities now came to the fore. These competing interests often had a regional territorial component. In the late 1980s, many Soviet republics comprised multiple groups with competing goals. Nationalist movements generally wanted to limit the powers of the Soviet center, and sometimes even called for the termination of the USSR. The SSRs also included elites that wanted less dramatic shifts or opted for the status quo of remaining inside the USSR. Moreover, political elites in some regions with autonomous status insisted on various degrees of autonomy from the SSRs. Nationalist movements generally viewed these demands as a threat to their own goals.

Both Georgia and Ukraine, the cases of our comparison, contained several of these features. Georgian and Ukrainian leaders had to handle these challenges during a highly uncertain transition period. To the surprise of many, Georgia, Ukraine and the other SSRs became independent just a few years after the Soviet system began to crumble. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, the period from 1989 to the early years of independence is analyzed as a shock followed by a critical juncture.

The remainder of this chapter presents a comparative analysis of Georgia's and Ukraine's formative periods. The analyses start with a brief discussion of specific historical conditions that contributed to distinct regions within Georgia and Ukraine. There follows an analysis of Georgia's and Ukraine's formative periods during the transition to independence. Central to the analysis are the national movements, the political leaders and the approach taken by the government vis-à-vis the regions in terms of early nation-building. The basic question is whether the leadership took a dominant or accommodational approach to handling these challenges. Relatedly, the analysis pays attention to the Georgian and Ukrainian governments' relationships with the Kremlin during this period.

Georgia: a dominant strategy and war

This section presents a brief history of Georgia and three of its distinct regions, followed by an analysis of Georgia's formative period.

Georgia: a brief history

Georgia is located in the South Caucasus next to Armenia and Azerbaijan. Powerful neighbors encircle these three small states: Russia to the north, Turkey in the southwest and Iran to the south, while the Black Sea connects Georgia with Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine. Thus, Georgia is located at a crossroads between Europe, the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia. For centuries, it had been under strong influence from Mongols, Persians, Ottomans and Russians, before its incorporation into the Soviet Union.[26] Even under long periods of external domination, Georgians have managed to protect their unique Georgian language (*kartuli ena*) and traditions (De Waal, 2019, pp. 33–35).[27] Georgians tend to emphasize their long history. Its most renowned king, David IV the builder, established a revival of Georgia in the late 11th century, the so-called Golden Age. After centuries of political and territorial

[26] Useful overviews of this older historical development are found in Suny (1994) and Rayfield (2012).

[27] It is worth pointing out that other languages within the current Georgia such as Mingrelian and Svan were also preserved during this time.

divisions of Georgian lands, including a Mongol invasion in the 13th century, followed by Persian dominance, it was paradoxically under occupation by the Russian Empire and later under Soviet rule that Georgian territories gradually reunited (Suny, 1994, pp. 64, 114). In 1783, the Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti (today's eastern Georgia) signed the Treaty of Georgievsk (*Georgievskiy traktat*). King Erekle took an oath of allegiance to Russia and was, in return, promised Russian protection against other external powers. In 1801, however, Alexander I of Russia annexed the kingdom and Moscow gradually took control of other parts of Georgia (Rayfield, 2012). Life within the Russian empire was a mixed experience for the Georgians. On the one hand, it provided economic development, as well as security and protection from other external powers. Georgian elites were frequently educated in Russia and Moscow became a link to Europe for Georgia (Suny, 1994, p. 122). On the other hand, many Georgians viewed Russian control as a threat to Georgian culture and values. The Georgian national movement that arose in the late 19th century shared this view. Inspired by developments in Western Europe, the Georgian writer Ilia Chavchavadze advocated a language-centered nationalism that, together with fatherland and faith, would unite different Georgian-speaking regions (De Waal, 2019, p. 50). Chavchavadze and his followers pushed back against attempts at "Russification" and dreamed of a return to Georgia's Golden Age. After the fall of the Russian Empire, Georgian Mensheviks created the Democratic Republic of Georgia in 1918 (Jones, 2014). Already by 1921, however, the Red Army and the Soviet Bolsheviks had occupied the young state. In the same year, they formed the Georgian SSR, which together with Armenia and Azerbaijan was incorporated into the Transcaucasian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic in 1922.[28]

This is not the place for a detailed account of Georgia's history within the USSR, but some points are worth noting for the purpose of my argument. First, despite attempts by the Soviet leadership to create a Soviet man and a shared ideology, and its often-violent response to those who opposed these ideas, Georgians managed to preserve their language and much of their traditional culture. As discussed above, this was partly a result of early Soviet nation-building policy that, within limits, encouraged nationalism. Georgia had a very high level of ethnic Georgian teachers in its education system and was able to keep its pre-Soviet nationalist school curricula until the 1930s. By that time, the population had developed almost full literacy. Early mass schooling in Georgia is one among several reasons why the Georgian language remained strong in the Soviet period (K. Darden & Grzymala-Busse, 2006, pp. 97–98). Significantly, even in the late 1970s relatively few ethnic Georgians were reportedly fluent in Russian. In 1979, 99.5 percent of ethnic Georgians considered Georgian their native language, and only 26.5 percent reported fluency

[28] The Transcaucasian Republic was abandoned in 1936 and the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic was separated from the Azerbaijani and the Armenian SSRs.

in the Russian language (Suny, 1994, pp. 300–310). Given the importance of the Georgian language, it is understandable that Georgians took to the streets in Tbilisi in 1978 to protest against a proposed constitutional change that would downgrade Georgian from being the sole state language. Instead, Georgian would become one of several state languages, including Russian. The communist government eventually abandoned this idea and the status of the Georgian language remained.

Figure 4.1. Map of independent Georgia (Source: Britannica 2008)

Georgia's regional borderlands

While, according to the 1989 Soviet census, 70 percent of Georgia's population were ethnic Georgians, the republic was diverse. In the late Soviet era, as argued by the Georgian political scientist Ghia Nodia: "Georgian society faced an intricate web of fissures based on ethnicity, religion, and sub-ethnic regional loyalties, fissures which were often reinforced by territoriality and administrative structures" (Nodia, 2005, pp. 44–45). The Georgian SSR included three regions with autonomous status: two ASSRs, Abkhazia and Ajaria; and one Autonomous Oblast, South Ossetia. In addition, the Georgian SSR included other minorities such as Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Russians. The autonomous regions were strategically located along Georgia's borders: Abkhazia and South Ossetia bordering Russia and Ajaria bordering Turkey.

Abkhazia

Abkhazians constitute a distinct ethnic group with its own language that has coexisted with Georgians for at least 1000 years (De Waal, 2019). The Abkhaz language relates closely to North Caucasian languages such as Circassian and Adyghean. The history of Abkhazian-Georgian relations is contested. Abkhazians and Georgians have long debated which group settled in the region first, and scholarly debates about primordial history have also spilled over into contemporary politics (Toft, 2002). Historically, Abkhazians had a troublesome relationship with both Georgians and the Russian Empire. Abkhazia was first incorporated into the Soviet Union as an SSR, codified in the Abkhazian constitution in 1925. In 1931, however, the Soviet leadership downgraded the republic to an ASSR within Georgia.

Interpretations of Abkhazian-Georgian relations during this historical period are hotly contested. The Abkhazians argue that influential Soviet leaders of Georgian origin, such as Stalin, took away their right to separate from Georgia, while many Georgians underline the continuity of Abkhazia as part of Georgia. In Soviet times, a period seen by the Abkhazians as "Georgianization" took place. Ethnic Georgian Mingrelians moved into the region, but so also did Armenians and Russians.[29] As a result, in 1989 Abkhazians constituted only 18 percent of the approximately 525 000 people living in Abkhazia (Cornell, 2001, p. 144). Nonetheless, in line with the Soviet nationalities principle, the Abkhazians were politically overrepresented and could control regional politics with the support of other minorities. Moreover, in the 1989 census, 94 percent of Abkhazians reported Abkhazian to be their primary language, and 79 percent claimed Russian to be their second language. This language divide, together with territory and history, amplified the cleavage between Abkhazians and Georgians (Toft, 2002).

Politically, the Abkhazian communist elite had closer connections with Moscow than with Tbilisi. Abkhazia's location on the Black Sea coast made it a favorite leisure destination for the Soviet leadership, with rail connections between Abkhazia and Russia. As early as 1957, Abkhazian officials were asking to be transferred to the Russian Federation, and in 1977 influential Abkhazian intellectuals made a similar appeal. Although Moscow denied these requests, they revealed underlying regional divisions between the Abkhazians and Georgians (Cornell, 2002a, pp. 142, 151). The Soviet leadership decided that Abkhazia would remain an ASSR within Georgia but accepted constitutional changes in 1978 that strengthened Abkhazian political control of Abkhazia. The contestation between Abkhazians and Georgians also had an important economic component, as ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia complained about discrimination (De Waal, 2019, p. 154). Disagreements between ethnic

[29] Georgian Mingrelians, however, mostly settled in the south of Abkhazia, while most ethnic Abkhazians settled in the north.

Abkhazians and ethnic Georgians would become a major problem during Georgia's transition to independence.

South Ossetia

The Ossetians are a people of Iranian origin living on both sides of the Caucasus mountains. The majority live in North Ossetia in Russia, and a minority reside on the Georgian side in South Ossetia, referred to by the Georgian authorities as the Tskhinvali region. South Ossetia became an Autonomous Oblast in 1921 and made an unsuccessful attempt to join North Ossetia in 1925. Instead, South Ossetia was incorporated as an Autonomous Oblast into the Georgian SSR. Ossetia has been described as "the most heavily Sovietized and pro-Russian territory in the Caucasus region" (Birch, 1995, p. 43) and many Ossetians are proud to have received the largest number of "Heroes of the Soviet Union" medals per capita of all Soviet ethnic groups (De Waal, 2019).

Ossetians constitute a distinct ethnic group with its own language (Ossetian). It had its own local parliament in the USSR.[30] Studies from the early 2000s showed that most Ossetians considered Ossetian their primary language and Russian their second language. Ossetians made up two-thirds of the total population of South Ossetia (98,000) in 1989, and 100,000 Ossetians lived in other parts of Georgia (Toft, 2002, pp. 130–131). In Soviet times, Georgian and Ossetian villages in South Ossetia were located adjacent to each other and people got along relatively well despite their historical differences (Cornell, 2002b). The construction of the Transcaucasian highway and the opening of the Roki tunnel in 1984 established a more efficient infrastructural link between South Ossetia and Russia (Toal, 2017, p. 131). Thus, while located within Georgia, Ossetians had infrastructural, economic, ethnic and historical links to Russia, especially in the North Caucasus.

Ajaria

The Ajars are Muslim Georgians who came under Russian rule in 1878 after a long period of Ottoman rule, although they were part of Georgia in ancient times. In the context of Moscow's annexation of Georgia in 1921, Ajaria, located in southwestern Georgia on the Black Sea coast, bordering Turkey, received ASSR status within the Georgian SSR on religious rather than ethnic grounds (K. Martin, 2012). Ajaria's capital, Batumi, became an industrial and economic center with a major port and railroad. Following a period of Georgianization during early Soviet rule, Ajars increasingly began to identify as Georgians, although their Muslim faith stood out from the majority faith of Orthodox Christianity (Toft, 2002). Taken together, due to its autonomous status and since almost all Ajars were concentrated within the region, Ajaria

[30] Due to South Ossetia's status as autonomous oblast the Ossetian language was not the main language in formal politics, unlike in Abkhazia.

developed as a distinct region within the Georgian SSR. As discussed below, Ajaria's strongman Aslan Abashidze would use this regional distinctiveness in the early 1990s to bolster demands for autonomy from the Georgian state.

Georgia's formative period, 1989–1994

After a long period of external control and separation, Georgian lands remerged as an entity under first Russian and later Soviet rule. Its diversity in terms of ethnic groups, language and interpretation of history meant that Georgia's political landscape in 1989 was complex and composed of several distinct regions. As discussed above, many people residing in the borderlands had a different interpretation of history and closer links to Russia than most ethnic Georgians. Autonomous status had produced distinct political structures in some regions, but not for other minorities in Georgia, such as Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

Shortly after Gorbachev's reforms, the USSR became an epicenter of national mobilization. Protests in Armenia in February 1988 quickly spread to the rest of the South Caucasus, Moldova, Ukraine and the Baltic states (Beissinger, 2002). As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, it is important to analyze the transition to independence, relations between central and regional elites, and whether the transition and its immediate aftermath were violent. Georgia's path to independence was characterized by turbulence, and at times by radical nationalism, infighting between political and military groups, separatism and military conflict.

In the late 1980s, Georgian nationalist groups emerged on the political scene and dissidents founded the Ilia Chavchavadze Society. Soon, its most prominent leaders, Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Merab Kostava, Giorgi Chanturia and Irakli Tsereteli, split to create new organizations (Wheatley, 2005, p. 42). Influential parts of the Georgian nationalist movement adopted an ethnic conception of the nation, using slogans such as "the country of Georgia must belong to Georgians". Many Georgian nationalists dreamed of a "unified, homogeneous nation-state" (Reisner, 2009, p. 248). At the same time, moderate intellectuals and reformists were integrated into the semi-official, Communist Party-sponsored Rustaveli Society. Unlike the more revisionist groups, the Rustaveli Society took a cautious approach. It did not push for independence but opted for gradual change and promoted Georgian culture.

In late 1988, Georgians participated in mass demonstrations in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi. Nationalist movements in Armenia and the Baltic states inspired the protests, which were also a reaction to Abkhazian requests to secede from Georgia (Suny, 1994). In March 1989 an Abkhazian mass meeting of 30,000 people reiterated claims for Abkhazia to become a full union republic under Moscow, which led to counterdemonstrations in Tbilisi.

Georgia's leader, Jumber Patiashvili, was a technocrat who had replaced the experienced Eduard Shevardnadze in 1985 as First Secretary of Georgia's

Communist Party (Reisner, 2009).[31] In April 1989, protests shifted focus from Abkhazia to general demands for Georgian independence. In response, the Georgian Communist Party asked Moscow for permission to break up the demonstrations, but on April 9 the operation got out of control. Interior troops beat demonstrators with shovels and used teargas. At least 19 people died in the tumult, mostly women (Suny, 1994). The Georgian authorities temporarily arrested opposition leaders such as Gamsakhurdia and Chanturia. The violent scenes and the killing of innocent Georgian civilians sent shockwaves not only across Georgia but all over the Soviet Union. Scholars have portrayed this event as a vital moment that transformed Georgia's political landscape (see for example Cornell, 2002; De Waal, 2019; Reisner, 2009; Suny, 1994). The importance of April 9 is perhaps best portrayed by Jonathan Wheatley:

> 9 April 1989 was a defining moment in the history of modern Georgia and henceforth became a recurrent theme in Georgian nationalist discourse. Nationalism was to define political life in Georgia during the dying days of the Soviet Union and after this violent event its discourse was characterized both by a refusal to compromise and – amongst certain circles – by increasing intolerance towards non-Georgians. (Wheatley, 2005, p. 41)

The Georgian political scientist Ghia Nodia also underlines the importance of April 9: "People were killed by Soviet troops, so I think that explains the much more dramatic, and polarized, and also violence prone scenario in Georgia".[32]

April 9, 1989, had important implications. First, contrary to the Communist Party's intentions, it strengthened nationalist and anti-Soviet feelings among many Georgians. The Rustaveli Society, the Social Democratic Party and the Popular Front, which preferred a more moderate approach in response to developments, all lost influence. Instead, more radical groups "determined the pace and shape of the [opposition] movement" (Suny, 1994, p. 324). Second, many Georgians viewed the Communist Party as illegitimate and Patiashvili was removed from office. After this moment, the communists could no longer get the upper hand or even find middle ground for compromise to build a pact with more moderate Georgian nationalists (Kaufman, 2001). In several other SSRs, including in Ukraine, as is demonstrated below, compromises resulted in a gradual transformation to independence.

Third, in the rather chaotic period that followed, organized crime, mafia and paramilitary groups expanded their influence on Georgian politics. The nationalist and anti-Soviet *Mkhedrioni* (the Horsemen) led by Jaba Ioseliani, a former bank robber and theatre critic, became the most influential of these groups. The groups took control of important parts of Georgia's economy and played an important role in Georgia's formative period (Suny, 1994; Wheatley, 2005).

[31] Eduard Shevardnadze had been promoted to serve as the Soviet foreign minister.
[32] Interview, Ghia Nodia, 2019.

In this environment, the political dissident Zviad Gamsakhurdia managed to seize the initiative amid a weak Communist Party and a fragmented opposition.[33] Gamsakhurdia's Round Table Bloc won the elections to the Supreme Soviet in October 1990. The Round Table received 54 percent of the vote against the Communist Party's 29.6 percent. In just 18 months, the Georgian Communist Party had gone from being the major political organization in Georgia to being voted out of power.

Gamsakhurdia's approach to the USSR

Gamsakhurdia rapidly attempted to consolidate power and distance Georgia from Moscow. He appointed Tengiz Kitovani to lead the new National Guard, an organization intended to act as Georgia's armed forces (Wheatley, 2005). Gamsakhurdia announced his ambition for Georgian independence and stated that the government would handle relations with Georgia's regions and minorities without Moscow's involvement (see below). Moreover, Georgia, but not Abkhazia and South Ossetia, refused to participate in a referendum on the future of the Soviet Union. Georgia held its own referendum, based on the 1918 Act of Independence, on "restoration of the state independence of Georgia", which was supported by over 90 percent of those who voted (Suny, 1994, p. 326).[34] Georgia declared independence on April 9, 1991, symbolically precisely two years after the violent break-up of the demonstrations in 1989.

Soon after becoming President of Georgia in May 1991, Gamsakhurdia was already showing authoritarian tendencies. He fell into conflict with rival political and military groups and labeled his critics "public enemies". To his supporters, Gamsakhurdia was a messianic figure, while his opponents compared him to the Romanian dictator Ceausescu (Reisner, 2009, p. 253).

Gamsakhurdia's failure to condemn the coup attempt against Gorbachev in August 1991 was used as a pretext by the opposition to challenge the Georgian president.[35] The situation increasingly turned into a violent power struggle between Gamsakhurdia, supported by the *Zviadists*, and opposition groups, including paramilitary forces (Rayfield, 2012). Gamsakhurdia's attempts to outmaneuver Kitovani's National Guard failed. Together with Ioseliani's *Mkhedrioni* and former Prime Minister Tengiz Sigua, Kitovani forced Gamsakhurdia to flee after a military conflict that played out on the streets of Tbilisi in the winter of 1991–1992. The conflict reportedly killed over 100 people. What was described as a civil war between the *Zviadists* and the new Georgian government continued until 1993 (De Waal, 2019; Reisner, 2009). To increase the legitimacy of the new Georgian leadership, the paramilitaries invited Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Communist leader of Georgia and

[33] One of the other main opposition leaders, Merab Kostava, died in a car accident in late 1989.
[34] Most Abkhazians and Ossetians boycotted the referendum.
[35] Gamsakhurdia himself argued that what happened in Moscow was not Georgia's business, since Georgia was no longer part of the USSR (Wheatley, 2005, p. 55).

former Soviet Foreign Minister, back to lead the new government. To maintain his influence over Georgia's military affairs, warlord Ioseliani established himself one floor below Shevardnadze's office, which says much about Georgia's weak state structures at the time (Sebag, 1993). During his relatively short time in power, Gamsakhurdia had influenced the relationship with several of Georgia's regions in a negative way, to which this chapter now turns.

Government-regional relations under Gamsakhurdia

Increased openness in the USSR provided a window of opportunity not only for Georgian nationalists, but also for minority groups and regions to push their agendas. In part, they were responding to perceived threats from Georgian nationalist groups. As mentioned above, Abkhazian intellectuals were already advocating for autonomous status directly under Moscow in 1988. Inspired by the Abkhazian movement, Ossetians also mobilized and in 1989 Alan Chochiev founded the *Adamon Nykhas* (People's Assembly) movement (De Waal, 2019), which hoped that success for Abkhazia would help South Ossetia join Russia. While Gamsakhurdia took a hardline approach to most minorities, he seemed to have the least respect for Ossetians. He called Ossetians and other minorities "guests" on Georgian territory and highlighted discrimination against ethnic Georgians living in South Ossetia. Furthermore, from his perspective, minorities could stay in Georgia as long as they did not question the Georgian national project – a project envisioned primarily for ethnic Georgians (De Waal, 2019; Nodia, 2005).

In response to new Georgian laws, Ossetian representatives adopted Ossetian as the state language of South Ossetia. In November 1989, Ossetian representatives declared South Ossetia an autonomous republic and expressed a will to join North Ossetia. Unsurprisingly, the Georgian authorities rejected this proposal. Some Georgian nationalist leaders cautioned that conflicts within the Georgian SSR would complicate the ambition to become an independent state (Cornell, 2002a, p. 159). One of Gamsakhurdia's first political decisions as Georgia's de facto leader showed his hardline approach. In December 1989, he organized a march on the South Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali, and a major clash with Ossetian militias was prevented only at the last minute by Soviet internal troops.

As Cornell (2001, pp. 150–151) notes, Gamsakhurdia paid some respect to Abkhazian and Ajarian rights, but disregarded the "alien" Ossetians, who had their homeland in Russia. In late 1990, a Georgian parliamentary majority led by Gamsakhurdia voted to abolish South Ossetia's autonomous status, initiate an economic blockade and declare a state of emergency in the region. This in turn was a response to the South Ossetian decision to put itself under Moscow's authority. No effective diplomatic mechanism was established, which further escalated the conflict. When the new Ossetian leader, Torez Kulumbegov, arrived in Tbilisi for negotiations in early 1991, the Georgian authorities arrested him. This resulted in an armed conflict, which included the bombing

of Tskhinvali and shelling of Georgian and Ossetian villages, reportedly by both sides (Human Rights Watch, 1992; Rayfield, 2012, p. 380).

The conflict also had a Moscow-Tbilisi-Tskhinvali component. Gorbachev had denounced both Tbilisi's and Tskhinvali's declarations as unconstitutional (Toal, 2017). The Georgian government demanded that Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) troops positioned in South Ossetia withdraw from "Georgia's internal affairs" (Human Rights Watch, 1992). Clearly, Georgian nationalism and a similar response from the regions with autonomous status pushed the Georgian government and regional elites further away from each other.

The military conflict between the Georgian government and the Ossetians continued throughout 1991, which was portrayed as "a year of chaos and urban warfare" (International Crisis Group, 2004, pp. 3–4), and was only temporarily halted by the above-mentioned winter war in Tbilisi. Eduard Shevardnadze attempted to end the conflict on his return as Georgia's leader, but it escalated in the spring of 1992, in part due to Shevardnadze's lack of authority and in part because Georgian and Ossetian militias gained access to heavy weaponry from abandoned Soviet military bases.

My theory predicts that borderlands will often have close links to, and can receive support from, external powers. This was true in this case. Ossetians received support from Russia, and especially from their North Ossetian allies. The North Ossetians cut off a natural gas pipeline to Georgia, requested support from Moscow and mobilized a battalion of volunteer soldiers from the North Caucasus to fight for South Ossetia. Various Russian factions also became involved. Reports circulated that Russian tanks were attacking Georgian positions and that the conflict risked escalating into a Georgian-Russian/Ossetian war. On June 24, 1992, Shevardnadze and President of Russia Boris Yeltsin met in Dagomys to sign a peace agreement (Cornell, 2001; De Waal, 2019).[36] The intention was to stop the violence, but the agreement did not include any long-term political solutions. A Georgian-Russian-Ossetian Joint Control Commission and a Joint Peacekeeping Force were set up within the framework of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (International Crisis Group, 2004). The outcome was a clear defeat for the Georgians. Shevardnadze presented his view of the conflict in an interview in 2006:

> Gamsakhurdia decided to invade the region... Frankly speaking, it is our fault. We should not have entered South Ossetia in the first place. To put it briefly, the Georgians were not ready for war and they were defeated. There was a danger that Russian troops would interfere in the conflict. So when [President Gamsakhurdia] escaped from Georgia and I returned to the country, our main purpose was to stop military operations. I then met with President Yeltsin in

[36] The agreement is referred to as the Dagomys Agreement or the Sochi Agreement.

> Dagomys, near Sochi, and we agreed to put a halt to hostilities. There was no other way out for us (RFE/RL, 2006).

Clearly, Georgia's rapid nationalism after 1989 and Gamsakhurdia's bold stance against the Ossetians contributed to the conflict. A similar bold position taken by the Ossetians, including military support from North Ossetia, a region inside Russia, also contributed to the war.

Abkhazia: descent into war

As discussed above, in late 1988 and again in March 1989, Abkhazian elites requested Abkhazia's status to be elevated to a Union Republic directly under Moscow. The Abkhazian elites were supported by a substantial part of the Abkhazian population and other minorities living in the region (Cornell, 2001, p. 152). In the context of the violence of April 9, 1989, protests among ethnic Georgian students in Abkhazia resulted in the separation of schools, theaters and soccer teams along ethnic lines. In this context, 30,000 Georgian Mingrelians, led by Merab Kostava, marched on Abkhazia's capital, Sukhumi, where they clashed with Abkhazian armed groups. This left 15 people dead and several hundred injured before Soviet interior troops ended the fighting (Kaufman, 2001, pp. 104–105). In August 1990, the Abkhazian authorities declared Abkhazia a Union Republic. While this looked like complete secession from Georgia, the Abkhazians left the door open to a federal arrangement in line with the situation prior to 1931. Vladislav Ardzinba, an Abkhazian historian and former Soviet parliamentarian in Moscow, was elected leader of the Abkhaz Supreme Soviet in December 1990 (De Waal, 2019, p. 155).

Like the Ossetians, the Abkhazian authorities organized a referendum in March 1991, which supported the preservation of the USSR. When Georgia declared independence in April 1991 without offering a clear status to the autonomous regions, the Abkhazian elite saw no future within Georgia (Cornell, 2001). At the same time, Georgia's President Gamsakhurdia surprisingly reached out to the Abkhazian leadership to negotiate a power-sharing arrangement between Georgia and Abkhazia, including veto power over key decisions. Although Abkhazia's Ardzinba responded that the region belonged to the USSR, this raised hopes for a negotiated solution (De Waal, 2019, p. 156).

The overthrow of Gamsakhurdia and the collapse of the USSR in late 1991 increased the uncertainty but as late as June 1992 Ardzinba sent a draft document to the Georgian government that included proposals for a federative or confederative solution that could have preserved Georgia's territorial integrity. Thus, alternatives seem to have been available. When the Georgian leadership did not respond to the proposal, Ardzinba changed strategy. He re-established the constitution from 1925, declared that Abkhazia would independently join the newly established Commonwealth of Independent States

(CIS) and stated in July 1992 that Abkhazia was "strong enough to fight Georgia" (cited in Cornell, 2001, p. 158).

Shortly after Shevardnadze reached a peace deal with South Ossetia, a larger conflict broke out with Abkhazia. On August 14, 1992, Georgia's Minister of Defense, Tengiz Kitovani, entered Gali in southern Abkhazia with several thousand troops of the National Guard. The official justification was to rescue government officials taken hostage by Gamsakhurdia's militias and to protect the railway system from recurring robberies. Kitovani, however, moved into the Abkhazian capital, Sukhumi, dissolved the Abkhazian Parliament, plundered parts of the city and burned down several public buildings. The Abkhazian leadership declared Kitovani's move an "aggression against Abkhazian statehood on the part of a hostile state" (Kaufman, 2001, p. 120). They escaped to the town of Gudauta, which still had an active Soviet military base, and ordered Abkhazian forces to wage a patriotic war.

It remains unclear whether Kitovani acted on his own or on Shevardnadze's orders. Statements from Shevardnadze at the time indicate that he could not control Kitovani's actions. Shevardnadze carefully defended Kitovani's actions but noted he would have preferred negotiation: "there was no necessity to seize the Parliament building and the Council of Ministers". Shevardnadze's close aid Sergei Tarasenko put it more bluntly, "It was the most stupid thing to do, the military campaign gained nothing, and it's even a worse situation than before. I don't know how this situation can be resolved, anything can happen" (Erlanger, 1992). In either case, the outcome was a war between the Georgian and Abkhazian military and paramilitary groups. The details of this war are beyond the scope of this dissertation, but some points are important to highlight.

Russian involvement

During the war, the Abkhazians took advantage of its location as a border region with Russia and received outside military support. The Confederation of Mountain Peoples, which included Chechen and Cossack volunteers in Russia, took up arms to defend Abkhazia. Moreover, there is evidence that Russian troops fought on the Abkhazian side (Cornell, 2001; Kaufman, 2001). Influential members of the Russian State Duma and Russia's armed forces, and possibly Defense Minister Pavel Grachev reportedly sympathized with Abkhazia, in order to increase Russia's influence in Georgia. Hardliners in Moscow also had a negative view of Shevardnadze and held him partly responsible for the collapse of the Soviet Union (De Waal, 2019, p. 162). Either way, the lightly armed Abkhazian forces suddenly had access to "armor, tanks, and heavy artillery" (Human Rights Watch, 1995, p. 32). Russia's direct involvement on Abkhazia's side became even clearer when a Russian helicopter crashed on Georgian territory and when Georgian forces shot down a Russian fighter aircraft (Cornell, 2001). At the same time, Russia was officially trying to mediate in the conflict (Kozyrev, 2019).

In the fall of 1993, Georgian troops faced a two-front conflict. Gamsakhurdia, who had returned to western Georgia after a period in exile, encouraged his forces to escalate the fighting against Georgian government troops.[37] Meanwhile, Abkhazian forces exploited the situation, ignored a negotiated ceasefire and recaptured most of Abkhazia, including Sukhumi.[38] Russia's foreign minister at the time, Andrei Kozyrev, wrote later in his memoirs:

> The [Abkhazian] surprise attack had more than a trace of assistance from Russian forces… [The Abkhazians] quickly captured a large amount of territory and drove the Georgian population away, destroying Georgians' property and killing many people… [Russia's Minister of Defense] Grachev denied authorizing this unilateral assistance but as far as I knew he never reprimanded the commanding officers on the spot. (Kozyrev, 2019, p. 229)

With much of Georgia's economy in ruins and a weakened military, Shevardnadze, who almost lost his life in the war, risked also losing control of much of Georgia. Gamsakhurdia's troops advanced on Georgia's second largest city, Kutaisi, likely with the final goal of conquering Tbilisi. At this point, Shevardnadze reluctantly reached out to Yeltsin and Russian troops quickly helped Shevardnadze stop the *Zviadists*. Gamsakhurdia fled Georgia for a second time and died in the winter of 1993–1994.[39] Georgia and Abkhazia signed a ceasefire agreement (Rayfield, 2012).

Shevardnadze had to pay a high price to Russia to stop the war with Abkhazia and obtain Yeltsin's support against the *Zviadists*. Georgia had to agree to join the CIS, including its military component, the Collective Security Treaty (CST).[40] Soviet military bases on Georgian territory would become Russian bases, Russian border guards would control Georgian borders and key positions in the Georgian defense and security ministries would have to be approved by Moscow (Gordadze, 2009, p. 35). To avoid complete Russian dominance, Shevardnadze lobbied for an international peacekeeping force. The US ambassador to Georgia, Kent Brown, privately advocated for a US-led peacekeeping force in Georgia but the Clinton administration showed little interest (Toal, 2017). Instead, the West supported the idea of a Russian-led UN peacekeeping force.

Severe human rights violations were reported on both sides of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict (Human Rights Watch, 1995). The death toll remains uncertain and varies from several thousand to over 10,000 (Cornell, 2001; De Waal, 2019). Around 250,000 ethnic Georgians had to flee Abkhazia – only a

[37] Sections of Georgia's army also switched sides to support Gamsakhurdia.
[38] At this time, Yeltsin faced his most severe domestic political crisis that ended only when he ordered the army to shell and storm the Russian Parliament.
[39] Gamsakhurdia died in Chechnya. The official cause of death was suicide but this is still debated in Georgia.
[40] According to Rayfield (2012, p. 384), Georgia had to accept joining the CIS immediately before Yeltsin accepted to send an aircraft to take Shevardnadze out of Sukhumi.

minority of them were later allowed to return. Rudolph Perina (2013), an experienced US diplomat who served as a negotiator in several conflicts in the post-Soviet region and the former Yugoslavia, later admitted that the hatred between Georgians and Abkhazians had been the most vicious he had ever experienced. The conflict had also been the most difficult to resolve in his portfolio.

Ajaria: de facto autonomy without war

Unlike the other two regions with autonomous status, Ajaria did not end up in armed conflict with the Georgian government. In part this is linked to the fact that Ajaria made no attempt to secede. Its autonomous status, based on religion rather than ethnicity, had resulted in fewer benefits within the Soviet system and most Ajarians identified as Georgians. Ajaria's leader, Aslan Abashidze, also played a key role (Kaufman, 2001). Abashidze, a Communist Party functionary whose family had played a historically important role in Ajaria, came to power in 1991. He quickly set up his own military guard, including armed vehicles and helicopters, led by a retired Russian military officer. Beyond this, Abashidze was protected by Russian forces in a Soviet-era military base outside Batumi (K. Martin, 2012, p. 72). Abashidze and his Revival Party used strong-arm tactics to quickly marginalize the regional opposition. In 1992, Abashidze exploited Georgia's political chaos to effectively separate Ajaria from the rest of Georgia. To avoid Ajarian secession, Shevardnadze accepted Abashidze's strongman position. Abashidze established his own fiefdom in Ajaria, placing members of his own family and clan network in powerful positions. He even appointed local border guards and took control of tax and customs to benefit from the lucrative trade with Turkey and through the Batumi port. Georgian officials had to show their passports to enter the region.[41] Georgia's government clearly did not control Ajaria. Shevardnadze's pact with Abashidze, which would make the latter both a leader of an autonomous region and an active player in Georgian politics, was a price Shevardnadze had to pay to avoid another armed conflict.

To sum up, Georgia's formative period was violent and resulted in the loss of control over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and de facto left Ajaria outside government control. Following a contingent violent event on April 9, 1989, Georgian nationalism was radicalized, sidelining more moderate actors. Georgian leaders chose a strategy of domination vis-à-vis two border regions and against minorities in general. This triggered a reactive sequence, which resulted in wars with Russian involvement. As discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapters, this traumatic period left a strong imprint on Georgia's foreign policy. The conclusion of this chapter compares Georgia's formative experience with Ukraine's transition to independence.

[41] Interview, Valeri Chechelashvili, 2019.

Ukraine: accommodation and a peaceful transition

Ukraine a brief history

Ukrainians trace their origin to the Kyivan Rus', founded in the 9th century.[42] After centuries of prosperous trading and cultural relations with Europe and the Byzantine Empire, Kyivan Rus' declined and the Mongols conquered Kyiv in 1240. Galicia and Volhynia in today's western Ukraine preserved their autonomy until they were occupied by Poland and Lithuania in the 14th century. Subsequently, large parts of what is today Ukraine, excluding the Black Sea coastline and the far east, became part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Thus, the Ruthenians (an Eastern Slavic people, the ancestors of modern Ukrainians and Belarusians) lived separately from the Russians for centuries (Plokhy, 2015; Yekelchyk, 2007). Cossacks, who settled on the Ukrainian steppe, developed military capacity in the 16th and 17th centuries and came into conflict with the Polish authorities. An autonomous Cossack state was established under the Cossack Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky's skillful leadership. In the ongoing struggles against the Poles, Khmelnytsky was looking for allies and eventually signed the Pereiaslav Treaty with Orthodox Muscovy in 1654. Although described by Ukrainian historians as a military alliance, official Russian and Soviet history portrays the treaty as the "reunification" of Russia and Ukraine (Yekelchyk, 2007, p. 29). Over time, the Russian authorities undermined the Cossacks (although the idea of free Cossacks remained in Ukraine), resulting in Polish control of the lands west of the Dnipro River, Russian control of Kyiv and territories east of the Dnipro, and the Ottomans controlling the south of today's Ukraine. Several hetmans tried to break free from Russian dominance, including Hetman Ivan Mazepa, whose alliance with Sweden's King Charles XII ended in defeat by the Russians in Poltava in 1709.

Following the partitions of Poland and the weakening of the Ottoman Empire in the late 18th century, large parts of Ukraine ended up in the Russian Empire. Western Ukraine was incorporated into the Habsburg Monarchy. In today's southern Ukraine, multiple groups settled within the Russian Empire, including Russian and Ukrainian peasants, but also Greeks, Italians and Romanians. The port city of Odesa became a diverse trading metropole. Industrialization took place primarily in southeastern Ukraine and ethnic Russians were sent to work in the larger cities. The policies of the Russian Empire meant that assimilation into Russian culture and language was common in the southeastern industrialized cities. Ukrainian was primarily spoken outside the cities – in 1897, 95 percent of Ukrainian speakers in the Russian Empire lived in rural areas (Yekelchyk, 2007, p. 55). The Habsburg Monarchy, in contrast,

[42] As do Russians and Belarussians.

tolerated and even encouraged Ukrainian culture, language and political activity, in part to counterbalance the influence of the Poles (Plokhy, 2015).

Throughout the 19th century, politicians and intellectuals developed the idea of a Ukrainian nation. The influential poet and social thinker Taras Shevchenko argued that Ukrainians were a distinct nationality with the right to a separate nation, and clandestine societies of Ukrainian intelligentsia (*hromadas*) were established. Galicia in today's western Ukraine also experienced a national revival and the city of Lviv was a cultural and educational center. Historian and political leader Mykhailo Hrushevsky played an important role. His work, "History of Ukraine-Rus", presented a comprehensive account of Ukraine as a distinct historical nation (Yekelchyk, 2007). Nonetheless, it took until 1918, at the end of World War I, and the fragmentation of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires before Ukrainian leaders declared an independent Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR). The West Ukrainian People's Republic was created in Galicia later the same year, before uniting with the UPR. A Bolshevik government controlled by Russia was also set up in Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine to counter these developments.[43] The period was turbulent and, as often the case throughout its history, external powers used violent means to take advantage of Ukraine's strategic location, notably its agriculture and industry. Moreover, regionalism resulting from different historical trajectories led to varying degrees of support for Ukrainian statehood, which was higher in western and central Ukraine, and lower in the southeastern steppe regions and the big cities dominated by other ethnicities than Ukrainians (Plokhy, 2015, p. 226). The Ukrainian dream of independence ended in disappointment. Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia established control of western Ukraine, and Russian Bolsheviks incorporated the remaining parts into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.[44]

As discussed above, Lenin took nationalism seriously and supported a federation of socialist republics, a debate he won against Stalin who preferred the republics to be autonomous regions within the Russian Federation. The decision to create Soviet Socialist Republics, formally distinct from Russia, would play an important role in how the USSR developed (Plokhy, 2023). During *korenizatsiia* in the 1920s, Ukrainization based on the idea of national communism flourished. Ukrainian leaders encouraged local culture and traditions, and promoted education, books and newspapers in Ukrainian, which strengthened Ukraine's national consciousness. Excluding the famines of the early 1920s, Ukrainization combined with the New Economic Policy (NEP) made Ukraine relatively well off, especially compared with the dark times that would follow.

[43] Kharkiv also became the first capital of the Ukrainian SSR, until the capital was changed to Kyiv in 1934.
[44] The original name was the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic, which was changed in 1936.

With Stalin in power, things changed rapidly. The period of Ukrainization ended. The command economy with its heavy industrialization primarily affected the cities in Ukraine's southeast (Yekelchyk, 2007). Moreover, the collectivization of agriculture led to the man-made famine – Holodomor – which resulted in the deaths of several million Ukrainians. Applebaum (2017) argues that the Soviet state used the famine to deliberately kill Ukrainians, an argument strengthened by the mass repression of Ukrainian intellectuals and political cadres at the time. Stalin's Great Purge followed in 1936–1938, which also had a negative impact on Ukrainians (Plokhy, 2015).

During World War II, Ukraine became a major battleground in the war on the Eastern Front between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Red Army. The grim reality on the ground led to the deaths of seven million Ukrainians, including over one million Jews, and the destruction of cities and industries (Plokhy, 2015; T. Snyder, 2012). Following Stalin's pact with Adolf Hitler, Soviet troops occupied eastern Poland, including Galicia in today's western Ukraine. In 1941, Nazi Germany, together with its allies, launched a surprise attack on the Soviet Union and quickly took control of Ukraine. In 1943, the Soviets launched a counteroffensive westward and gradually established control of Ukraine and significant parts of Eastern Europe. Importantly for this dissertation, Stalin incorporated today's western Ukraine, including Galicia, Bukovyna, and Transcarpathia into the Ukrainian SSR. He even gave Ukraine (and Belarus) seats at the United Nations (Yekelchyk, 2007). Wilson (2015) argues that the turbulent first half of the 20th century in Eastern Europe could have offered a variety of possible futures for Ukraine. However, Nikita Khrushchev's decision in 1954 to transfer Crimea to Ukraine (see below) finalized what would become the borders of independent Ukraine in 1991.

Both Khrushchev (1953–1964) and his successor as leader of the USSR, Leonid Brezhnev (1964–1982), had strong links to Ukraine but each approached the republic differently. Khrushchev used the Ukrainian connections he had established during his time as the first secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party (CPU) to consolidate power. As leader of the USSR, he promoted Ukrainians to important positions in Moscow. Petro Shelest, first secretary of the CPU (1963–1972), tolerated limited Ukrainization. The Ukrainian intelligentsia endorsed this idea, especially "the generation of the 1960s" (*Shistdesiatnyky)* who demanded substantial improvements in the name of Lenin's nationalities policy.

Brezhnev, on the other hand, was an ethnic Russian who had worked his way up within the so-called Dnipropetrovsk Mafia in eastern Ukraine. As a Soviet leader, Brezhnev appointed his Russian-speaking old friend from the region, Volodymyr Shcherbytsky (1972–1989), to replace Shelest in Ukraine. This signaled the Kremlin's restored tight grip over Ukraine and an era of economic stagnation followed. Brezhnev promoted the idea of a Soviet people unified by Russian language and culture, which also affected Ukraine. While Ukrainian remained widely spoken in western and central Ukraine, many in

the southeastern cities spoke Russian in daily life (Plokhy, 2023). By the 1980s, large cities in the south and east, such as Donetsk, Kharkiv and Odesa (not to mention the Crimean Peninsula), had few if any Ukrainian-speaking schools. Moreover, the proportion of ethnic Russians in Ukraine increased from 16 percent in 1959 to 22 percent in 1989 (numbers cited in Yekelchyk, 2007, pp. 173–174).

As shown by this brief chronicle, the Ukrainian people lived within multiple empires for centuries. They also had different experiences of the Soviet Union. These historical conditions contributed to Ukraine's regional diversity.

Figure 4.2. Map of independent Ukraine

Ukraine's regional diversity

Analysts have used various categorizations of Ukraine's regional diversity since 1991. Formally, Ukraine is composed of 27 administrative units with 24 *oblasts*, two special cities (Kyiv and Sevastopol) and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. For analytical purposes, western experts and media have often divided Ukraine into two parts: east and west, with the Dnipro River as the dividing line. Especially since Euromaidan and Russia's annexation of Crimea, and even more so after Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, critics have cautioned against simplification and stereotypes portraying Ukraine as split in half between a 'pro-West' western Ukraine and a 'pro-Russian' eastern

Ukraine (Haran et al., 2019). Overly simplistic categorizations should indeed be avoided. At the same time, however, it would be a mistake to downplay the regional dimension of Ukrainian politics between 1991 and 2014.

Many Ukrainian and western political scientists and sociologists have categorized Ukraine into four macro-regions: west, central, east and south (Colton, 2011; Haran & Yakovlyev, 2017; Hrytsak, 2019; Way, 2015).[45] I agree that four macro-regions are useful for capturing Ukraine's regional diversity, especially when analyzing political attitudes and voting patterns. At the same time, certain places within the four macro-regions have been politically more important. For this reason, I refer to four macro-regions (west, central, south and east), but also pay attention to distinct regions within the four macro-regions. Of particular interest are Galicia in western Ukraine, Crimea in the south and Donbas (Donetsk and Luhansk) in the east. Together with Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, these regions are important for political, historical and economic reasons.

Galicia and Ukraine's West

As discussed above, western Ukraine was incorporated into the Soviet Union as late as World War II and has been portrayed as "the least Soviet area in the USSR" (Way, 2015, p. 46).[46] Historically, western Ukraine belonged to Central European polities,[47] and Galicia, the core of western Ukraine, became an important center of Ukrainian national awareness. The Austrian-Hungarian Empire promoted mass schooling in the Ukrainian language and tolerated local culture and the Greek Catholic Church (which reinforced the difference from the Russian Orthodox Church). In all, this resulted in a strong sense of Ukrainian identity in Galicia, compared to the parts of Ukraine that experienced mass literacy under Russian rule (K. Darden & Grzymala-Busse, 2006).

After World War I, Galicia came under Polish control, and oppression resulted in the development of a radical Ukrainian nationalist movement (Wilson, 1997, p. 15). The Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) split in two, and Stepan Bandera was one of the dominant leaders. Since the OUN's main enemies were Polish and Soviet forces, many OUN members initially welcomed Germany's attack on the USSR and declared an independent Ukrainian state in Galicia in 1941. Hitler, however, did not support an independent Ukraine and Bandera was imprisoned in Berlin, together with others in the OUN leadership (T. Snyder, 2010). The partisan Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), with 40,000 soldiers, ended up fighting German, Polish and Soviet troops (Yekelchyk, 2007, p. 55). Stepan Bandera (who was murdered by

[45] East and south are sometimes analyzed as one macro region, southeast.
[46] Russia occupied parts of western Ukraine for very short periods earlier, such as in 1914–1915.
[47] Primarily the Habsburg Monarchy and Poland, Hungary, Romania and Czechoslovakia.

the KGB in 1959) remained an antagonistic figure in Ukraine after independence. In Galicia and elsewhere, mostly in western Ukraine, Bandera was a hero symbolizing Ukrainian nationhood, self-defense and resistance against imperial oppression. In other places in Ukraine, Bandera was seen as a traitor for his collaboration with the Germans and his opposition to the Soviet Union. The latter storyline dominated Soviet historiography and remained widespread in eastern Ukraine and Russian discourse after 1991.[48]

After World War II, Ukrainian partisans in Galicia fought against the Soviet Union until the 1950s. Soviet rule in Galicia during this period was unforgiving, and hundreds of thousands were killed or deported to Siberia. Instead of taming it, Stalin's treatment of western Ukraine strengthened Ukrainian nationalism and anti-Russian views in the region (Wilson, 1997, p. 18). Soviet bureaucrats did not implement Russian assimilation programs, and few Russian speakers moved to Galicia. Moreover, minorities were either killed during World War II or deported on Stalin's orders to "stabilize" the occupied territories (Plokhy, 2015). Poles, for example, who had dominated the city of Lviv in Galicia, were deported to post-war Poland and Ukrainians, in turn, moved eastwards to the enlarged Ukrainian SSR. As a result, 93 percent of the population of Galicia and 94 percent of Volhynia identified as ethnic Ukrainian in 1989, most people in the western macro-region spoke Ukrainian and the area was considered one of the least Russified areas of the USSR (Wilson, 1997, p. 19). Despite past conflicts, Galicia's border with Poland also contributed to the inflow of western goods and culture. Soviet dissidents found a home here and the anti-Soviet Ukrainian independence movement emerged in western Ukraine – as characterized by a Ukrainian-Canadian historian: "One could call Galicia and, with lesser justification, all of western Ukraine a hotbed of anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalism" (Yekelchyk, 2015, p. 19).

Crimea

The Crimean Peninsula belonged to the Crimean Khanate before the Russian Empire annexed it in 1783. It remained under Moscow's rule, including the Russian SFSR 1921–1954,[49] before being transferred to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954.

For centuries, Crimea has been strategically important for rival powers, primarily because of its location on the Black Sea coast. To Ukrainians, Crimea was the Cossack's outlet to the sea (Wilson, 2015). However, Crimea has also

[48] Prominent western scholars have cautioned against an overly heroic interpretation of Bandera (T. Snyder, 2010; Umland, 2016). Unfounded allegations by Russian propaganda from 2014, and even more so after 2022, linking Nazism with Ukrainians who defend their independence against the Russian invasion, have made a nuanced academic discussion of Ukraine's experience during World War II almost impossible.

[49] For shorter periods, Crimea was controlled by other powers, such as during World War II. Crimea's status as an autonomous republic was downgraded to an oblast in 1945 following the forced removal of the Crimean Tatars (Kramer, 2014).

played a special role in Russian military mythmaking on the Crimean War (1853-1855) and World War II. Sevastopol, Crimea's largest city and home of the Black Sea Fleet (BSF), has been portrayed in Russian culture as the "city of Russian Naval Glory" (Yekelchyk, 2015, p. 4). After the fall of the Russian Empire, the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was founded and incorporated into the Russian SFSR. In the late stages of World War II, Stalin abandoned Crimea's autonomous status and deported the whole of the Crimean Tatar population to Siberia (Kramer, 2014). Many Russians and Russophone Slavs migrated to Crimea, which increased the share of ethnic Russians among Crimea's population from 49 percent in 1939 to around 70 percent in the post-war years. High-ranking military officials and senior Communist Party members also settled in Crimea (Yekelchyk, 2015, p. 122).

As mentioned above, Nikita Khrushchev transferred Crimea to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954. In one interpretation, Crimea was a gift to celebrate "300 years of Russian-Ukrainian friendship". More plausible explanations are that Khrushchev needed the support of Ukrainian communists in ongoing power struggles and for infrastructural reasons (Kramer, 2014). In either case, the transfer caused no major sensation. Few at the time predicted the Soviet Union's collapse. When this "impossibility" occurred, the status of Crimea, Sevastopol and the BSF would become contested, as is discussed below. According to the last Soviet census in 1989, Crimea was the only Ukrainian region with an ethnic Russian majority and the peninsula had not experienced earlier periods of Ukrainization. Its high concentration of Soviet military and resort facilities popular among Soviet elites, USSR trade unions and ethnic Russians meant that Crimea "entered the post-Soviet period as a stronghold of Soviet perceptions and power structures" (Sasse, 2007, p. 132).

Donbas and Ukraine's East

The Donbas, an abbreviation of the Donetsk Coal Basin, is a territory in eastern Ukraine composed of two *oblasts*, Donetsk and Luhansk, bordering Russia and in part occupied by Russia since 2014. As discussed above, most of eastern and southern Ukraine came under the control of the Russian Empire in the 17th and 18th centuries, and industrial cities in the southeast were impacted by Russification within the Soviet Union. As a result, many people in this part of Ukraine, including ethnic Ukrainians, spoke Russian in daily interactions (Way, 2015, p. 46).[50]

[50] The relationship between ethnicity, language and politics is complex and has been hotly debated in the context of Ukraine. Ethnicity was a category of identification in the USSR. Another larger category of people in Ukraine, including some ethnic Ukrainians, identified Russian as their native language, and an even larger category – including some ethnic Ukrainians, with Ukrainian as their native language – could speak Russian in daily life. Moreover, *Surzhyk*, a mix of Russian and Ukrainian, is spoken in some Ukrainian regions. Thus, people's use of language has been relatively fluid in Ukraine.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Donbas became an important coal mining and industrial region, first within the Russian Empire and then as part of the Ukrainian SSR. People from Russia and other parts of the USSR migrated to the Donbas to work in industries and coal mines, and ethnic Russians were for a long time in a majority in the region (Kuzio, 2017, p. 172). During the Russian Civil War, leaders in the Donbas supported the Bolsheviks and established an independent "Donetsk-Kryviy Rih Soviet Republic" with the intention of becoming an autonomous republic inside Russia. Lenin, however, preferred the region's inclusion in the Ukrainian SSR to strengthen Bolshevik support in Ukraine. Symbolically, Donetsk (the largest city in the Donbas, founded by a Welsh businessman) was renamed from Yuzovka to Stalin, and to Stalino in 1929, until receiving its present name in 1961 during the era of de-Stalinization.

Attempts to strengthen Ukrainian culture in the Donbas during *korenizatsiia* mostly failed and policies to encourage people learning Ukrainian were met with resistance. Ukrainian-speaking peasants who came to work in Donbas industries were mocked for speaking Ukrainian and quickly adapted to speaking Russian. A survey in 1930 showed that only 8.5 percent of employees in the Donbas had knowledge of the Ukrainian language (T. Martin, 2001, pp. 103, 121). Passive resistance to learning Ukrainian was strong in the Donbas but also occurred elsewhere among Russians and the "Russified" Ukrainian urban population, especially in large cities in the East and South of Ukraine, such as Kharkiv and Odesa.[51] Although the proportion of ethnic Ukrainians in the Donbas gradually increased, they lived in an environment in which Soviet and Russian culture dominated. Few Ukrainian schools were available. People generally studied in Russian and a majority of newspapers published in Russian.

The Donbas regional political elite advanced quickly to positions within the Communist Party in Moscow. Links between the Donbas and Moscow within the USSR have been described as thicker than those between the Donbas and Kyiv (Sasse, 2007). In 1989, 44–45 percent of the population in Donetsk and Luhansk identified as ethnic Russians, although the numbers declined to 38–39 percent in the 2001 census (Haran et al., 2019).[52] An overwhelming majority of the Donbas population identified Russian as their mother tongue, which was unusual in Ukraine. In Donetsk City, for example, around 90 percent identified Russian as their mother tongue (Wilson, 1997, pp. 17–21). The Soviet authorities did not give Donetsk and Luhansk autonomous status but the leadership's connections to Moscow, the large population, the economic industrial base, a shared border with Russia and the high level

[51] As noted by Martin "Regional tests carried out in 1931–1932, which now judged only whether the employees did or did not know Ukrainian, confirmed these fears: in Kiev, 58 percent of those tested did not know Ukrainian; in Odessa, 50 percent; in Kharkov, 60 percent" (Martin, 2001, p. 121).

[52] In Ukraine as a whole, 22.1 percent identified as ethnic Russians in 1989.

of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers made Donbas a distinctive region within the Ukrainian SSR. Kuzio (2017) even portrays the Donbas as "a mini-USSR". At the same time, the Donbas belonged to the Ukrainian SSR, and its people developed a distinct regional identity as an important region of Soviet heavy industry.

Other important regions and cities in Ukraine's east and south, such as Dnipropetrovsk (with its main city Dnipro), Odesa and Kharkiv, had a lower degree of ethnic Russians, and only Kharkiv shares a border with Russia. Because of its industries and powerful political-economic networks, Dnipropetrovsk initially became the most influential of these regions after 1991 (see Chapter 6), although its political influence declined after 2004.

Beyond the distinct regions presented above, scholars categorize one Ukrainian macro-region as the center. Central Ukraine has a mixed historical background, and a population that after 1991 spoke both Ukrainian and Russian but with a clear majority identifying as ethnic Ukrainian. After independence, the center functioned as a "swing region" that supported various political forces (Way, 2015).

To sum up this section, it is important to underline that overly simplistic categorizations of Ukraine's regions are unhelpful. Relatedly, speaking Russian or even defining oneself as ethnic Russian does not equate with support for separatism or unification with Russia after 1991. At the same time, as this study will show, regional pluralism has been a very important component of Ukraine's political development and its foreign affairs. Sasse, for example, notes that, "Regional diversity has arguably been the predominant feature of Ukraine's transition and state- and nation-building process" (Sasse, 2002, p. 70). In my analysis, I refer to four macro-regions, but pay particular attention to regions such as Galicia, Crimea and Donbas since they have played important roles in Ukrainian politics since independence.

Ukraine's formative period, 1989–1994

As shown above, Ukraine, due to antecedent conditions, was regionally diverse when Gorbachev introduced *glasnost* and *perestroika*. Below follows an analysis of Ukraine's transition to independence. The analysis then turns to Ukraine's early years of independence, the most challenging part of its formative period. From 1991 to 1994, there were political conflicts between Kyiv and Moscow, and between the Ukrainian government and Crimean politicians. At the same time, Ukraine faced serious economic challenges and regional divisions. Notwithstanding these challenges, Ukraine's transition was peaceful and all regions of the Ukrainian SSR became part of the independent state, both de facto and *de jure*.

Ukraine from Soviet republic to independent state

The aftermath of the Chornobyl nuclear disaster in 1986 resulted in the rise of a Ukrainian ecological movement and a public debate about political power and center-republic relations. The event also triggered a national mobilization in Ukraine. In 1988, public demonstrations were held in Lviv in western Ukraine, raising demands for a Popular Front (Wilson, 1997). Hardline CPU leader Volodymyr Shcherbytsky's first reaction to Gorbachev's reforms was: "What idiot invented the word 'perestroika'?" (Plokhy, 2015, p. 315). His leadership likely slowed the progress of Ukraine's independence movement.

The year 1989 became a turning point in Ukraine's political history with the founding of Ukraine's main national movement, Rukh, which, by the end of the year, had over 300,000 members (Plokhy, 2015). Although smaller radical nationalist groups existed, Rukh had a moderate agenda and its leadership served as a link between Communist Party reformers and the demands of the population. According to Wilson, Rukh's moderate approach was a bridge-building strategy to gain a broad national-democratic foundation that did not alienate Ukraine's east and south. Nonetheless, 95 percent of Rukh's congress delegates in 1990 were ethnic Ukrainians and 57 percent came from Galicia and Kyiv (Wilson, 1997, pp. 65–67). Plokhy (2015) notes that national mobilization followed historical regional patterns. Mobilization in Galicia and Volhynia in western Ukraine was similar to developments in the Baltic states, where former dissidents and intellectuals led the national movement.

In 1990, Rukh raised the stakes. One of its leaders, Ivan Drach, rejected the Ukrainian government's demand that Rukh should take the form of a cultural movement only. In the first relatively free elections to the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) in March 1990, the Democratic Bloc, which included Rukh members, won a quarter of the seats, but the Communist Party dominated in numerical terms. Ivan Drach then demanded full sovereignty and independence for the Ukrainian state and asked activists to prepare for civil disobedience (Wilson, 1997, p. 68). At this point, Leonid Kravchuk emerged as the new leader of the Ukrainian government. Shcherbytsky resigned in late 1989 and died soon thereafter. Kravchuk came from Volhynia in western Ukraine. He was not an outsider dissident; he had held top positions in the communist department for propaganda and ideology in the Ukrainian SSR. Unlike Georgia's Gamsakhurdia and his followers, Kravchuk turned out to be a moderate leader. Kravchuk spoke excellent Ukrainian, avoided both radical nationalism and hardline communism and could talk to the nationalist movement while maintaining support within the Communist Party.

In October 1990, students started a hunger strike in Kyiv against the Communist Party and demanded, among other things, the prime minister's resignation. Soon, 50,000 people in Kyiv joined the protests to protect the students, and universities announced a strike. Faced with large-scale demonstrations, Kravchuk gave the protesters airtime on television and yielded to several of

their demands (Plokhy, 2015, p. 317). Kravchuk's accommodational approach can be contrasted with the violent actions taken by the Soviet authorities in Georgia in 1989. Kravchuk continued to balance demands for Ukrainian independence from the national movement with demands from communist forces that wanted a reformed Soviet Union.

Ukraine, unlike Georgia, participated in the Soviet referendum in March 1991. The Ukrainian SSR voted for the preservation of a renewed Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (approved by 71.5 percent) but added a question on whether it should be based on Ukraine's state sovereignty declaration (approved by 81.7 percent). Galicia went further by adding a third question to its referendum: 88 percent in the region supported Ukraine's full independence and its right to decide all domestic and foreign policy issues on its own (Wilson, 1997). By this time, Crimea had proclaimed itself autonomous, distancing itself from Kyiv (see below), illustrating the contrast between Galicia and Crimea.

Ukraine continued negotiations with Moscow on the future of the Soviet Union. If the March referendum demonstrated ambivalence and rival ideas within Ukraine, the failed coup by Soviet hardliners in Moscow in August 1991 clarified the situation. A few weeks earlier, US President George H W Bush had held his infamous "Chicken Kiev speech" at the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada. Bush warned Ukraine's national movement, "Freedom is not the same as independence. Americans will not support those who seek in order to replace a far-off tyranny with a local despotism. They will not aid those who promote a suicidal nationalism based upon ethnic hatred" (Bush, 1991). Bush was apparently worried about a violent Yugoslavia scenario inside Ukraine, or in Kyiv's relationship with Moscow.

The failed August coup changed the calculations for Kravchuk (who had remained silent during the coup attempt) and the national communists (Yekelchyk, 2007). A few days later, the Ukrainian Rada passed a bill declaring Ukraine's independence. It also scheduled presidential elections and a referendum on independence for December 1991. Kravchuk had skillfully maneuvered the political scene. Through moderate responses to various groups' demands, Kravchuk gradually transformed himself from a Communist Party official to a moderate bridge builder and defender of Ukraine's independence. Meanwhile, the nationalist movement, with its strongest support in western Ukraine and Kyiv, faced a dilemma. Many preferred a radical break with the USSR, like the one achieved in much of Central and Eastern Europe, but the nationalist movement concluded its best option was to seek Ukrainian independence together with Kravchuk and pragmatic national-minded communists. A radical break, in contrast, risked alienating a large part of the Ukrainian population in the southeast. Thus, the national democrats made a tactical decision to ally with the national communists rather than oppose the Communist Party (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 29).

Scholars have portrayed this as "grand bargaining", an "alliance of convenience" or a "Faustian bargain" (Way, 2015). As a result, many within the old elites remained in power and much of the old state machinery was preserved. Ukraine's path to independence was thus based on accommodation and a peaceful transition. The downside of this approach was that "[t]here was no shared vision of an alternative order, which would be defined as superior and exemplary.…The opposition and the communist elites diverged diametrically in their evaluation of the communist and pre-communist past" (Wolczuk, 2001, pp. 79–80).

Some argue that a more revolutionary approach, as in Georgia and the Baltic states, was impossible in Ukraine since the nationalist movement was not strong enough. Others, however, underline the importance of Ukrainian elite strategies for this development (D'Anieri, 2019b). As shown below, several moments in the early 1990s could also have changed Ukraine's trajectory. Thus, it was not a predetermined outcome.

In December 1991, Kravchuk won the first Ukrainian presidential election, receiving strong support all over Ukraine except in Galicia where the former Soviet dissident Viacheslav Chornovil won. Moreover, 92 percent of participants in the referendum supported Ukrainian independence. (In Crimea, 57 percent voted for independence, although turnout was low. In both Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, 84 percent supported independence).[53] There are indications that regions such as Donetsk and Luhansk supported independence for its anticipated economic benefits rather than for Ukrainian patriotic considerations. Ukrainian media at the time emphasized the economic potential of an independent Ukraine (Popova & Shevel, 2024). Backed by a strong Ukrainian majority for independence, Ukraine's new President Kravchuk effectively dissolved the Soviet Union (Plokhy, 2023). The Belovezha Accords were signed at a meeting in Belarus between Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian leaders on December 8, 1991. Disagreements were already visible between Ukraine and Russia. Russia's new president, Boris Yeltsin, wanted new joint institutional structures with Russia at the core, something that Kravchuk opposed. The compromise became the CIS, which looked like a confederation but in reality lacked legally binding commitments (D'Anieri, 2019b). Again, Russia and Ukraine found a compromise solution, although their respective leaders would later dispute what the CIS actually meant. To sum up so far, the accommodational approach of President Kravchuk and his opponents contributed to a benign transition to independence. However, Ukraine's most challenging time of its formative period occurred in the first years after 1991, which were characterized by domestic political conflict, economic collapse, Russian pressure and threats of secession by Crimea.

[53] Most regions in western Ukraine had a turnout of over 90 percent while the turnout in Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv and Odesa oblast was between 60-68 percent.

Regional challenges in Ukraine in the transition's aftermath, 1991–1994

Some of Ukraine's most serious challenges came late in the formative period, in 1991–1994. In fact, as discussed below, it could be argued that Ukraine possessed many of the same ingredients as the former-Soviet republics that ended up in armed conflict (Sasse, 2007). This section discusses these challenges and how Ukraine managed to overcome them peacefully.

Government-regional relations under Kravchuk

As discussed above, President Kravchuk was respected by most Ukrainian groups. His main regional challenge was from Crimea, which was elevated by pressure from Russia (see below). Already in early 1991, Crimea's communist leaders had arranged a local referendum that showed a high level of support (over 90 percent) for the restoration of Crimea's autonomous status; that is, the Crimean ASSR within the USSR.[54] The referendum was in reaction to the demands of national democrats for independence and a higher status for the Ukrainian language, as well as the return of Crimean Tatars following increased recognition of the crimes committed against them during Stalin's rule (Kuzio, 2007).

The Ukrainian leadership worried that an autonomous Crimea within Soviet structures (not as part of the Ukrainian SSR) would result in Russia taking control of the peninsula. Kravchuk, however, tolerated Crimea's autonomous status and viewed it as a test for Ukraine's democracy. The Ukrainian Parliament also approved it but argued for Crimean autonomy within the Ukrainian SSR (Sasse, 2007, pp. 134–140). This status remained until the end of the USSR but, as noted above, a majority of those in Crimea who participated in the referendum in December 1991 supported Ukrainian independence.

After independence, the question of Crimea became an increasingly complicated affair that included several actors and issue areas. Kyiv negotiated with regional Crimean politicians but Russia's political interests also shaped developments. In May 1992, communist hardliners in power in Crimea declared Crimean sovereignty and called for a referendum. Meanwhile, pro-Russian media outlets in Crimea were spinning (generally unfounded) stories about "dangerous" Ukrainian nationalism. Kravchuk again aimed for a moderate approach, although some Ukrainians preferred a tougher response to Crimean demands (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 43). An important component of Kravchuk's pragmatic strategy was to strike deals to co-opt regional elites that could pose a problem for Ukraine's territorial integrity.

[54] It is important to underline that many Crimean Tatars had yet to return to Crimea when the referendum took place.

This approach turned out to be effective, at least initially. Crimean leader Mykola Bahrov welcomed a Ukrainian Parliament delegation to Yalta for negotiations and the Crimean Constitution approved in 1992 was a compromise. A new leadership position, President of the Republic of Crimea, was established and people living on the peninsula would be citizens of both Ukraine and Crimea. Moreover, the regional leadership was given relatively high degrees of autonomy – military troop movements and appointments to key positions of the National Guard and the Security Service (SBU) in Crimea required regional approval (Sasse, 2007). In other words, instead of responding with force, Kravchuk accepted high levels of autonomy within the Ukrainian state.

Calls for Crimean separatism and regional polarization, 1993–1994

For several reasons, according to this dissertation, 1993–1994 was the most challenging time in Ukraine's formative period. First, Ukraine's economy was in free fall. As mentioned above, Ukrainian politicians had used economic arguments to convince people, primarily in the east and south, of the advantages of independence. It was argued that Ukraine's economic potential meant that leaving the USSR would provide major economic benefits for Ukrainians (Yekelchyk, 2007). These promises turned out to be overly optimistic as Kravchuk's government failed to implement a robust economic reform agenda. Ukrainians were divided, especially on whether Ukraine should distance its economy from Russia. National democrats wanted to rapidly distance Ukraine's economy from Russia but others preferred a gradual separation and conservative communists wanted closer economic ties with Russia. These divisions led to deadlock on economic reform.

A weak government, high inflation and high levels of poverty led to social discontent. One poll in 1993 indicated that only 47 percent would support independence if a new referendum was held (compared to 92 percent in 1991). Another poll found that 55 percent believed they had been better off in Brezhnev's days (Meek, 1993). Discontent was highest in the southeastern industrialized regions (F. Hill, 1994, p. 81). Moreover, the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU), which had been banned in 1991, re-established itself at a party conference in Donetsk City in 1993. In June 1993, 400,000 workers in the Donbas initiated major strikes, supported by regional elites. The Donbas workers even took their protests to Kyiv and set up a tent on the Maidan. The movement demanded major changes in Ukrainian politics. During the 1994 parliamentary elections, Donetsk and Luhansk conducted a regional referendum with three questions: on Ukraine adopting a federal structure, increasing the status of the Russian language and becoming a full member of the CIS. All three received over 80 percent support (D'Anieri, 2019b; Kuzio, 2017).

Economic difficulties contributed to social discontent in Crimea too. In 1994, the peninsula once again caused problems for the Ukrainian government. This time the situation was even more challenging because of the increased popularity of the Russian nationalist, Yuri Meshkov, who was seen by

analysts as "a serious threat to Ukraine's territorial integrity" (Kuzio, 2007, p. 143). In 1992, Kravchuk had relied on compromises with Bahrov to keep Crimea stable, but Meshkov, a candidate for the Russia Bloc, criticized Bahrov's "weakness" and promoted a more assertive agenda. Meshkov's slogan was "Crimea's Unity with Russia" and he advocated, among other things, Crimea joining the Russian rouble zone (Sasse, 2007, p. 158). He also criticized "the Ukrainianization of the Crimean economy, that is to say complete collapse" (Bohlen, 1994), and argued that the government had prioritized Ukrainian nationalist slogans over economic growth and good relations with Russia.

In the Crimean presidential elections of 1994, Meshkov easily defeated Bahrov in the second round and his party won a majority in the Crimean Supreme Soviet. For a while, Kyiv appeared to lose control over Crimea. Meshkov called for a Crimean referendum and a boycott of Ukraine's parliamentary election. He installed a Russian citizen as Crimea's deputy prime minister and symbolically switched Crimea's time zone to Moscow time. Furthermore, he demanded that Crimean men recruited to the Ukrainian army should serve only in Crimea. This worried the Kyiv government since it could be a first step to establishing a separate Crimean army (Hockstader, 1994b). The regional referendum, downgraded to a poll in a temporary sign of pragmatism from Meshkov, revealed that 78 percent of participants supported a treaty-based relationship between Kyiv and Crimea (Sasse, 2007, p. 163).

After his electoral victory, Meshkov traveled to Moscow to assess his support there. The results of these meetings were not made public. A period of tit-for-tat followed between the Ukrainian and Crimean leadership. Kravchuk used decrees and threats of economic sanctions, and increases in government security personnel on the peninsula to put pressure on Meshkov. Meshkov, in turn, responded with measures to increase regional political and military control (Kuzio, 2007). Moreover, he made changes to regional sections of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and replaced the local head of the security service (SBU). In May 1994, the Crimean Supreme Soviet formally strengthened "regional control over military and security organs based in the peninsula" (Sasse, 2007, p. 165). The Ukrainian Parliament set a deadline for the Crimean leadership to reverse these actions but decided to extend it to continue negotiations and avoid a violent intervention. Although Meshkov first ignored the deadline, he finally changed his mind and took a more moderate approach. According to Sasse (2007), this decision probably avoided a violent outcome.

How did Ukraine's leaders respond to these significant challenges? Unlike Georgia's Gamsakhurdia or Russia's Yeltsin, who responded with tanks against Communist hardliners in Moscow in September 1993, Kravchuk and his successor Leonid Kuchma responded with restraint. In response to the Donbas protests in 1993, early presidential elections were scheduled for 1994 (in which Kravchuk lost power), and Yukhym Zvyahilsky, a former boss of a coal mine in Donetsk, replaced the former prime minister. Thus, Kravchuk's

accommodational approach gave the Donbas a clear voice in Ukrainian politics in 1993 and, as D'Anieri (2019b) notes, the type of pact making between opposing forces would become a reoccurring theme in Ukrainian politics for decades to come. Moreover, Leonid Kuchma, who won the presidential elections in 1994, came from Dnipropetrovsk oblast in eastern Ukraine and had campaigned for closer economic ties with Russia and to strengthen the status of the Russian language. Kuchma received strong support from voters in Donbas and Crimea. Further, the CPU, which supported closer ties with Russia, became the largest party in the parliamentary elections in 1994. With Kuchma as president and the CPU as the largest party in parliament, arguments for secession, in the case of Crimea, and for autonomy or federalism in the Donbas faded.

Ukraine's relations with Russia 1991–1994: significant pressure but no armed conflict

As this domestic process unfolded and the Ukrainian government tried to secure Ukraine's independence and handle regional challenges, Russia was also playing an important role. The major difficulties were linked to the recognition of Ukraine's borders, nuclear weapons on Ukrainian territory inherited from the USSR and the status of Crimea and its largest city, Sevastopol. Crimea was also indirectly linked to control of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet, as well as the large naval base on the peninsula.

First, the idea that Crimea, in general, and Sevastopol, in particular, belonged to Russia had strong appeal in Russian policy circles and among intellectuals. Moscow's mayor, Yury Luzhkov, the ultranationalist, Vladimir Zhirinovsky, and the Soviet dissident, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, all spoke out in favor of Crimea as Russian, but ministers and liberal Russian politicians also made similar statements (D'Anieri, 2019b). In 1991, Yeltsin's press secretary, Pavel Voshchanov, declared that if Ukraine left the Soviet Union: "Russia reserved the right to review borders" (Cited in F. Hill, 1994, p. 68), which was a reference to Crimea. In early 1992, the Russian Duma questioned the legality of Crimea's transfer to Ukraine in 1954 and insisted that Sevastopol was a Russian city – a statement it would repeat for several years. Kravchuk responded that the Russian notion of seizing Sevastopol was "a gross act of imperialist intervention in Ukrainian internal affairs" (Cited in F. Hill, 1994, p. 74).

Russia used Ukraine's energy debt as a lever in these negotiations. Yeltsin's government reduced gas flows and offered to "resolve" the issue if Ukraine gave up its claims to the BSF. In 1992, Yeltsin stated that, "the Black Sea fleet was, is and will be Russia's. No one, not even Kravchuk will take it away from Russia" (Rettie & Mask, 1992). Russian officials offered dual citizenship to ethnic Russians in Crimea, backed pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine and provided vocal support to Donbas workers during the economic crisis (F. Hill, 1994). To make things worse, Ukraine came under pressure

from the United States, Russia and others to abandon its inherited nuclear weapons and live up to its promises to become a non-nuclear state.

Kravchuk and Yeltsin found an initial solution for how to divide the BSF but the problem of how to handle the issue of basing rights remained. The Russian approach to link Crimea, the BSF, recognition of Ukraine's borders, nuclear weapons and energy policies irritated the Ukrainian leadership. However, although the political conflicts between Ukraine and Russia were serious, they ended peacefully through negotiation and compromise, anchored in several international agreements. First, Ukraine agreed to hand over its remaining nuclear weapons to Russia. In return, Ukraine achieved security assurances (but not guarantees comparable to NATO's Article 5) from the US, Russia and the UK in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, the signatories to which promised to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and to provide assistance via the UN Security Council if Ukraine came under attack.[55] Second, Ukraine and Russia managed to find a compromise solution for Crimea, the BSF and the military naval base. Russia received the larger share of the fleet and was allowed to lease the naval base in Crimea from Ukraine until 2017, with an option to extend it if both parties agreed to do so. A large Russian military presence in Crimea was clearly not Ukraine's most preferred option, but its negotiators made a realistic assessment. Alternatives, such as making Sevastopol a Russian city, as suggested by Russian politicians, or to risk provoking a military confrontation with Moscow were considered much worse options. In return, Crimea remained Ukrainian, and Russia and Ukraine signed a Friendship Treaty in 1997 in which the two parties promised to respect each other's territorial integrity, not to use force or threats against each other and to acknowledge the inviolability of each other's borders.[56]

How close did Ukraine come to armed conflict? Such a sequence of events would almost certainly have resulted in a different formative experience and political arena in Ukraine. Scholars who have studied the period in detail believe "The danger was real" (D'Anieri, 2007, p. 5). Ukraine had several conditions similar to those of neighboring states that ended up in military conflict (such as Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Russia). Ukraine had regional borderlands and minorities with links to an external power. Regional

[55] Ukraine's decision to abandon its nuclear weapons and the assurances it received returned to the agenda after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014. Could Ukraine have protected itself if it had kept its nuclear weapons? First, Ukraine would probably have become a pariah state if it had not kept its promise to abandon nuclear weapons in the 1990s, with disastrous effects on its economy. Second, it is highly questionable whether Ukraine could have used these weapons as a deterrent at the time, due to command and control and other issues. Third, many of the weapons would have needed replacement within a decade, which would have been very costly. For a discussion on nuclear disarmament and US security assurances to Ukraine see Pifer (2017).

[56] Formally the "Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation".

leaders promoted separatism (Crimea) or federalism and closer ties with Russia (Donbas). Ukraine experienced economic hardship and politicians in Russia, the former imperial metropole, openly encouraged separatism (J. Hughes & Sasse, 2002). Moreover, Kyiv had multiple political disputes with Moscow.

In an interview with this author, Strobe Talbott, President Clinton's advisor on Russia and the newly independent states, and later Deputy Secretary of State, noted:

> We were always worried about what the Russians were doing to Ukraine, from day one. I would say that Ukraine was in a very fragile position for a number of reasons. First of all, people back in Russia were furious that Russia was going to let go of Ukraine, for all kinds of reasons, so there was a lot of antagonism from the people in Russia who were appalled by the collapse of the Soviet Union and particularly outraged that Ukraine would go its own way, and in the way of the West.[57]

A 1994 US intelligence report even predicted that Ukraine would split apart, and western media warned about the risk of conflict between Ukraine and Russia (Hockstader, 1994a). As shown in declassified cables, US and German leaders Bill Clinton and Helmut Kohl worried that Ukraine could break apart and that Russian influence was a serious concern:

> Kohl: I told Yeltsin that even any suspicion that Russia wanted to annex Ukraine would be catastrophic. Clinton: But many think that Ukraine will break up from within. The elections in Crimea could point in that direction.… If Ukraine collapses, because of Russian influence or because of militant nationalists within Ukraine or any other reason, it would undermine the whole theory of NATO's partnership for peace (SDC, 1994a).

This was not just a concern among western politicians and experts. In January 1994, even before Crimean separatism stirred up again, Ukraine's President Kravchuk raised his concerns in a private meeting with Clinton. In a declassified diplomatic cable, Kravchuk said he trusted Yeltsin:

> But there is no eternal president and we worry about expansion. There are extremist forces in Russia and Ukraine. Yeltsin and Chernomyrdin understand. Now there is no serious worry or danger but the situation is not stable. Russians were brought up in greatness. They dream of empire, especially the officers of the army. There are millions of them, especially in the Black Sea Fleet….We too have nationalists, forces opposing the President on nuclear weapons. They are not numerous but we should not give them the possibility to spread. They are ready for unthinkable actions. They are actually speculating on the situation and making it even worse. Actually, I can now hold the political situation, but it is a hard process (White House, 1994).

[57] Interview, Strobe Talbott, 2020.

Moreover, Yeltsin was under significant pressure at home, especially from hardline communists and nationalists, to the extent that he ordered the army to shell the Russian legislature in 1993. In the 1996 presidential elections, Yeltsin almost lost to Gennady Zyuganov, a communist hardliner who wanted to restore "Russian greatness", and who held what could best be described as neo-imperial views on Ukraine.[58]

Outside of Crimea, no separatism was visible in Ukraine, but even small-scale violence on the peninsula, deliberate or accidental by either side, could have triggered a response from Russia and from radical politicians in Ukraine's east and in Crimea. It is not certain that Yeltsin could have held back hardliners within Russia's political and military circles. This could have triggered a reactive sequence that would have transformed Ukraine's political arena in unpredictable ways. In other words, there were high stakes and multiple crises during Ukraine's formative period that could have transformed Ukraine's political arena.

How did Ukraine manage to accomplish a peaceful transition to independence? First, in comparison with Georgia, Ukraine did not experience a "9 April 1989" moment that could have triggered nationalist forces. Instead, Ukraine's transition was agreed on by all regions of Ukraine in a non-violent process. Second, as highlighted by my theory, choices by leaders can be important at these critical junctures. In this case, Ukraine's President Kravchuk and his successor Kuchma played constructive roles. Kravchuk was famously called "the one who walks between raindrops" for his flexibility and ability to handle different political forces (Kolomiiets, 2023). He used an accommodational approach based on compromise for which he gained respect from national democrats, communists and even hardliners in Crimea. This approach was true also in international negotiations with Russia. Kravchuk and his team allowed negotiations to take time. Kuchma (discussed in Chapter 6) was also known for his flexibility and pragmatism. Kuchma's victory in the 1994 elections gave voters in Ukraine's southeast, including Crimea, a voice in Ukrainian politics that ended calls for federalism or separatism. Moreover, Kuchma waited patiently for Yeltsin, who postponed final negotiations on the BSF numerous times, and he managed to include a passage in the Ukrainian Constitution allowing Russia to lease the naval base in Sevastopol, which resolved the issue. Yeltsin was clearly also important in holding back Russian hardline communists, nationalists, and forces within the military and security services that considered Crimea to be part of Russia, and in some cases treated Ukraine as an artificial state. By comparison, Yeltsin and his team were relatively moderate. Unlike in the case of Georgia, Ukraine was able to find a compromise with Russia that was not imposed on Kyiv, and Russia recognized Ukraine's territorial integrity in a treaty and several other documents.

[58] Zyuganov's (2014) views on Ukraine are available on his party's webpage.

Conclusion: Georgia's and Ukraine's transitions to independence

This chapter has analyzed the transitions to independence of Georgia and Ukraine. A formative period is a relatively concentrated episode of innovation, and I argue each was a critical juncture in both states. In 1989, both states were regionally diverse because of antecedent conditions, in important part due to imperial policies, such as the quasi-federal Soviet system, autonomous status, and Russian and Soviet annexation of territories. Regions within Georgia and Ukraine had developed in different ways during earlier periods of history within empires. The shock triggered by Gorbachev's reforms opened up a window of opportunity for national movements. The chapter has traced two different sequences of events: the rapid and turbulent national mobilization of Georgia with a reactive sequence that resulted in armed conflicts with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. As an unintended consequence, Georgia lost control of three regions during its formative process and experienced Russian military involvement and subordination. Ukraine experienced a more gradual, peaceful transition, partly because of compromises among Ukrainian leaders and difficult but fruitful negotiations between Kyiv and Moscow.

Compared to Georgia, Ukraine's transition occurred gradually, without violence, such as the killing of protesters in Georgia on April 9, 1989. Thus, the Ukrainian nationalist movement did not radicalize. Instead, it used a moderate approach in which all citizens in the Ukrainian SSR became equal citizens within an independent Ukraine. The grand bargaining between competing actors contributed to Ukraine's peaceful transition to independence. In this regard, Ukraine was rightly highlighted as a success story compared to several of its conflict-ridden neighbors (Sasse, 2007). As discussed in the forthcoming chapters, however, this grand bargain and accommodational approach to Moscow also contributed to Ukraine's ambiguity and vacillation in foreign affairs for several decades thereafter.

There is no doubt that Ukraine's regional challenge, primarily over Crimea, was serious and could have ended in full separatism and perhaps even armed conflict, just as happened in Georgia and other post-Soviet states. Before the peaceful resolution of the political disputes in Crimea, international experts, diplomats and members of the intelligence service warned that relations between Kyiv, Crimea and Moscow might spin out of control into a military conflict.

In the end, an accommodational approach by Kravchuk and his successor, Kuchma, as well as responsible steps taken by Meshkov and by Russia under Yeltsin's leadership contributed to a peaceful resolution. This can be compared with Georgia, which first had the antagonistic leader, Gamsakhurdia, followed by his successor, Shevardnadze, who did not seem to be able to control Georgia's multiple armed groups, with disastrous consequences. Although antecedent conditions certainly influenced these developments, this

chapter has argued that the paths were not predetermined. There were several points when leaders and elite groups in Georgia and Ukraine made choices that set their formative processes in contrasting directions. Both Georgia and Ukraine experienced challenges in relation to Russia during this period but Georgia's vulnerable situation, with three wars within a few years, allowed Moscow to exploit the situation and dictate political demands on Georgia to a much greater extent than it could against Ukraine. As is argued in the subsequent chapters, these contrasting formative experiences created legacies with important implications for Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies for decades to come.

5. Georgia's foreign policy 1995–2002: from Russian dominance to a pro-West orientation

In 1995, Georgia's international orientation could aptly be described as close to Russia. Georgia was on the brink of collapse and highly dependent on Moscow. Under strong pressure from Moscow, Eduard Shevardnadze had accepted Georgian membership of Russia-dominated organizations – the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and, more significantly, a military alliance, the Collective Security Treaty (CST). Moreover, Georgia had signed agreements with Russia in 1995 allowing Russian (former-Soviet) military bases to remain on Georgian territory for 25 years. The Georgian state was unable to patrol its own borders and had agreed that Russian border guards could do the job. Moreover, Russia had handpicked several key officials in Georgia's security, internal and defense ministries, giving it significant influence over these sectors. Russia was also playing a dubious role in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Formally, the Kremlin was a peacekeeper and mediator in the frozen conflicts. At the same time, it was strengthening the partnership with the regions de facto outside Georgian government control. Meanwhile, the collective West was busy elsewhere with the integration of Central and Eastern Europe and dealing with the wars in the former Yugoslavia. From the West's perspective, Georgia looked like a small, remote, war-torn country with few opportunities.

By 2002, Georgia's foreign policy was remarkably different. Georgia had established a close partnership with the United States and become one of the world's top recipients of US aid per capita. It even had US military instructors on its territory to train and equip Georgian soldiers. Georgia had become a strategic transit country for energy and trade, bypassing Russia, and had joined the World Trade Organization and the Council of Europe, and signed partnership agreements with the European Union. Moreover, Georgia had left the CST (but remained in the CIS without major commitments) and denied Russia's request to operate against Chechen militias on Georgian territory. Russian border guards had been removed from Georgian territory and, with the help of the United States, Shevardnadze had signed agreements on the withdrawal of several Russian military bases in Georgia. Finally, in 2002, having mentioned it for a few years, Shevardnadze formally declared Georgia's intention to seek NATO membership. While Russia's influence over Abkhazia and South Ossetia remained, Georgia had by this point clearly switched to a

pro-West orientation. Given that Georgia in 1993–94 was a small post-Soviet state on the brink of collapse, dominated by Moscow and located far away from the United States and Western Europe: How can this turn to the West be explained? This chapter explores and answers this question.

It is argued that the structure of Georgia's political arena as a legacy of the transition to independence was closer to a single than a multicenter political arena. As a result, pro-Russian Georgian forces played a limited direct role in Georgian politics, especially after 1997. Aslan Abashidze in Ajaria was an exception but was too weak to seriously challenge Shevardnadze and the ruling party. Taken together, the structure of the political arena limited the resistance to Georgia pursuing a foreign policy away from Russia. Furthermore, it is argued that the legacy of Georgia's traumatic transition to independence produced experiences, lessons and memories for Georgia's leadership that made the status quo of close ties with and dominance by Russia increasingly untenable. These traumatic experiences also shaped the foreign policy narrative in relation to Russia and the West.

Georgia's political arena: toward a single center

After the turbulent first years of independence, Georgia's political arena stabilized after 1995. Eduard Shevardnadze and loyal ministers and allies in the Georgian Parliament gradually consolidated political power. Although criticized for Georgia's defeat in the war against Abkhazia and for far-reaching compromises with Russia in 1993–94, Shevardnadze remained Georgia's most influential politician. With his long political experience and international contacts, Shevardnadze presented himself as the person who could lead Georgia out of chaos and toward stability (Mitchell, 2009b). The Georgian people seemed to agree. Shevardnadze won the 1995 presidential election with 77 percent of the votes against his main rival, Jumber Patiashvili, the former chair of Georgia's Communist Party. Patiashvili, who campaigned on Soviet nostalgia, had been in power during the killing of protesters in Tbilisi on April 9, 1989, which is likely to have contributed to low voter support (Levine, 1995). Shevardnadze's victory made it possible to pay more attention to domestic and foreign policy beyond crisis management. Georgia's constitution, adopted the same year, gave the president wide-ranging powers. A five percent electoral threshold in the Georgian Parliament, raised to seven percent a few years later, further strengthened Shevardnadze's position. Only three parties passed the threshold in the 1995 parliamentary election – and Shevardnadze's party, the Union of Citizens of Georgia (CUG), became dominant (Wheatley, 2005).[59]

[59] Some marginal additional parties and individuals won seats in single-seat constituencies but with very limited impact on Georgian politics.

The CUG was Shevardnadze's creation in collaboration with the Green Party. The party had several factions, which made it possible for him to balance factions against each other (Nilsson, 2009). Zurab Zhvania, the leader of one influential faction, became Chair of the parliament in 1995 and led the so-called young reformers group of young politicians, many of whom were fluent in English and educated in the West (see more in Chapter 7). Shevardnadze encouraged the inclusion of a younger generation to balance other factions. In the words of Giorgi Baramidze, affiliated with Zhvania, and a deputy to Shevardnadze:

> This Citizens Union was an eclectic unity. It was like a big chunk of retrogrades, and young people who tried to fight the retrogrades and tried to push them out of Georgian politics. We said to Shevardnadze that these [older] guys are corrupt, and in order for Georgia to succeed, we need to get rid of these guys.[60]

Thus, Shevardnadze and Zhvania led the CUG, but it also included people from the liberal intelligentsia, Tbilisi's shadow economic elite and conservative parts of the *nomenklatura* (Wheatley, 2005).

The weakening of alternative power centers

While Shevardnadze and his allies were the most influential, alternative political forces also existed. Some had close ties to Moscow and could potentially seek to influence Georgia's foreign policy to remain within Russia's orbit. The most obvious individuals were ministers appointed more or less on the Kremlin's demand as a result of Russia's coercive diplomacy when Georgia was on the brink of collapse. Igor Giorgadze, Georgia's minister of state security (1993–1995), for example, had been a KGB officer and advocated close Georgia-Russia relations. Vardiko Nadibaidze, Georgia's minister of defense (1994–1998), was an openly pro-Russian Soviet general with Georgian origins who had served in the Russian army in Georgia until 1994. He was a friend of Pavel Grachev, Russia's minister of defense. As Nadibaidze's successor, Davit Tevzadze, noted, Nadibaidze "was appointed as minister after the [Georgia-Abkhazia] war, under Russian pressure. He served here in the main headquarters of the Russian base in Tbilisi. He was taken from there as a minister to us".[61] The third Russian nominee, Shota Kviraia, a former KGB officer, became minister of the interior and replaced Giorgadze as minister of state security in 1995 (Gordadze, 2009, p. 36). Initially, having Russia-appointed ministers in control of the security, defense and interior ministries limited Georgia's ability to formulate foreign and security policy independent of Moscow. These three ministers, however, were not able to consolidate

[60] Interview, Giorgi Baramidze, 2019.
[61] Interview, David Tevzadze, 2019.

strong political-economic networks and were outmaneuvered within a few years. On 29 August 1995, a car bomb exploded close to Shevardnadze on his way to sign the new constitution. Shevardnadze survived, and Giorgadze, the main suspect, resigned and escaped to Moscow. Kviraia resigned in 1997 after a wiretapping scandal and Nadibaidze resigned a year later, just months after another failed assassination attempt on Shevardnadze (Kinzer, 1998).

Moreover, with an increasingly functioning government, Shevardnadze and his allies managed to outmaneuver paramilitary leaders such as Tengiz Kitovani and Jaba Ioseliani, who had been influential during the transition to independence (see Chapter 4). After the assassination attempt in 1995, the Shevardnadze government took advantage of the situation to marginalize Mkhedrioni, and arrested Ioseliani. By then, Kitovani was already under arrest after the Georgian authorities stopped him, allegedly on his way together with 700 armed men to try to recapture Abkhazia (Wheatley, 2005, pp. 87–97). In this way, Shevardnadze neutralized the leaders who had invited him back to Georgia but who had also stood in the way of him consolidating power.

The regional dimension of Georgia's political arena

As a result of the formative period and its loss of territory, Georgia's political arena post-1995 had less direct regional influence than Ukraine's (as discussed in Chapter 6). Ajaria in western Georgia was an important exception. Ajaria's leader, Aslan Abashidze, a former high-ranking Communist Party functionary, was born into a noble family that had ruled the region for long periods historically. Abashidze used the turbulence of Georgia's transition to take control of the region and rule it in a feudal style. Government positions in Ajaria were controlled by Abashidze's clan network based around his own family (K. Martin, 2012). By controlling parts of Georgia's border with Turkey and the Batumi port, Abashidze collected revenues, established an independent economic base and refused to contribute to the Georgian state budget (Mitchell, 2009b).[62] Abashidze set up his own militia of between 500 and 1000 men, armed vehicles, coastal patrol vessels and helicopters, led by a retired Russian Major General (K. Martin, 2012).

Abashidze reportedly spoke better Russian than Georgian, and had close links to high-ranking figures in Russia, such as Mayor of Moscow Yury Luzhkov and Defense Minister Grachev. He received additional protection from a Russian military base outside Batumi (Civil Georgia, 2002). Abashidze often invited international diplomats to his home, making him a self-appointed international representative of Georgia's foreign relations. Abashidze had his own political agenda and preferred close ties with Russia, as a senior Georgian diplomat described:

[62] Interview, Valeri Chechelashvili, 2019.

> [Abashidze] was saying that Russia is a very important partner, a lot of investments are coming… the Russian army is a component of stability, he was saying things like that. He was such a controversial person, and mainly, of course, there was a lot of influence from Russia, and his Russian friends, and his philosophy was very close to this Russian corrupt bureaucracy, oligarch philosophy. They were in the same tune, his Russian friends and himself.[63]

Abashidze had a complex relationship with the Shevardnadze government and played a multifaceted role in Georgian politics until 2004. Abashidze ensured that Ajaria did not plan to secede from Georgia. At the same time, he did not visit Tbilisi, and Georgians had to go through a passport check and get a "visa" at the administrative boundary line to visit the region (Civil Georgia, 2002). Unlike the leaders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Abashidze intervened directly in Georgian politics. He challenged the CUG several times and used his position to pressure Shevardnadze to accept deals that benefited the Ajarian strongman (Mitchell, 2009b). His ties to Moscow's elite, economic resources, military protection and political control of a strategically located region allowed him, to some extent, to influence Georgian politics.

Moreover, Abashidze's party, the Democratic Union for Revival, became an alternative for conservative politicians dissatisfied with Shevardnadze and the young reformers. Notably, Abashidze's Revival Bloc, supported by the Communist Party's Patiashvili, became the CUG's main challenger in the 1999 parliamentary elections, although the CUG won a clear majority of 132 of the 235 seats, compared to the Revival Bloc's 59 seats (CSCE, 1999). In the 2000 presidential election, Abashidze declared he would participate but suddenly withdrew his candidacy after gaining concessions from Shevardnadze (Wheatley, 2005). Shevardnadze was re-elected president with 76 percent of the votes. This shows how the opposition led by Abashidze, at times in cooperation with the communists, existed in Georgia. However, he remained too isolated to build strong opposition to Shevardnadze. Instead, Abashidze mostly worked through informal deals with the Georgian president.

Other regionally based groups were also present, such as the Armenians in Javakheti (part of the Samtskhe-Javakheti administrative region). The Armenians did not have autonomous status within the USSR, but they were a relatively significant geographically concentrated minority and an Armenian nationalist umbrella organization, *Javakhk*, was created in Georgia in the early 1990s (Nodia, 2005). Furthermore, Russia's 62nd military base (the region's largest employer) was located outside Javakheti's main city, Akhalkalaki. Thus, in theory, Javakheti could have become a problem for the Georgian government. In the end, however, neither the Armenian nor the Russian government encouraged instability or separatism in Javakheti. Moreover, Shevardnadze had divided Georgia into nine regions (*mkharebi*) and managed patron-client relations through his appointed governors (*rtsmunebuli*) (Berglund &

[63] Interview, Valeri Chechelashvili, 2019.

Blauvelt, 2016, p. 28) and *Javakhk* was split apart as a result. Javakheti became isolated and did not have substantial influence in Georgian politics, a fate it shared with Georgia's Azerbaijani minority (Siroky, 2016). Moreover, the Zviadists, based in Samegrelo in western Georgia, had been defeated in 1993 and were not a powerful political force, although they continued to play a limited role, for example, in guerrilla warfare against Abkhazia.[64]

Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia: drifting apart

As discussed in Chapter 4, the Abkhazians and Ossetians, backed by their allies, won their respective wars against Georgia in the early 1990s and continued to cultivate a partnership with Russia, effectively remaining outside Georgian government control. Abkhazia and South Ossetia were not internationally recognized but emerged as small state-like entities. Based on the institutions inherited from the USSR, Abkhazia adopted a constitution in 1994 and had its own parliament, president (Vladislav Ardzinba), flag and national anthem, as well as Abkhazian and Russian as official state languages (Hewitt, 2013, p. 162). South Ossetia also had its own constitution, a president (Lyudvig Chibirov), and a parliament. Russian remained the region's second language and the Russian rouble the currency (German & Bloch, 2006). Abkhazia and South Ossetia held negotiations with Georgia throughout the 1990s. Talks between Georgia and Abkhazia were held in a context of deep distrust and without major breakthroughs in 1997–1999. Ardzinba suggested a confederation with Georgia based on two equal states, or Abkhazian independence. These options, however, required international recognition of Abkhazia, which was not on the agenda for Georgia or the international community (Hewitt, 2013). Georgian refugees' right to return to Abkhazia was also a sensitive issue. A minority of around 50,000 returned to Gali in southern Abkhazia after the war, but the Abkhazian government did not allow all ethnic Georgians to return or to vote, since it might shift the ethnic balance. After a violent clash between the White Legion, a Georgian guerilla group, and Abkhazian forces in 1998, 20,000–30,000 recently returned Georgian refugees were again pushed out from Abkhazia. From Georgia's perspective this was seen as an act of ethnic cleansing (Cornell, 2001; Lynch, 2004). In 1999, Ardzinba announced that negotiations had led nowhere and, after a referendum, Abkhazia declared itself formally independent, which made any dialogue even more difficult.

Relations between Georgia and South Ossetia were comparatively calm after the end of the conflict in 1992 and no significant violence was reported in 1993–2003. Georgian-Ossetian negotiations took place resulting in the so-called Boden agreement, signed in 2000. In 2001, however, Eduard Kokoity, a wrestler and businessman with close ties to the Russian security service,

[64] Other smaller areas, such as the Pankisi Gorge, were outside Georgian government control until the early 2000s but could not be classified as alternative centers of power as the concept is defined in this dissertation.

replaced the more moderate Chibirov as South Ossetia's president (Toal, 2017, p. 140). Kokoity used his connections in Moscow to invite former Russian KGB officers to join the government. He took a tougher line against Georgia, advocated a union with North Ossetia, and for South Ossetia's integration with Russia (Lynch, 2004, p. 31). Untaxed goods from Russia flowed through the Roki tunnel into South Ossetia and further into Georgian-controlled territory. Kokoity even set up a party modeled on Vladimir Putin's United Russia Party with the slogan "Unity – our Road to Russia!" (Toal, 2017, p. 139). He refused to negotiate with Shevardnadze and accused the Georgian president of being one of "the main criminals guilty of genocide against the Ossetians" (BBC Monitoring, 2002b). The international community did not support Kokoity's positions but the de facto reintegration of South Ossetia into Georgia became even more difficult.

Russia's role in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

After the wars, Russia seemed at first to be balancing the interests of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russian peacekeepers protected Abkhazia from Georgian nationalist groups but also approved CIS economic sanctions against Abkhazia, which were implemented in 1996. Already by 1999, however, Russia had reopened its trade and roads to Abkhazia – reportedly, most of the goods on the Abkhazian market, including gasoline, came from Russia – and Abkhazia remained in the rouble zone (Lynch, 2004). From 2000, Russia's new president, Vladimir Putin, showed increasing support for Abkhazia and South Ossetia (De Waal, 2019, p. 200). In 2002, the railroad between Sochi and Sukhumi was reopened, which increased Russian tourism and strengthened Russia-Abkhazia ties. The Russian Government introduced visas for Georgian citizens but residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia could travel to Russia without a visa. Moreover, Russia's new citizenship law of 2002 changed the process of how to become a Russian citizen. As a result, many residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia acquired Russian passports and became Russian citizens, which ended their international isolation.[65] According to a 2005 report, 84 percent of the people living in Abkhazia had a Russian passport and 70 percent of the elderly were receiving Russian pensions (AFP, 2005).

While the Abkhazian leadership wanted independence, they linked Russian citizenship to security. Valery Arshba, then vice president of Abkhazia (and himself a Russian citizen), noted, "The president of the Russian Federation is the guarantor of protection of the citizens of the Russian Federation, no matter where they live….Political protection implies military protection" (Chivers,

[65] The Georgian government argued that people in Abkhazia and South Ossetia should use Georgian passports since, according to the international community, the regions were part of Georgia.

2004). The Abkhazian leadership wanted a continued Russian military presence to keep Abkhazia separate from Georgia. As Abkhazia's de facto foreign minister put it: "The CIS peacekeeping forces have de facto established a state border" (Cited in Lynch, 2004, p. 62). In South Ossetia, as mentioned above, Russian security officials were integrated into South Ossetia's leadership. In 2004, a senior Ossetian official claimed that almost 90 percent of all Ossetians in South Ossetia had become Russian citizens (International Crisis Group, 2004, p. 7). Russia also provided salaries and pensions for many Ossetians.

While *de jure* part of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, supported by Russia, increasingly drifted apart from the rest of Georgia. This meant that Georgia's most "pro-Russian" regions did not participate actively in Georgian politics. As discussed below and in Chapter 7, this legacy – the loss of the two regions and how Georgian elites perceived Russia's role in this process – would have major implications for Georgia's foreign policy for decades to come.

To sum up, after the transition to independence, Georgia was closer to a single than a multicenter political arena. Beyond Ajaria, no significant alternative centers of power with close links to Russia participated in Georgian politics. Pro-Russian Georgian ministers failed to establish strong independent networks and were replaced by Shevardnadze loyalists. As a legacy of the transition to independence, Georgia's most Russia-friendly regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, did not participate in Georgian politics. Taken together, the structure of the political arena limited resistance within Georgia to pursuit of a separate foreign policy from Russia. The next section explores the motivations behind Georgia's foreign policy orientation.

Georgia's foreign policy: memories, lessons and motivations

What motivated Georgia to turn away from Russia in the second half of the 1990s? The following sections explore how traumatic and humiliating experiences during Georgia's transition to independence and its aftermath provided lessons and understandings for Georgian decision makers that would guide Georgia's foreign policy. The interpretation of these experiences helps to explain how a shift away from Russia to a pro-western foreign policy became possible, and how it even became perceived as necessary. The main lesson was that the status quo would result in continued negative experiences and pain for Georgia, involving Russian dominance, little freedom and continuing territorial fragmentation. A dominant narrative took form among Georgia's political elite that Russia had exploited Georgia's weakness in the early 1990s in humiliating ways, and that Moscow had no interest in restoring Georgia's territorial integrity or rebuilding the state. Georgia's political elite started to

identify Russia's political and military elite as a radically different other and to perceive Georgia as a victim of Moscow's post-imperial behavior. Georgia's leadership was also highly sensitive to issues related to territorial integrity and accused Russian officials of showing disrespect and of breaking agreements.

From high expectations to a dark reality

As discussed in Chapter 4, Georgia's formative period included both successes and failures. On the one hand, Georgian independence from the Soviet Union was a triumph according to most (ethnic) Georgians. On the other hand, significant minorities inside Georgia did not share the euphoria, which contributed to conflicts and separatism. Even ethnic Georgians fought each other in the contest for political power. Partly because of the conflicts, Georgia experienced economic collapse and widespread poverty, failing infrastructure, bad roads and constant electricity blackouts. Georgia was widely described as on the brink of becoming a failed state (World Bank, 2012). Georgians' high expectations of what independence would bring had clearly not been met. Georgia's formative experience, often portrayed as "the times of troubles" (*areuloba*) (Berglund & Blauvelt, 2016, p. 24), had a deep impact on Georgia's foreign policy elite. In interviews with this author, key decision makers underlined the great difficulties Georgia faced during this period and how this influenced Georgia's foreign policy.[66] The overall understanding among key figures in Shevardnadze's team is well captured by a member of the National Security Council:

> You know the Georgian story of independence started in a very traumatic way in the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s if you compare it with relevant stories of many other Soviet republics. Because it started for example with [the] terrible bloodshed in the capital of Georgia, 9 April of 1989, which converted Georgian society in one day to extremely anti-Kremlin and pro-independent....Then the beginning of our real political independence started with the terrible wars, first in South Ossetia, the Tskhinvali region. Then in Abkhazia, with direct involvement of [the] Russian Federation, [and] ended with the factual loss of these territories...so these particular realities of course make Georgia much more radical politically, rather than other, so to say, colleagues from the Soviet club.[67]

This quote represents a common view held among Georgian politicians, including President Shevardnadze and his advisors.

[66] Interviews, Archil Gegeshidze, 2019; Irakli Menagarishvili, 2019; Nikoloz Vashakidze, 2019.
[67] Interview, Nikoloz Vashakidze, 2019.

Russia takes advantage of Georgia's vulnerability

An important theme brought up in my interviews with key decision makers and foreign policy advisors in Shevardnadze's government was that Russia had taken advantage of Georgia's weakness during the transition period.

As a result of the Georgian government's vulnerability in 1993, faced with two conflicts simultaneously and the fragmentation of the country, Shevardnadze had no choice but to negotiate with Russia. To receive Russian help, however, Shevardnadze had to join the CIS and its military component, the CST. Georgia had previously declined and Georgian decision makers portrayed joining the CIS as a Russian ultimatum. According to a US diplomatic cable, Shevardnadze recounted a meeting in the Russian city of Adler with Russia's Minister of Defense, at which Grachev had "shown him [Shevardnadze] a map of Georgia and explained the geographic consequences of Georgia's refusal to join the CIS" (SDC, 1994b). Given Russia's support for Abkhazia earlier in the war (an interpretation shared by most Georgians), Georgia's foreign policy elite did not take demands lightly that it must join the CIS to receive Russian help. As the then foreign minister, Irakli Menagarishvili, put it:

> Georgia felt fully [under] Russian control against our wishes and our desires. Georgia was forced to join the CIS… at that time it was perceived as a real successor of the Soviet Union. Georgia was forced to join the Collective Security Treaty, which was more fearsome.
>
> [The Russian leadership] clearly dictated it to Shevardnadze and the parliament at that time without any shame, without any formality…Georgian people had been deprived their rights… they were forced to follow what was prompted from Moscow. Russian military bases were deployed on these territories…so it was really [a] terrible situation.[68]

Russian demands to appoint "Moscow-friendly" politicians in the Georgian government, as discussed above, also provoked Georgian officials. Shevardnadze's chief foreign policy advisor and his foreign minister described their experiences in the following way:

> So Russia forced Shevardnadze to appoint [a] minister of defense [and] of security, their loyal guys. They gave Shevardnadze [an] ultimatum, you have to appoint this guy, so he had to appoint them.[69]

> The key positions in the state apparatus mainly related with security and so on became kept by persons so-called recommended by Moscow, very Soviet …they [the Russian government] clearly dictated it to Shevardnadze and the parliament at that time.[70]

[68] Interview, Irakli Menagarishvili, 2019.
[69] Interview, Archil Gegeshidze, 2019.
[70] Interview, Irakli Menagarishvili, 2019.

In a conversation with a US diplomat, Shevardnadze said of one "Russian nominee" (Nadibaidze), "the only thing Georgian about him is his name" (SDC, 1994b). When the nomination was approved, the Georgian Army immediately received the Russian ammunition it had asked for. As mentioned above, the "Russian-approved" ministers were fired within a few years. Nonetheless, Russia's approach to exploiting Georgia's weakness shaped an understanding within Georgia's leadership that Russia could not be trusted – this was not a partnership built on equality and mutual respect.

In 1994, the Georgian government felt pressured to re-enter the Russian ruble zone to improve Georgia's disastrous economy. After a meeting with Shevardnadze in 1994, the US ambassador wrote in a classified report:

> Shevardnadze predicted that such a policy will be implemented, and when it is, Georgia will truly have lost its sovereignty. Georgia will end up as a "branch" of Russia. "I may not be the one to take the decision", he said, "but somebody will do it". Once in the ruble zone, all decision-making will be in Russia's hands again. Georgia will be unable to make decisions on the funding of arts, or science, and the army will evolve just as Russia wants (SDC, 1994b).

The media reported that Russian officials wanted a veto on the selection of Georgia's minister of finance and the vice president of Georgia's national bank, and the right to influence Georgia's state budget. A year later, Georgia decided to establish its own currency (the *lari*), but Russian pressure contributed to skepticism on the Georgian side about the Kremlin's intentions (BBC Monitoring, 1994). Georgian politicians viewed Russia as behaving like an imperial power. Georgia's head of the parliamentary defense committee, after returning from a visit to Moscow, noted that: "I was very upset to find that their attitude toward us is openly aggressive. They told me quite directly, 'Do what we say, and then you will have no problems'. They want us to behave like a colony" (Kinzer, 1998). Taken together, such behavior added up to an understanding of Georgian subordination and Moscow's humiliating behavior toward its smaller neighbor.

Disappointment regarding Russian–Georgian agreements

Another legacy of the formative period was an understanding that emerged within Georgia's foreign policy elite of Russia's unwillingness to honor agreements signed with the Georgian government. In February 1994, Yeltsin visited Tbilisi to sign a "Friendship, Good Neighborly Relations and Cooperation Treaty" with Georgia.[71] As mentioned above, it was signed at a time when Georgia was under heavy pressure and included an agreement on joint Georgian-Russian patrols of Georgia's borders. In 1995, Georgia and Russia signed

[71] The visit was highly unusual. Russian presidents rarely visited Georgia after 1991. Most meetings at the highest level between Russian and Georgian heads of state have taken place in Russia or at CIS summits.

a military treaty allowing a Russian military presence in Georgia for 25 years. The agreement included four Russian military bases, at Vaziani outside Tbilisi, in Akhalkalaki, in Gudauta in Abkhazi and in Batumi. Agreements also secured Russia's role as a peacekeeper and mediator in Georgia's conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Gordadze, 2009). Russia promised to help restore Georgia's territorial integrity and to rebuild the Georgian Army. In reality, these agreements were never ratified or fully implemented. The Russian Duma, for example, did not ratify the Friendship Agreement as it wanted to resolve the conflicts first and avoid sending weapons to Georgia. From a Georgian perspective, Russia never fulfilled its obligation to help overcome Georgia's trauma, to respect Georgia's territorial integrity build up the military or help to resolve the conflicts (Devdariani, 2005). As a senior official who worked under both President Shevardnadze and his successor Mikhail Saakashvili described it:

> We have negotiated and signed a lot of very good agreements with Russia, but they have never worked. Because they betrayed them, and it later turned out that they, from the very beginning, did not have any idea of keeping these agreements. And this historic experience, our experience with Russia, I mean, it demonstrated very well that Russia is not a reliable partner.[72]

Shevardnadze repeatedly talked about Russia's failure to fulfill agreements: "Why have signs of difficulties in relations between Russia and Georgia appeared recently", he asked rhetorically, "because disillusionment has set in. The Russian leaders, and Russia as a whole, have certain obligations" (Shevardnadze, 1997). Although the Georgian side did not ratify several of these agreements either, most of the blame for the failed agreements was put on Russia.

Understandings of Russia's involvement in Abkhazia and South Ossetia

Russia's role in Abkhazia, and to a lesser extent in South Ossetia, was arguably the single most important lesson that contributed to Georgia's shift away from Moscow in the late 1990s. Influential members of Georgia's leadership perceived the Russian government to be uninterested in resolving the conflicts, and that the Kremlin was deliberately postponing conflict resolution to maintain strategic influence over Georgia. As expressed by Shevardnadze's foreign minister:

> It had become clear very soon after 1995, when we started watching the developments around us from our own perspective that Russia was not prepared to make any active steps towards restoring our territorial integrity. The ruling elite of Russia was viewing these conflicts and the situation there as tools to keep Georgia and the South Caucasus under control.[73]

[72] Interview, Valeri Chechelashvili, 2019.
[73] Interview, Irakli Menagarishvili, 2019.

Shevardnadze's foreign policy advisor held a similar view: "Russia formally was called a facilitator, mediator, but in fact sometimes especially in the early years seemingly was in favor of Georgian governments but starting from 1995 when [Yevgeny] Primakov replaced [Andrei] Kozyrev…Russia began to openly side with Abkhazia and South Ossetia".[74]

During Shevardnadze's time as president, he and his ministers constantly criticized the Russian government for not doing enough to help Georgia restore its territorial integrity. Georgia also questioned the role of the CIS, since the organization failed to implement resolutions related to the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict. The lack of results to resolve the conflicts was the main reason why Georgia left the CST in 1999 and refused to join the more institutionalized Russia-led military alliance, the CSTO (BBC Monitoring, 1999).

Georgia's focus on Russian inaction clearly left little room for understanding the positions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Nonetheless, the Georgian view of Russia's lack of interest in helping Georgia to overcome its traumatic formative period contributed to Georgia's foreign policy shift away from Russia. As noted in the theory chapter, a dramatic shift in foreign policy often follows from an insight that the status quo would result in continuing painful losses.

Georgia's quest to become a modern functioning state

The transition to independence had left the Georgian state in a miserable condition. In 1994, Georgia had no functioning army, few border patrols and no reliable police force to maintain order. Moreover, Georgia's reliance on Russian border guards and the need to accept Russian military bases on its territory showed that Georgia did not live up to the Weberian definition of the state. Shevardnadze expressed these realities when he explained the concessions made to Russia in early 1994:

> Mainly Russian Border Troops are guarding the border at present. Our Border Troops are not able to guard the border independently, unfortunately….No country can be happy in allowing other countries' troops to enter its own territory. Today we possess nothing of our own. We have no armaments, no heavy equipment, no medium or light equipment, no ammunition, nothing. We failed to get arms even for the police from anywhere.
>
> Let us think. If a country could exist without an army, we would not take that decision. But an army is apparently a necessity. If a country could exist without police we would request the Russians to quit and no talks about any bases would take place (Shevardnadze, 1994).

Georgia's need to rely on its former imperial master to perform rudimentary state functions and to accept Russian military bases was painful, and in stark contrast to the euphoria of independence a few years earlier. This humiliating

[74] Interview, Archil Gegeshidze, 2019.

experience strengthened the commitment among Georgian politicians to rebuild the Georgian state with the help of partners other than Russia (discussed in more detail in Chapter 7). Moreover, Georgian decision makers developed a hypersensitivity to issues related to territorial integrity and control of its borders. Perhaps the clearest example in Shevardnadze's presidency was during Russia's second war against Chechnya in 1999 when the Russian government asked to use Georgian territory for military operations. Shevardnadze declined, which resulted in a major diplomatic crisis between Georgia and Russia.[75] To stand up for territorial integrity became an important act for the Georgian leadership.

Personal experiences and humiliation

As discussed in Chapter 2, trauma storylines and narratives are based on shared lessons and experiences. However, these are also experienced by influential decision makers. Personal stories connect to broader macro narratives. Such events are of particular importance for a country's international orientation when experienced first-hand by people responsible for foreign affairs.

Key officials in Georgia's foreign policy elite experienced the violent years of the early 1990s and had personal memories that connected to broader shared understandings within Georgia. President Shevardnadze is perhaps the most vivid example. Dressed in combat uniform, he led Georgian troops during the later stages of the war against Abkhazia and was rescued from the conflict zone at the last minute during Georgia's humiliating defeat in Sukhumi in late 1993. Just after he returned to Tbilisi, Shevardnadze met the press: "The loss of Sukhumi is a great moral and political blow... we have been brought to our knees". He frankly expressed that he felt betrayed by the Russian leadership for not managing the earlier agreed ceasefire and added: "The plan to occupy Sukhumi was masterminded at Russian headquarters" (Hiltzik, 1993). This statement related to what would become part of a dominant narrative in Georgia. Russia had been first and foremost responsible for Georgia's failures in the wars and Georgia was a victim of outside forces, in this case the former imperial master.

In a lengthy interview with the *New York Times*, Shevardnadze described the daunting task he had accepted: "When I returned to Georgia, it was like committing suicide. I knew I was jumping into a cauldron….It was my duty to go home and save my country. What else could I do?" He also commented on the loss of the war in Abkhazia, "If I had died in Sukhumi… at least, it would have been an honorable end" (Sebag, 1993).

While careful not to blame Yeltsin personally, Shevardnadze, known for his drastic metaphors, linked the loss of Abkhazia to Russia's wish to bring

[75] This crisis was confirmed in an interview made by this author with Kenneth Yalowitz (2019), the US Ambassador to Georgia, 1998-2001.

Georgia into medieval darkness: "hard-liners still have their forces on the periphery of Russia. Those who play games with the forces of darkness in Moscow seem to be trying to drag Georgia back into medieval darkness". He also underlined his personal responsibility, having trusted Russian decision makers: "I am responsible for absolutely everything, I am responsible for having trusted Russia" (Sebag, 1993). As mentioned above, Shevardnadze survived several assassination attempts. Shevardnadze's chief foreign policy advisor claims the fact that the main suspect for the attempt in 1995, Giorgadze, was later able to live openly in Moscow contributed to Shevardnadze's decision to gradually shift Georgia's foreign policy away from Russia:[76]

> So I think the last point was the assassination attempt in 1995 when Shevardnadze firmly decided that nothing promising was to be expected from Russia. When the assassination attempt happened in 1995, he decided that it has to be a very firm decision to shift slowly the foreign policy orientation towards [the] West, to seek guarantees of security in the West.[77]

In media interviews, Shevardnadze did not hide his frustration with the Russian government's failure to arrest and deport Giorgadze to Georgia. The belief that Russian hardliners and the military establishment wanted Shevardnadze to fail, or even die, circulated in Georgia in the 1990s and came up in my interviews with the Georgian foreign policy elite. Shevardnadze himself talked about "reactionary forces" in Russia (Sebag, 1993).

Petre Mamradze, one of the president's closest advisors, noted that Shevardnadze believed Russian hardliners wanted revenge for the loss of Moscow's influence after 1991: "Shevardnadze was often saying that you know these generals in Russia and most of the politicians they dream about revenge, they dream about the restoration of the USSR."[78] Although the assassination attempts were not a complete explanation for Georgia's shift to a more pro-West orientation, the personal experiences of the president added to the overall Georgian narrative that Russia was a radically different other.

Another example was David Tevzadze, Georgia's defense minister in 1998–2004, who increased Georgia's military cooperation with the United States. He had not served in the Soviet Army but joined and led the Georgian paramilitary group *Orbi* in the Georgian war against Abkhazia (Darchiashvili & Jones, 2020).[79] His own experience of fighting and losing a war with Russian involvement clearly affected his understanding of Georgia's foreign and security policy:

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[76] Interview, Petre Mamradze, 2019. Mamradze was head of the state chancellery and one of Shevardnadze's most trusted advisors. He was also in the car during the 1995 assassination attempt and confirms this view.
[77] Interview, Archil Gegeshidze 2019.
[78] Interview, Petre Mamradze, 2019.
[79] Interview, David Tevzadze, 2019.

> Georgians at the time saw that independence maybe could be defended only by strong foreign support… and that support could be provided by NATO. That is why it was important; to retain independence, to defend it, and to stay as a nation. It was perceived at the time that strong foreign support was necessary for that, and that support could be provided by NATO. So, when Russia took these steps to abolish our independence, or abolish our country, it was natural to find a way to look for a kind of shield.[80]

Irakli Menagarishvili, Shevardnadze's foreign minister (1995–2003), served as deputy prime minister and minister of public health during the conflicts and witnessed these painful times first-hand:

> The very beginning of our development in [the] early 1990s unfortunately brought a lot of pain to Georgians and to Georgian society… these first years were very destructive. I can stress that after the war in Abkhazia was lost, huge numbers of ethnic Georgians were expelled from Abkhazia, almost [Georgia's] entire statehood had failed and collapsed. Georgia felt under total control of [the] Russians, it was actually the goal of the forces acting in that direction.[81]

To sum up, this section has explored themes, memories and understandings of Russia within Georgia's political elite. The relationship was perceived as unequal and characterized by Russian imperial ambitions and dominance. This understanding, a legacy from the formative period, strengthened the determination of the Shevardnadze government to change Georgia's foreign policy and break Russia's strong influence. A senior Georgian diplomat who served as ambassador to NATO and later as ambassador to Russia viewed Shevardnadze's foreign policy shift mainly as a result of Georgia's negative experience with Russia:

> He changed [Georgia's foreign policy] because I think the main reason was Russia's negative and destructive policy…and sometimes I used to say to my Russian colleagues that it was not about Georgia going to the West, it is about Russia pushing Georgia to the West.[82]

Hence, there was a clear understanding within Georgian foreign policy circles that the country had to move away from Russian dominance, even though this was a dangerous goal. The final part of this chapter deals with the Georgian leadership's approach to engaging with the West and the role played by lessons from the transition to independence.

[80] Interview, David Tevzadze, 2019.
[81] Interview, Irakli Menagarishvili, 2019.
[82] Interview, Zurab Abashidze, 2019.

Engaging the West: shaping a narrative of Georgia's importance

Following the painful formative years of state fragmentation and Russian dominance, Georgia's political leadership concluded that to achieve security and reestablish statehood, Georgia needed to engage with the West, and in particular the United States. As Zurab Zhvania, then Chair of the parliament noted, foreign policy "is one of the instruments that secures our sovereignty, our independence" (Zhvania, 2009, p. 122). Shevardnadze had already paid a visit to President Clinton in Washington, DC in 1994 but the relationship grew stronger after the assassination attempt in 1995. As described by his advisors, the approach was to almost covertly build ties with Washington and European capitals.[83] A major lesson from the transition to independence was that Georgian leaders had overestimated the country's reputation, which writer John Steinbeck had called a "magical place", and underestimated the importance of justification (C. King, 2001). Why was Georgia worthy of support? What could it bring to the West? As Zhvania noted in a series of lectures for students in 2002–2003, Georgia had initially taken its value for granted, and this illusion had contributed to a disaster in the wars:

> To ensure its security, its sovereignty, what is especially important is not just how strong our army is, but mostly how well we can justify to the international community the necessity of our sovereignty and independence. When Shevardnadze was standing there in the disarmed Sukhumi on September 25th and 26th [1993] and kept sending telegrams to his personal foreign friends, they were telling him something like this in response: We are so sorry that you are being bombed ... And none of them made a single step to help. It was a time when the international community wasn't ready for this, when superpowers and the US, first of all, weren't ready for this (Zhvania, 2009, pp. 124, 140).

In 1994, when Shevardnadze was under heavy pressure from Russia, he met with the US ambassador in Tbilisi. According to the then-classified cable, Shevardnadze described how:

> He had written many leaders asking for their help and support….He had gone before NATO and made another futile plea to his old colleagues. He ended up alone in Abkhazia, where he literally got down on his knees to the Russians. The Russian response was Georgia's loss of Abkhazia and its membership in the CIS… Shevardnadze said that Georgia has no choice but to obey Russia… Georgia is in this situation because the West had no time or attention for the Caucasus (SDC, 1994b).

The main lesson for Shevardnadze and his advisors was the need to build a convincing case for why the West should help and support Georgia. Unlike most other post-Soviet leaders, Shevardnadze was well-known from his time as Soviet foreign minister, including for his role in bringing a peaceful end to

[83] Interview, Archil Gegeshidze, 2019.

the Cold War. Thus, he had a strong standing and an impressive high-level network in the West (Toal, 2017). As President Clinton's advisor to Russia and the newly independent states told this author: "I had a fondness for him [Shevardnadze], you know. He had an impossible way of bringing his country, Georgia, into the 21st century, and the Russians did everything they could to block him and get him out of power".[84]

Using three interconnected storylines, Georgia's leadership created a narrative emphasized in official declarations and in meetings behind closed doors with high-level western officials.[85] In several respects, these storylines resonated with the Georgian leadership's own understanding of its formative experiences but also connected with goals important to decision makers in the West (Toal, 2017).

The first and most important storyline was Georgia's right to freedom and territorial integrity, and its need for protection from Russia. According to this trope, Russian officials had an imperial mindset and were exploiting Georgia's vulnerability. The idea of Georgia as a victim of Russian imperial manipulation resonated particularly well with those US politicians who looked at the world through a Cold War prism. According to this narrative, Georgia was a captive nation, an underdog seeking freedom and sovereignty in contrast to Russian domination (Toal, 2017). US officials repeatedly declared their support for Georgia's territorial integrity and encouraged resolution of the conflicts. The US helped Georgia to establish its own border guards – Russian border patrols left the country in 1999 – and the US even trained Shevardnadze's personal security guards. In a meeting with Clinton, Shevardnadze (having presented a long list of problems with Russia) thanked the United States for making Georgia capable of protecting its own borders and added, "I have laid all this out so you can visualize what kind of neighbor we have. Without your support, we would have been swallowed", to which Clinton responded, "I am glad we have been able to work with you – not only on the security and sovereignty of Georgia, but also on your personal security" (White House, 1999). During the same meeting, Shevardnadze asked the US president for help in negotiating the withdrawal of Russia's military bases in Georgia. An agreement was signed at an OSCE meeting in Istanbul in late 1999. Russia promised to withdraw from the Vaziani base outside Tbilisi and from Gudauta in Abkhazia by July 2001, and to reduce its military presence and continue negotiations regarding the remaining bases in Batumi and Akhalkalaki.

Moreover, Georgia left the CST in 1999. Shevardnadze argued that the CST had been ineffective at resolving Georgia's conflicts and hinted he would instead "knock on NATO's door" for potential membership by 2005 (Jack &

[84] Interview, Strobe Talbott, 2020.
[85] For an illustration of these storylines, see the declassified notes from a meeting between Shevardnadze and Clinton in 1999 (White House, 1999).

Stern, 1999). In 2002, Georgia officially declared it would seek membership of NATO. Shevardnadze underlined that NATO membership would end Georgia's history of hardship: "NATO membership means security for Georgia. It means that we will have final security guarantees. Throughout our history, we have seen a lot of hardship, and I think that today the only right decision is to become a member of NATO" (Peuch, 2002). NATO's response was cautiously optimistic (see more in Chapter 7). Meanwhile, Russia's new president, Vladimir Putin, repeatedly threatened to enter Georgia to attack Chechen militias operating against Russia in the Pankisi Gorge, a Georgian mountain region outside of government control. Instead of Russian troops, Shevardnadze and US President George W Bush came up with a "Georgia Train and Equip Program" with the goal of providing training and equipment to Georgian soldiers.

> We started the process, it was in October 2001. Shevardnadze was visiting the United States and met with President Bush and that idea was put forward at that meeting. Then in December that year Mr Rumsfeld, the secretary of defense, visited Tbilisi and brought this outline, the idea, what to do, and so on. We agreed, he met Shevardnadze, the practical work on drafting papers and everything was started, and in February 2002 the first group of American special operation troops arrived in Tbilisi, and that project started, and since then the Americans are training the Georgian military.[86]

The idea of having US troops in Georgia undoubtedly irritated Russian officials but was accepted since it helped Georgia establish control over the Pankisi Gorge. Thus, Georgia's storyline of a small state seeking protection from a former imperial power contributed to a strong partnership with the United States. Georgia shifted to a pro-West foreign policy and also received substantial support. In return, Georgia supported the US military intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and the war against Iraq in 2003, unlike Russia which was highly critical of both (Toal, 2017).

The second storyline was Georgia as a strategic location and a transit route for energy and trade. The idea of establishing energy routes from the Caspian Sea, through Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, bypassing traditional rivals Russia and Iran, appealed to US and British politicians and companies. Shevardnadze presented the idea of a new "Silk Road" linking Europe and Asia through the Caucasus and got support from senior US officials such as his friend, former Secretary of State James Baker (1997). The Baku-Supsa pipeline opened in 1999 and a year later Georgia became a member of the WTO. A grander project, called the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, opened in 2005 in parallel with the South Gas Pipeline from Azerbaijan to Turkey through Georgia. These pipelines, promoted by political entrepreneurs such as Shevardnadze and his Azerbaijani counterpart Heydar Aliyev, provided Georgia with

[86] Interview, Irakli Menagarishvili, 2019.

transit fees and made Georgia less dependent on Russian oil and gas. In 2002, Zhvania reflected on the importance beyond economic gains, "What we gain from it is much more important….What happened is that now several congressmen and senators on Capitol Hill know, in detail, what is going on in Georgia." (Zhvania, 2009, p. 138). Clearly, this was a foreign policy lesson from Georgia's earlier failure to attract international attention during the painful transition to independence.

The third storyline was Georgia on a path of reform, a democratizing state, returning to Europe, most famously captured by Zhvania's declaration, "I am Georgian and therefore I am European" (De Waal, 2019, p. 10). This was the most ambiguous storyline: Georgia as an old Christian nation that could be seen as Europe's gate to Asia and the Middle East. Georgia signed a partnership agreement with the EU in 1996 and joined the Council of Europe in 1999. However, Georgia's strongest partnership at this time was with the United States – it became one of the world's largest recipients of US aid and democracy promotion per capita (Mitchell, 2009b). Moreover, the pace of reform in Georgia slowed in the late 1990s. Corruption, crime and poverty remained endemic, and electricity and water supplies functioned at times for only for a few hours a day. Government officials were even accused of coordinating smuggling networks from which they themselves benefited (Nodia, 2005). While Shevardnadze was not a dictator, Georgian elections did not meet democratic standards. The disconnect between rhetoric and reality led a prominent historian to write an article entitled Georgia's "Potemkin Democracy" (C. King, 2001). The failure to live up to Georgia's third storyline eventually resulted in the Rose Revolution (discussed in Chapter 7) and the end of Shevardnadze's political career. It also showed that Georgia's democratic ambitions and European values were not the main drivers of Georgia's pro-West foreign policy at the time.

Conclusion

Between 1995 and 2002, Georgia experienced a significant turn in foreign policy away from Russia and toward the West. As discussed in subsequent chapters, Georgia's pro-West orientation would continue for decades. This is puzzling because, at the outset, Georgia was weak and dominated by Russia, with few natural allies in the West. As shown in this chapter, as a legacy from the transition period, Georgia's political arena had few independent power centers. Abashidze in Ajaria was the notable exception, and he certainly played a role in Georgian politics, promoting close ties with Russia. However, with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the most pro-Russian regions, de facto outside Georgia, Abashidze was too weak to seriously challenge the CUG and the emerging Georgian consensus on the need for a pro-West foreign policy.

The chapter has also shown how experiences and lessons from Georgia's traumatic transition to independence and its aftermath played an important role in shaping an understanding of the need to turn away from Russia. From a realist point of view, the best option might have been to bandwagon with Russia or to declare neutrality, especially given Georgia's limited resources and lack of western security guarantees. However, the Georgian leadership perceived these as highly negative options. On balance, Georgia's shift to a pro-West orientation seems much less driven by Shevardnadze's aspirations for democracy, reform or a European identity than motivated by traumatic experiences during Georgia's transition to independence and its aftermath. This legacy shaped an understanding of Russian dominance, imperialism and disrespect. Strengthening ties with the West became an urgent priority and was seen as the only way for Georgia to restore its statehood and territorial integrity.

Moreover, lessons and memories are important for understanding not only the shift itself, but also how it was carried out. A major lesson from the early 1990s was that Georgia had underestimated the importance of explaining why the West should support it. With this in mind, Shevardnadze and his advisors worked hard to establish a narrative that resonated not only with Georgia's own experience, but also with ideas in the West. From Russia's perspective, Georgia's pro-West turn was clearly provocative, and the Kremlin increasingly used its leverage in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to punish Georgia's behavior. This, however, only confirmed the emerging understanding within Georgia that Russia wanted to keep Georgians weak and divided, which in turn strengthened the belief that a pro-West foreign policy was indeed necessary.

6. Ukraine's shifting foreign policy, 1995–2003

This chapter explores Ukraine's foreign policy after 1994, after the transition to independence and its immediate aftermath had ended. During Leonid Kuchma's two terms as president, Ukraine's foreign policy wavered between Russia and the West. As discussed in Chapter 4, Kuchma won the 1994 presidential election by advocating closer ties with Russia, especially economically, and by promoting policies that appealed mainly to voters in Ukraine's east and south, such as stronger status for the Russian language. The election in 1994 split Ukrainian voters along regional lines, and 80–90 percent of voters in Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea (and about two-thirds in the broader southeast) supported Kuchma (see Figure 6.1). Nearly 95 percent of the voters in several western regions supported the incumbent, Leonid Kravchuk, who emphasized Ukraine's sovereignty and closer ties with the West in his campaign (Erlanger, 1994).

As president, however, Kuchma's foreign policy wavered (D'Anieri, 2019b). Ukraine signed a Friendship Treaty with Russia in 1997 (see Chapter 4). Russia's leadership formally recognized Ukraine's territorial integrity and, in return, secured a continued military presence in Crimea. Article 6 of the agreement stated: "Each High Contracting Party shall refrain from participating in, or supporting, any actions directed against the other High Contracting Party, and shall not conclude any treaties with third countries against the other Party" (UN Treaty, 1997). This article could be interpreted as an obstacle to Ukraine joining NATO in the future – and Russia later interpreted it in this way. In addition, Kuchma promoted an overtly pro-West foreign policy from 1997 into the early 2000s. Ukraine became a major recipient of western aid and signed several agreements with the EU and NATO. Kuchma frequently met with senior western officials, and with Clinton. In 2002, Ukraine officially declared an interest in joining NATO (Pifer, 2017).

Soon after, however, Ukraine's foreign policy gradually tilted toward Russia, although the long-term goal of western integration formally remained. Kuchma developed a close partnership with President Putin and became Chair of the CIS. In 2003, Kuchma declared "Russia's year in Ukraine" and signed an agreement with Moscow on a Common Economic Space (CES). If fully implemented, the CES would have integrated Ukraine's economy with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, which according to experts would have ruled out

deep economic integration with the EU. Moreover, Kuchma's relationship with western leaders plummeted. In his last year as president, Kuchma's administration removed the goals of NATO and EU membership from Ukraine's military doctrine and fired Ukraine's pro-NATO minister of defense. Finally, Kuchma campaigned with Putin to try to secure the victory of their joint candidate, Viktor Yanukovych, in Ukraine's presidential election in 2004.

Why did a Ukrainian president running on a pro-Russian platform in 1994 start to pursue a pro-West foreign policy? Why did the same president later turn back closer to Russia at a time when both the EU and NATO were conducting an enlargement agenda in Eastern Europe? This chapter explores and seeks to explain Ukraine's foreign policy throughout this period. It is argued that although opportunities in the external environment played a role, Ukraine's ambivalent and shifting foreign policy can best be explained by domestic political struggles within Ukraine's multicenter arena. As discussed below and in subsequent chapters, the structure of Ukraine's political arena shaped the rules of the game and provided strong incentives for Ukraine's political leaders. While political leaders used different approaches to navigate the arena, they could not overcome these constraints. President Kuchma had a good understanding of the political game and how to maneuver within this arena, which was reflected in his shifting foreign policy. The chapter also discusses the foreign policy implications of Ukraine's non-violent formative experience with Russia, compared to Georgia's traumatic transition. It demonstrates that while some were critical, many Ukrainians at the time, at both the elite and the mass level, supported relatively close ties with Russia. This relaxed approach to Russia can in part be traced to lessons from Ukraine's peaceful transition and the international agreements signed with Russia that seemed to safeguard Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Ukraine's multicenter arena, 1995–2003

As a result of the historical conditions and peaceful transition to independence discussed in Chapter 4, Ukraine's political arena after independence took the form of multiple centers that competed for political influence. Ukraine's historical diversity, which included regions with contrasting experiences of Russia, was reinforced after independence by regional elite networks that competed for influence in national politics (D'Anieri, 2019b). It is perhaps indicative that no Ukrainian president so far has been born in Kyiv. Instead, Ukraine's presidents often started out in the regions. Moreover, after 1991, Ukraine's leaders frequently used underlying regional divisions and geopolitical orientations to bolster popular support during election campaigns, which contributed to a polarized political climate in elections and to a vague and shifting foreign policy. The densely industrialized centers of Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk were the most important regions in the period studied in this

chapter. Western Ukraine also mattered; it had less industrial capacity but a strong sense of Ukrainian identity, and living memory of Moscow's military aggression and negative treatment of the region in the context of World War II. Therefore, western Ukraine could mobilize activists and voters to counter leaders and parties that supported closer ties with Russia (Way, 2015). Other parties and groups played complementary roles in Ukrainian politics and collaborated with regional centers. These included the Communist Party and politicians in Crimea, which generally supported close ties with Moscow, oligarch groups such as the Kyiv clan and a vaguer category in the Ukrainian Parliament often labeled "independents".

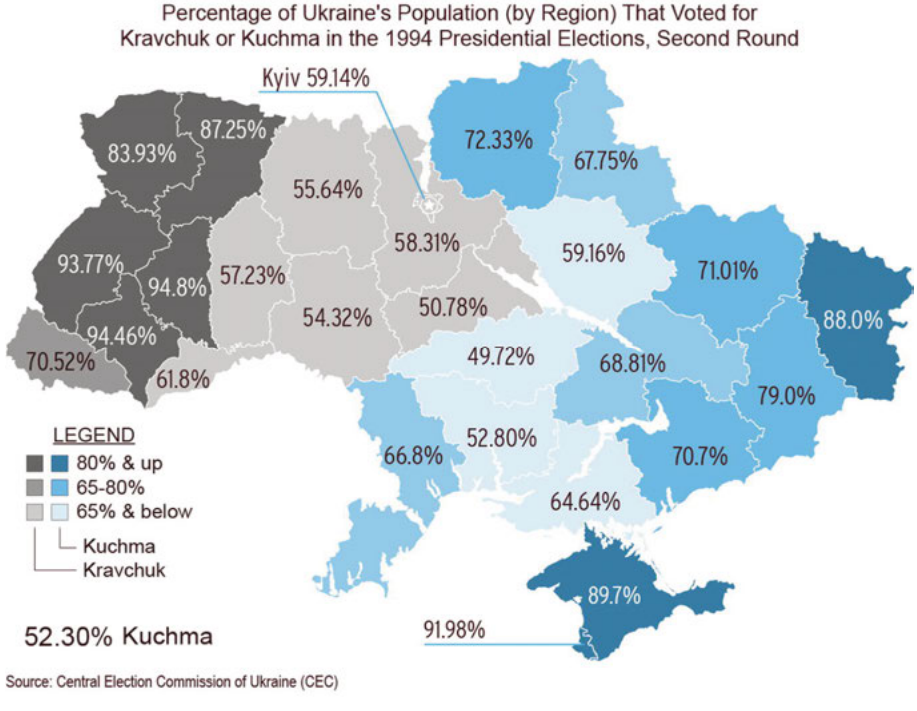

Figure 6.1. Results of the 1994 Ukrainian presidential election by region

The influence of Dnipropetrovsk and Donbas

As discussed in Chapter 4, Dnipropetrovsk and Donbas in eastern Ukraine were two of Soviet Ukraine's most heavily industrialized regions and, in particular, the Dnipropetrovsk mafia (or "clan" as it was often called after 1991) had played an important role in Soviet politics. It was therefore not surprising that Kuchma, a red director from Dnipropetrovsk, became president in 1994.[87]

[87] A red director is a Soviet industrial leader who remained in a powerful position after the USSR's collapse.

Kuchma, a former head of the dominant Soviet aerospace and rocket manufacturer *Pivdenmash* located in the region, had backing from his home region, but also from other red directors (Yekelchyk, 2007).

In the mid-1990s, a new generation of business leaders appeared that were quickly labeled "oligarchs". In the context of Soviet collapse and the complex privatization processes that followed, oligarchs soon became Ukraine's richest individuals. The close links between the political and economic elite meant that oligarchs not only built business empires but also expanded into politics (Puglisi, 2003). Oligarchs either led factions or had indirect influence over factions in the Ukrainian Parliament – a seat in the parliament gave immunity from persecution. The most powerful oligarchs owned several of Ukraine's largest media companies and their television channels and newspapers were used for political purposes. Some of Ukraine's most influential oligarchs were regionally based and teamed up with politicians from the same region. Two illustrative examples were President Kuchma and oligarch Victor Pinchuk in Dnipropetrovsk and President Viktor Yanukovych and Ukraine's richest oligarch, Rinat Akhmetov, in Donetsk (Zygar, 2023).[88] Thus, regional political and business networks became influential in Ukrainian politics. Regional elites could give politicians economic support, favorable media coverage during political campaigns (and negative coverage of opponents) and secure votes in the parliament. Moreover, Ukrainian presidents often promoted people from their home region to influential political positions. Beyond regional networks, family and friends were frequently appointed, especially by President Kuchma and later by President Yanukovych. This practice amplified the underlying regional dimension of Ukrainian politics (Kudelia, 2014).[89]

Kuchma initially relied on a network from his home region – the Dnipropetrovsk clan (*Dnipropetrovtsy*). Kuchma had headed the union of red directors and received support from industrialist leaders in the 1994 presidential election (Yekelchyk, 2007). Early in Kuchma's presidency, the weakening of the rival Donetsk clan due to mafia-like conflicts enhanced the initial influence of the Dnipropetrovsk clan (Skorkin, 2023).[90] As a result, Kuchma's regional network and friends occupied important government positions, such as those related to foreign and security affairs. Dnipropetrovsk governor Pavlo Lazarenko became prime minister in 1996. Kuchma handpicked Volodymyr Horbulin, an ally from *Pivdenmash*, as national security advisor and head of the National Security and Defense Council (NSDC). Foreign minister Hennadiy

[88] A few other oligarchs worth mentioning are Ihor Kolomoyskyi, Yulia Tymoshenko and Pavlo Lazarenko (the latter two became politicians) from Dnipropetrovsk, and Serhiy Taruta from Donbas. Petro Poroshenko (later a politician) and gas magnet Dmytro Firtash were from the more western part of Ukraine.

[89] Unlike Soviet apparatchiks, oligarchs within regional networks were difficult for the president to control and tended to be highly opportunistic.

[90] Several other influential businesspersons from the region, such as Yulia Tymoshenko and oligarch Ihor Kolomoyskyi would later take part in Ukrainian politics.

Udovenko (1994–1998) was from the same region and the head of the security service, Leonid Derkach (1998–2001), had worked at *Pivdenmash* and in the security arena in Dnipropetrovsk (Wilson, 2005). A 1996 report notes, "[a]t last count there were 204 appointees from the city [Dnipro, the region's capital], including 55 in top-ranking positions" (Perlez, 1996). As mentioned above, Victor Pinchuk, one of Ukraine's richest oligarchs who had graduated from the Dnipropetrovsk Metallurgical Institute, also supported Kuchma.[91] Kuchma managed to strengthen presidential powers in the 1996 Ukrainian Constitution and gradually enlarged the presidential administration (Zon, 2005, p. 14). Dnipropetrovsk's initial strength and the selection of loyalists gave Kuchma's administration control over Ukraine's foreign and security policy, which he could use as an instrument in the domestic political battle. However, as discussed below, due to the region's fragmented nature, Kuchma concluded in the late 1990s that he needed support from other groups to secure political power.

The Donbas (Donetsk and Luhansk *oblast*) became another industrial region of political importance in post-independent Ukraine. Protests by Donbas miners had resulted in early elections in 1994, in which President Kravchuk lost power (D'Anieri, 2019b). Donetsk City was the home base of the revitalized Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU), which became the largest party in the 1994 and 1998 parliamentary elections. Importantly, the CPU was not anchored in just one region – it had a wider support base, including in Crimea. However, the party did not get government access. As mentioned above, in the mid-1990s Donbas businessmen were temporarily weakened by intra-elite conflicts and workers faced dangerous working conditions in the decaying industries. The regional elite, the *Donetskiye* – a mix of senior Soviet bureaucrats, red directors and crime bosses – competed for influence in a violent environment, which resulted in several spectacular killings of businessmen and politicians (Skorkin, 2023; Zygar, 2023).[92] A group of former senior Komsomol members came to power in the neighboring *oblast*, Luhansk.

A regional saying, which contributed to regional distinctiveness, was that "the Donbas feeds all of Ukraine, but meanwhile goes hungry" (Skorkin, 2023). In reality, the Donbas elite accumulated massive wealth and another regional motto was: "Politics is made in Kyiv, and money is made in the Donbas" (Zimmer & Haran, 2008, p. 555). However, the Donbas soon became deeply involved in politics. The death of senior Donetsk figures provided an opportunity for Rinat Akhmetov, who controlled important industries, including *Azovstal*. He ended up at the top of the Donetsk clan. Viktor Yanukovych,

[91] Pinchuk later married Kuchma's daughter.

[92] For example, Akhat Bragin, a Soviet entrepreneur who had expanded his influence in Donetsk in the late 1980s, was killed by a bomb when attending a football game in 1995. Yevgeny Shcherban, a wealthy businessman who owned 200 enterprises in the Donbas, was assassinated at Donetsk Airport in 1996. The Dnipropetrovsk clan reportedly benefited economically from these developments.

who became governor of Donetsk in 1997, headed the political wing. Yanukovych, Akhmetov and their allies soon controlled regional politics and helped Kuchma secure victory in Donetsk *oblast* in the 1999 presidential election. Kuchma's victory in Donetsk was surprising since his challenger, the CPU's leader Petro Symonenko, was from Donetsk and the communists had previously performed strongly in the region. In return, Yanukovych got Kuchma's ear and economic payback, which helped the *Donetskiye* to expand their influence at the national level from the early 2000s (Zimmer & Haran, 2008). In 2000, five parties in Donetsk merged into what became the Party of Regions (PoR). The Donetsk clan managed to unite into a coherent political organization – unlike the Dnipropetrovsk clan, which split into rival political factions and oligarchs. The Donbas elite was coordinated and disciplined, and a strong sense of regional identity based on the region's role as a Soviet industrial center likely contributed to regional unity (see Chapter 4). The *Donetskiye* built a political machine based on clientelism, the use of administrative resources and coercion (Kuzio, 2015). This approach proved effective in local elections and was later scaled-up to the national level. The Donbas elite's economic strength and political discipline contributed to the region's increased influence in Ukraine's political arena from the early 2000s and the PoR's expansion of power, mainly at the cost of the Communist Party. As discussed below, the increased influence of the *Donetskiye* would have important implications for Ukrainian politics, including its foreign policy.

Galicia and Ukraine's west

Western Ukraine and especially Galicia also played an important role in Ukrainian politics. As discussed in Chapter 4, western Ukraine comprises mainly ethnic Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians who overall avoided the Soviet Russification experienced in southeastern Ukraine. Moreover, the region was incorporated late into the USSR, in the context of World War II. In Ukrainian elections, the population of western Ukraine consistently supported candidates and parties considered the least Soviet/pro-Russian (D'Anieri, 2019b; Way, 2015). In 1991, western Ukraine strongly supported dissident Viacheslav Chornovil over the former Communist Party member Leonid Kravchuk. In the final round of the 1994 elections, however, western Ukraine preferred Kravchuk to Kuchma's Russia-leaning campaign. The macro-region's support for candidates that promoted a pro-West foreign policy continued in the following decades. A regional "asset", discussed in more detail below, was Galicia's ability to mobilize popular support for political causes. This included large-scale protests, especially when Ukrainian sovereignty was understood to be under threat (Way, 2015). Western Ukraine's disadvantage was its limited economic capacity compared to the more influential industrialized eastern regions, and its generally fragmented political leadership. For example, the Rukh party, popular in the western regions, split into two factions in 1999.

Later the same year, Rukh's leader Chornovil was killed when a truck hit his car outside Kyiv. Chornovil was a potential candidate in the 1999 presidential election and many presumed that this was a politically motivated killing (Semenova, 2021). Despite leadership fragmentation, voters in western Ukraine and its regional mobilization potential made it difficult for leaders to ignore this part of the country. When Viktor Yushchenko eventually emerged as an independent leader in the early 2000s (see below), the region got a strong candidate it genuinely supported.

Political landscape beyond regional centers

The regions discussed above were influential political centers during the period analyzed in this chapter. Beyond these regions, other parties and actors influenced Ukraine's political arena to various degrees. First, the leftist parties became the strongest faction in parliament in the 1994 and 1998 elections. As mentioned above, the CPU was popular in Ukraine's southeast and the largest party in parliament in 1994 and 1998. The communists peaked at 25 percent of the vote. The Socialist Party led by Oleksandr Moroz received support in central Ukraine. As discussed in Chapter 4, Crimean separatism faded after 1994, and Crimean voters generally supported the CPU. In 1997, Kuchma appointed his then-son-in-law, Anatoli Franchuk, Crimean prime minister, which gave the president more influence over the peninsula (Zygar, 2023). Crimea remained a challenge for Ukraine, however, as is discussed in subsequent chapters.

Other parties were created mainly to serve their leaders' personal agendas and had only a vague ideology. One example was Viktor Medvedchuk's Social Democratic Party of Ukraine-united (SDPU). Medvedchuk, the leader of the so-called Kyiv clan, had benefited from the privatization of Ukraine's economy in the late 1990s and basically hijacked the SDPU.[93] Born in Russia, Medvedchuk had close ties with Russian leaders. (Putin was a godfather to Medvedchuk's daughter). He would later be portrayed by Ukrainian media as one of the most outspoken pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine. Unlike the political networks from Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk, the Kyiv clan never received strong support in elections, but Medvedchuk became head of Kuchma's presidential administration in 2002 (Wilson, 2015). Finally, it is worth mentioning that many "independents" won seats in the Ukrainian Parliament. The independents often prioritized personal business interests and changed allegiance depending on what benefited their personal agenda (Puglisi, 2003).

As Way (2015) notes, leaders had to maneuver and often relied on specific regional elites and voters in the contest for political power. Voters in regional borderlands in Ukraine's West (Lviv and neighboring western *oblasts*) and

[93] Medvedchuk reportedly received support from two brothers, Hryhoriy and Ihor Surkis.

East and South (such as Donetsk, Luhansk, and Crimea) consistently supported candidates and parties with contrasting foreign policy orientations (Colton, 2011; Frye, 2015). This was especially evident in presidential elections. Ukrainian leaders repeatedly elevated foreign policy issues to contrast their candidacy with their opponents and to energize and mobilize voters. Given the different viewpoints on how to deal with Russia, and how to conduct foreign policy in general, Ukraine's foreign policy orientation became part of the broader struggle for political power. A polarized political climate contributed to policy swings, half measures and ambivalence in foreign affairs. The following sections explore how the political arena, and the rise and fall of different groups within it, help to explain Ukraine's shifting and ambiguous foreign policy during Kuchma's time in office.

Ukraine's multicenter arena and foreign policy

As mentioned above, Kuchma ran on a moderate pro-Russia platform in the 1994 presidential elections to secure support in Ukraine's south and east. Soon after, however, Kuchma started to build a closer relationship with western partners. Ukraine strengthened its partnership with the United States, which included frequent high-level meetings at the president level and in the so-called Kuchma-Gore Commission. At times, Ukraine was the third largest recipient of US aid after Israel and Egypt. It also gradually opened its economy to western markets, working closely with the IMF (Pifer, 2017).

The EU and Ukraine signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement in 1994 and the first EU-Ukraine summit took place in Kyiv in September 1997, during which Kuchma restated Ukraine's "European choice". In 1998, Kuchma signed a decree, "Strategy on Ukraine's Integration with the European Union", which declared EU membership to be a long-term Ukrainian goal. However, Kuchma's approach to the EU (echoed by several other Ukrainian leaders) was termed "declarative Europeanization" (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 34), meaning that Ukrainian leaders repeatedly declared Ukraine's European orientation without carrying out the significant reforms that in substance would lead the country in that direction.

In terms of security policy, Ukraine-NATO relations deepened when the two parties signed the Charter on a Distinguished Partnership in July 1997.[94] A NATO-Ukraine Commission was set up to monitor implementation and facilitate cooperation. Ukraine frequently participated in NATO exercises, including on Ukrainian territory. Even though Kuchma's security advisor, Volodymyr Horbulin, stated that, "Ukraine is not going to join NATO now, and

[94] The Ukraine-NATO Commission was established directly after the signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act and soon after the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty and should be understood in this broader context (Pifer, 2017).

there are no conditions for that" (Specter, 1997), developments indicated Ukraine's orientation toward the West.

How can Kuchma's pro-West turn be explained? First, the relationship with the West improved when Ukraine finally abandoned its nuclear weapons. This had been the main priority of the West's Ukraine policy since 1991, and Ukraine was rewarded when the weapons went (Pifer, 2017). Second, as discussed in Chapter 4, Ukraine and Russia were involved in prolonged negotiations concerning the recognition of borders and on finding a solution to the naval base in Sevastopol – issues that were not resolved until 1997. In a meeting with President Clinton in 1996, for example, Kuchma stated he felt "vigorous pressure from the Russians" but that he believed things would improve:

> I'm now certain that Yeltsin will be coming to Kiev in the near future to sign the Agreement on Friendship and Cooperation. This will influence positively relations between our two countries and Yeltsin's campaign for re-election. I think the majority of people in Ukraine and Russia are opposed to any aggravation of the situation between our two countries (White House, 1996).

According to this interpretation, Kuchma emphasized western cooperation as a counterweight until the agreement with Russia was signed. While these international factors definitely mattered, however, external opportunities in the mid-1990s do not sufficiently explain why Ukraine's pro-western foreign policy continued, or why it moved closer to Russia in the early 2000s at a time when the EU and NATO were pursuing an enlargement agenda in Ukraine's neighborhood. Based on the argument made in this dissertation, Kuchma's foreign policy is better explained by looking at the opportunities and constraints provided by the structure of Ukraine's political arena and Kuchma's struggle for political survival.

Although Kuchma had created a strong presidential administration, he was under pressure on several fronts by 1997. The political left, led by the Communist leader Symonenko and the Rada Chair and socialist Oleksandr Moroz, provided fierce opposition to Kuchma's political agenda. It took until 1996 before Ukraine, with much difficulty, was able to pass a constitution (Yekelchyk, 2007). Partly because of gridlocks in parliament, Ukraine's economy remained in poor condition and Kuchma's popularity in eastern Ukraine declined. There were indications he risked losing the upcoming 1999 presidential election (L. A. Times, 1999). The CPU and to some extent the Socialist Party were competing for voters in Ukraine's east and south. In a closed meeting with Clinton, Kuchma complained that the left was better organized than his political forces: "Even our Rada chairman has come out against the reform course, saying he had no conflict with the Communist Party of Ukraine on this issue. So you can see, this is all part of a pre-planned attack" (White House, 1996). In another meeting, Kuchma told US diplomats he would use "everything except tanks" (Pifer, 2017, p. 89) against the troublesome parliament.

Moreover, the Dnipropetrovsk alliance started to fracture. Prime Minister Lazarenko pursued his own agenda, including questionable business deals, resulting in accusations of large-scale corruption.[95] Lazarenko was forced to resign but went directly into opposition against Kuchma as leader of the Hromada Party (Pifer, 2017). To survive politically, Kuchma concluded that he needed to change his political base. He teamed up with centrist business leaders who preferred Ukraine to keep powerful Russian oligarchs at a distance to protect Ukraine's economy in the context of "privatization" (Zon, 2005). Kuchma also appealed to national democrats and voters in western Ukraine. He gradually rebranded himself as a reform candidate and an advocate of Ukraine's European and Euro-Atlantic integration. He nominated Borys Tarasyuk as foreign minister in 1998, known for his strong support for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership. Together with a group in the foreign ministry, Tarasyuk pushed Ukraine's pro-West agenda.

> You know, we regained independence when the communists were everywhere and were in the majority. So for us, a group of people in [the] Ukrainian foreign ministry who were defining foreign policy, it was obvious that we have to be integrated into the system of collective security that is NATO. So, there were no doubts, unlike for many political forces and politicians, some of them were dreaming of, well why shouldn't we be neutral, or [a] non-bloc country?[96]

Standing for re-election in 1999, Kuchma faced the staunch communist leader Symonenko in the second round. Other potential challengers had not made it for various reasons. Lazarenko had been forced into exile in the US and Chornovil had died. Kuchma's team used "patronage, harassment, media bias, and fraud" (Way, 2015, p. 62) to make sure the mainstream leftwing candidate Moroz lost against Symonenko in the first round.[97] Symonenko campaigned with Stalin and Lenin as a backdrop, and advocated a union between Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. He wanted to establish an "anti-NATO" coalition and to end the "dictatorship" of the IMF and western loans (Meyer, 1999). Kuchma elevated issues related to Ukraine's geopolitical orientation. He presented himself as a future-looking statesman with ties to the West, in contrast to Symonenko's return to Moscow and a new version of the USSR. Kuchma won the final round with 56 percent of the vote against Symonenko's 38 percent (CECU, 2023). Kuchma's strongest backing came from western Ukraine, with over 90 percent support in some regions (Colton, 2011). The same voters who voted against Kuchma in 1994 supported him in 1999, mostly because he was considered the strongest defender of Ukraine's independence and the least

[95] Lazarenko's ally Yulia Tymoshenko was another Dnipropetrovsk business leader.
[96] Interview, Borys Tarasyuk, 2017.
[97] Lazarenko was later arrested and imprisoned for money laundering and fraud in the US. Tymoshenko, who had worked closely with Lazarenko, had her bank accounts frozen in Ukraine and could not campaign independently in 1999. Instead, she created the Fatherland party that supported Kuchma, after which her money was returned (Way, 2015).

pro-Russian among the two. Kuchma also relied on regional networks to secure victory in Donetsk, Odesa and his home region of Dnipropetrovsk. At the time of writing, Kuchma is the only Ukrainian president to be re-elected. This can in part be explained by his understanding of Ukraine's political arena and his skillful maneuvering within it, but also by his ability to use foreign affairs as an instrument for political advantage. The 1999 election was criticized for not meeting democratic standards. Ahead of the election, Horbulin told US diplomats he could promise "democratic clothing", but apparently not democratic standards, since Ukraine could "not afford" to lose against the communist candidate (Pifer, 2017, p. 160). Moreover, large-scale corruption scandals continued to unfold. Thus, it was not a primary aspiration to fulfill the ideals promoted by the US and the EU, such as democracy and the rule of law, that motivated Ukraine's pro-West orientation, at least not at the top. After Kuchma's inauguration for his second term, he nominated Viktor Yushchenko to be the new prime minister. Yushchenko headed Ukraine's National Bank and his nomination was strongly supported by the US and the EU (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 103).[98] The choice of Yushchenko seemed to consolidate Kuchma's pro-West orientation.

Kuchmagate and the rise of the Donbas: Ukraine moves closer to Russia

At a time when the EU and NATO were pursuing an enlargement agenda among former-communist states that included Ukraine's closest western neighbors, Ukraine itself started to drift closer to Russia. An important explanation can be found in shifts within Ukraine's political arena triggered by a political crisis. At a press conference on 28 November 2000, opposition leader Moroz announced he had access to many hours of secretly recorded tapes exposing corrupt practices within the Kuchma administration. Kuchma's voice was identifiable on the tapes (apparently recorded by his bodyguard), and US experts deemed the recordings authentic (Pifer, 2017). Thus began the "Kuchmagate" scandal, which sent shockwaves throughout Ukraine. The recordings of Kuchma and his advisors not only revealed corruption and a highly cynical attitude in relation to Ukraine's highest office, but also allegedly linked Kuchma to the murder of Georgiy Gongadze, a journalist who had been found dead outside Kyiv a few months earlier.[99] Gongadze had been critical of the president and his death confirmed reported pressure on independent media in Ukraine, as well as authoritarian practices within Kuchma's administration (Zygar, 2023). The tapes resulted in a protest movement, "Ukraine

[98] Kuchma nominated Yushchenko following a trip to Washington DC in December 1999.

[99] According to the tapes, Kuchma gave orders to the Minister of Internal Affairs to throw Gongadze out and send him to the Chechens. Kuchma admitted his voice was heard on the tape but claimed it had been edited and falsified. He denied any involvement in Gongadze's death and has not been convicted (RFE/RL, 2005).

without Kuchma", and in strong criticism of the Ukrainian president in the US and European capitals.[100] Although government-loyal police managed to control the protests, the crisis weakened Kuchma significantly.

The crisis was linked to two important shifts in Ukraine's multicenter political arena. First, a strong political opposition emerged in response to the Kuchmagate. Yulia Tymoshenko, who had been sacked as deputy prime minister in 2001, went into fierce opposition against the president together with Moroz. Tymoshenko's departure was yet another sign of political division in Kuchma's home region of Dnipropetrovsk. In May 2001, Yushchenko resigned as prime minister after a no-confidence vote in parliament. Yushchenko's Our Ukraine Bloc became the leading political opposition. The CPU and influential oligarchs supported the no-confidence vote, reportedly orchestrated by pro-Russian figures such as Medvedchuk (Kuzio, 2005b). These forces wanted to maintain close relations with Russia, especially in the lucrative energy sector that Yushchenko and Tymoshenko had tried to reform.[101]

The second shift was that the crisis provided an opening for the Donbas elite. The merging of several parties into the Party of Regions in 2001 contributed to a change in Ukraine's political balance of power. As mentioned above, influential members of the PoR, including its leaders Viktor Yanukovych and Mykola Azarov, came from the Donbas, as did many within its economic wing led by Ukraine's richest oligarch, Rinat Akhmetov.[102] The PoRs approach to foreign policy is analyzed in detail in subsequent chapters. For now, it can be summarized in three points: (a) pragmatic and close ties with Russia, including with Putin; (b) opposition to Ukrainian NATO membership; and (c) cooperation with the EU based primarily on potential economic gains but not on "Euroromanticism".[103] Kuchma's loss of previous allies and a strengthened opposition led him once again to change his support base.

The shift in balance of political forces in Ukraine became evident in the 2002 parliamentary election. Kuchma relied on support from regional networks, primarily the Kyiv and Donetsk clans (D'Anieri, 2019b). They created "For a United Ukraine" (ZYU), an openly pro-presidential coalition that included the PoR. The election campaign also had an international component with pro-presidential television channels broadcasting anti-western messages. One example was the so-called Brzezinski plan, a conspiracy theory that the

[100] The US criticism increased in 2002 when recordings indicated that Ukraine had sold the *Kolchuga* air defense system to Baghdad, at a time when the US government was starting to plan for a war against Iraq.

[101] The energy sector reforms were strongly criticized by people with stakes in this business. In 2000, for example, Yevhen Marchuk, the head of Ukraine's NSDC, criticized the Yushchenko government's energy policy. It turned out that Marchuk was allied with Medvedchuk's SDPU party that was expected to lose from such reforms (Zon, 2005).

[102] Azarov was head of the controversial State Tax Administration in 1996–2002.

[103] The Party of Regions formally supported Kuchma's idea of NATO membership in the early 2000s but when the party gained more influence it came out strongly against Ukrainian membership.

US was trying to interfere in Ukraine's internal affairs to replace Kuchma with Yushchenko (Puglisi, 2003, p. 840). Vladimir Putin's spin doctor, Gleb Pavlovsky, worked closely with Medvedchuk to promote this narrative in Russian-language media in Ukraine. Moreover, Russian senior officials openly supported the ZYU, the SDPU and the CPU and were hostile to Yushchenko's Our Ukraine, which they considered "anti-Russian", "nationalistic" and "pro-western" (Pemberton, 2002).

Despite the negative campaigning, Yushchenko's approval ratings remained high (at 50–60 percent). To broaden Our Ukraine's voter base beyond western Ukraine, he presented himself as a moderate candidate. The Tymoshenko bloc emphasized Ukrainian identity, which attracted voters primarily in western Ukraine (Way, 2015). Tymoshenko promoted a pro-West foreign policy and criticized Kuchma for having "used his presidency for rapprochement with Moscow". She noted that, "we must take the power away from him as soon as possible, so Ukraine will have less time to march towards Russia" (Interfax Ukraine, 2002).

In the election, Our Ukraine won the popular vote with 23.6 percent. Ukraine's electoral system, however, with its complementary single-mandate constituencies, benefited the pro-Kuchma coalition. Translated into seats, the Yushchenko and Tymoshenko coalitions took 30 percent ZYU and Medvedchuk's party 28 percent (later supported by additional "independent" candidates), while the CPU got 15 percent (CECU, 2023).

Our Ukraine performed strongly in Ukraine's west and center but failed to reach the four percent barrier in Donetsk or in Sevastopol in Crimea. The ZYU on the other hand received strong support in Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk but performed poorly in Ukraine's west and center. The CPU performed strongly in the east and south, especially in regions with high concentrations of Russophones and ethnic Russians, such as Crimea and Luhansk, but did poorly in Ukraine's west. The results confirmed the pattern of Ukraine's regional differences, and that no coalition was able to receive broad support across the country.

Foreign policy implications of the shifts in Ukraine's political arena

Following months of uncertainty after the 2002 election, the political situation clarified due to the important role played by the regional clans. President Kuchma remained the main leader from Dnipropetrovsk while the Kyiv clan's Viktor Medvedchuk was given an influential position as head of the presidential administration. The Donetsk group exploited Kuchma's weakness and basically imposed Viktor Yanukovych as prime minister and Mykola Azarov as first vice prime minister (Wilson, 2015). In addition, the Donetsk network ob-

tained important positions in the energy sector.[104] This illustrates how powerful the Donetsk clan had become in just a few years. The strongest indicator of the growing influence of the Donetsk network was Kuchma's decision to select Yanukovych as his presidential candidate for the 2004 election.[105] Yanukovych had spent time in prison in his youth, lacked charisma and was unpopular in Ukraine's west and center. However, his role as leader of Ukraine's strongest regional network gave Kuchma little choice but to nominate him (Way, 2015). Thus, Kuchmagate and the rise of the Donetsk and Kyiv networks led to a shift in the balance of power in Ukraine's political arena. The coalition that now dominated the government and the presidential administration left western Ukraine without any direct government access. One expert noted, "Medvedchuk's rise reflected a shift in the balance of forces within Ukraine, with the oligarchs taking the upper hand…" and that "[t]he rise of the Donetsk clan upset the delicate balance between western and eastern Ukraine" (Zon, 2005, pp. 14–15). This shift in regional balance also had important implications for Ukraine's foreign policy orientation.

From this point, Kuchma and his advisors took multiple steps closer to Russia, even though they were reluctant to make a firm decision on Ukraine's foreign policy orientation (Hedenskog, 2004). Formally, the Ukrainian government continued to promote Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration. In May 2002, Kuchma's administration announced Ukraine's interest in becoming a member of NATO. This new position must, however, be seen in the context of Russia's constructive relations with the US and NATO after the 9/11 terrorist attacks but before the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Krushelnycky, 2002). Ukraine reportedly did not want to be left out of this partnership. US and NATO senior officials responded with caution to the Ukrainian NATO initiative. Western officials welcomed Kyiv's aspiration, but underlined that Ukraine was far away from membership, and that substantial reforms were needed, not just statements and declarations (Hedenskog, 2004). Kuchma even tried to repair his weakened reputation in the US by sending a peacekeeping force to Iraq in 2003 – a highly unpopular decision among the Ukrainian population.[106]

While formal pro-West policies remained in place, an in-depth look at Ukraine's foreign policy presents a different picture. As one analyst noted at

[104] Two men from Donetsk *oblast* serve as examples. Yuriy Boyko became head of Ukraine's largest national oil and gas company, *Naftogaz Ukrainy*, and Andriy Klyuyev became vice prime minister responsible for fuel and energy.

[105] Media outlets and experts speculated whether Kuchma would attempt to run for a third term. The Ukrainian Constitution only permits two terms but the constitution had been adopted only in 1996, and a counterargument was that Kuchma's first term, which began in 1994, should not count. In the end, Kuchma decided not to run, probably because of his unpopularity and of pressures from the Donetsk clan.

[106] According to a poll, 90 percent of Ukrainians opposed a military solution to Iraq, and 38 percent believed Saddam Hussein was "dangerous for peace in the world" compared to 57 percent who said the same about George W Bush (Zalizniak, 2003).

the time: "Kuchma's second term has witnessed a remarkable shift towards Russia in Ukrainian foreign policy – a shift impossible to ignore" (Hedenskog, 2004). Another expert later wrote: "The rise of the Donetsk clan and its political arm, the Party of Regions, was among the most important developments during Kuchma's second term, reshaping the oligarchic balance of power in Ukraine and the political base of support for pro-Russian policies" (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 106).

With Yanukovych and Medvedchuk installed in key positions, Ukraine's relations with Russia were strengthened in several spheres. In 2003, Kuchma became chair of the CIS, a position previously reserved for the Russian president. Ukraine also chaired the CIS working group on foreign relations. While Ukraine was a founder of the CIS, it had previously blocked proposals to strengthen the organization, and its parliament had avoided ratification of many CIS documents (Hedenskog, 2004). Thus, Kuchma's decision to chair the CIS signaled shifts in Ukrainian priorities. Shortly after, the Ukrainian government showed an interest in establishing an economic organization with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, the Common Economic Space (CES). During his first term, Kuchma had declined similar Russian proposals. Rapid progress by the new negotiators led by Vice Prime Minister Azarov (Donetsk) and behind the scenes by Medvedchuk (utilizing his close ties with Russia's leadership) demonstrated a shift in Ukraine's position closer to Russia (Bukkvoll, 2004). The CES agreement was signed in September 2003. Russia and Ukraine signed several additional important economic and energy agreements during this period. If implemented, international experts argued, a CES membership would rule out any future EU membership for Ukraine (D'Anieri, 2019b). Moreover, Kuchma's interest in the CES raised doubts among western diplomats about the Ukrainian government's interest in Euro-Atlantic integration.[107] The CES agreement was met with protests in western Ukraine and Yushchenko's bloc discussed a possible impeachment of Kuchma (Pifer, 2017, p. 241).

The dismissal of Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk, Ukraine's most vocal spokesperson for NATO membership and unpopular in Moscow, was another indicator of the "pro-Russia" turn. Kuchma's explanation for the decision to fire Tarasyuk serves as a useful illustration of his ambivalent foreign policy approach: "Today, the situation in the world, in Europe and in Ukraine is somewhat different, as they say. Hence, we need different people....Given the current situation, we need a balanced person, a diplomat by nature who will never say either yes or no" (Sherr, 2000, pp. 1–2). Tarasyuk's successor underlined the need to strengthen Ukraine's ties with Russia. Kuchma thus nominated foreign ministers depending on personal and domestic considerations, but also considered shifts in the political arena.

[107] Interview, Steven Pifer, 2020.

Another shift was seen in Ukraine's high-level meetings with western and Russian leaders. In Kuchma's first term, meetings between US and Ukrainian officials frequently took place at the presidential and cabinet levels. In the second term, visits to Kyiv by senior US officials were rare, and Kuchma did not meet face-to-face with President Bush until an international summit in 2004.[108] In contrast, Kuchma and Putin met 18 times in the first years of the new Millennium (Puglisi, 2003, p. 840). One analyst counted 10 bilateral high-level meetings per year between Ukraine and Russia and noted that Putin met more often with Kuchma than with any other foreign leader (Hedenskog, 2004). In comparison, Kuchma had met sparsely with Yeltsin in the 1990s. Unlike western leaders, Putin did not criticize the Ukrainian president after the tape scandal, something Putin considered a Ukrainian "internal matter". In a highly symbolic meeting in 2003, Putin visited his counterpart in Kyiv to celebrate "the Year of Russia in Ukraine".

Finally, ahead of the presidential election in 2004, Ukraine's leadership took several steps viewed at the time as pro-Russian (D'Anieri, 2019b). First, Ukraine's official goals of NATO and EU membership were removed from its military doctrine. Kuchma portrayed western integration as a long-term goal rather than an immediate task: "Previously we assumed that close cooperation with European and Euroatlantic structures would help us solve our economic, social and political problems. But… our western partners do not always fully understand what is going on in Ukraine" (Kuchma, 2004).

Second, as discussed in Chapter 8, Kuchma and Putin cooperated closely in backing Viktor Yanukovych as the presidential candidate for the upcoming elections against the main challenger, Yushchenko. As Kuchma noted later in an interview: "It was not a secret. Didn't the West discuss who should be president of Ukraine? The whole western community did that, but on the other side just Russia, just Putin. Putin knew Mr Yushchenko's statements and opinions. And he did not have a great desire that he come to power" (Cited in Roxburgh, 2021, p. 153). Finally, in September 2004, Defense Minister Yevhen Marchuk, the last strong NATO supporter in the Ukrainian government, was dismissed. Prime Minister Yanukovych declared he would not support the goal of Ukrainian NATO membership (D'Anieri, 2019b). To sum up, Ukraine's foreign policy under Kuchma was never either fully pro-West or fully pro-Russian, a strategy he labeled a "multi-vector" foreign policy. However, the emphasis was very different between the two "vectors" in 2001–2004 compared to Kuchma's first term. As one analyst argued, in 2004 Ukraine was further away from achieving its declared goals of Euro-Atlantic integration than it had been in the 1990s (Kuzio, 2005a). Much of these foreign policy dynamics can be explained by shifts in the balance of power within Ukraine's political arena.

[108] Bush and Kuchma participated at international summits earlier, but did not have a face-to-face meeting during these summits.

No traumatic formative experience with Russia

Most Ukrainian politicians agreed on the overall goal of supporting Ukraine's formal independence. Relatively few Ukrainian policymakers, however, seemed to view it as an urgent task to move Ukraine away from Russia, an urgency that was recognized in Georgia during the same period. How can this lack of urgency be explained? Besides Ukraine's diverse political arena, which made such a policy difficult to execute, the continuation of ties can also be traced to Ukraine's relatively benign formative experience with Russia – especially when compared to Georgia's experience. It is true that Ukraine and Russia conducted difficult negotiations during and after the transition to independence and hardliners in Moscow declared Crimea to be Russian. However, Ukraine and Russia resolved these disputes peacefully through prolonged negotiations and by agreements not imposed on Ukraine. Russia recognized Ukraine's territorial integrity in international agreements and the Russian leadership seemed to accept that Crimea was part of Ukraine. While some Ukrainian politicians were skeptical of Russia's intentions, many assumed Ukraine's sovereignty had been secured. As noted by Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, Ukraine's foreign minister in 2003–2005:

> We relied at that time and later on the whole set of international agreements, the Budapest Memorandum, which was obviously signed much earlier, but then later negotiations on the so-called big treaty with Russia, friendship, and which provided respect for territorial integrity and inviolability of borders, all the good things.[109]

His predecessor noted that Ukraine was bound with Russia by "history and fate" and that "nobody expects us to confront our biggest neighbour", we should "expand our economic ties [with Russia] while trying to keep a safe political distance" (EIS, 2003). Moreover, many Ukrainian government officials at the time did not view long-term western integration as contradictory to having close ties with Russia. Prime Minister Yanukovych noted that "Ukraine does not intend to run...either to the West or to the East. Ukraine will have simultaneous integration with both the EU and Russian economies. We do not want either party to take advantage of us" (Associated Press, 2004). Another government representative noted in 2002 that Kyiv's closer relations with NATO did not represent a risk:

> You know, I think it is important now that Russia itself is going through a very serious mentality change in terms of perceiving security in Europe. Therefore, I can see no serious, fundamental obstacle to our relations with Russia in the context of our choice… Russia will observe the process [of NATO decision making].…And most important, the process of European integration cannot pose any threat to Russia or any third party (BBC Monitoring, 2002a).

[109] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017.

While this understanding downplayed disagreements between Russia and the West, especially Moscow's criticism of NATO enlargement, the statement reflected the thinking of Ukrainian government representatives at the time (Myers, 2004). Nonetheless, some warning signs could be detected. During the Tuzla crisis outside Crimea in 2003, Russian workers started building a dam to connect Russian territory with the Ukrainian Tuzla Island, something that put Ukraine's territorial integrity into question. Kuchma strongly criticized Russia's action and returned early from a trip to Latin America to negotiate with Putin. The crisis was resolved by the Azov Sea Treaty, signed in December 2003 (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 113). Despite the notable incident, Kuchma and Putin appeared to continue on a business-as-usual format and, as discussed, jointly campaigned in support of Yanukovych's candidacy in 2004.

The view that Russia was non-threatening can also be seen within the Ukrainian population by studying surveys from the period. A poll in 2002, for example, conducted by a respected Ukrainian organization showed that 77 percent in Ukraine's east and 66 percent in the south wanted to deepen Ukraine's relationship with Russia. Somewhat surprisingly, a majority (59 percent) in Ukraine's central macro-region also supported deepening relations with Russia, although they preferred relations with the EU to Russia if they had to prioritize. Only in Ukraine's west did a majority of 60 percent want to maintain the present level of or reduce Russian influence in Ukraine. Moreover, 62 and 54 percent in Ukraine's south and east supported Ukraine joining a union with Russia and Belarus, which was supported by 37 percent in Ukraine's center and only 18 percent in Ukraine's west (Pashkov, 2002). Clearly, macro-regions with a stronger Ukrainian identity and more recent incorporation into the USSR were less in favor of strengthened ties with Russia.

While a flexible foreign policy was preferred inside Kuchma's administration, some Ukrainian politicians criticized Kuchma's vacillation and shifting policies. Besides Tymoshenko, mentioned above, Yushchenko argued that ambivalence could damage relations with both Russia and the West:

> The day the Ukrainian and Russian presidents meet in Yalta, Leonid Kuchma signs changes to the military doctrine and states that Kiev no longer wants to be a NATO member and has no plans for integration with the EU. No sooner had the Yalta summit ended, and no sooner had the Russian Foreign Ministry expressed profound satisfaction with Ukraine's new military doctrine, than Kuchma's foreign policy swung the other way… [saying] that other documents determined the [Ukrainian] strategy… Is this the way responsible partners act? (BBC Monitoring, 2004a).

Yushchenko expanded on this assessment in an interview with this author:

> If Kuchma was thinking about how to win the next election, which he was, of course this multivector policy was the right thing to communicate to your voters. Because, at that time, a majority of Ukrainians were pro-integration with

> Russia, and supported closer ties with Russia, and of course, if you wanted to get support from these voters, he had to be understood and taken well by the majority of Ukrainians who were also thinking in the same way. This is just the type of politician, and we know we have a lot of politicians who think about how to win the next election. In my opinion, a politician on a high level has to be one step forward, to look into the future and the policies that correspond to the interest of your country in the future.[110]

Moreover, Ukraine's deputy foreign minister highlighted the limits of Kuchma's and Yanukovych's approaches. In his view, Ukraine had to choose between Russia and the EU: "It is impossible to conclude around 2007 a customs accord with the EU, as president Kuchma has called for, and to create around 2009 an identical union with Minsk, Astana and Moscow. We have to choose" (AFP, 2004). This need to choose would become critical in Ukraine's foreign policy in 2013 (discussed in Chapter 10).

Conclusion

This chapter has explored Ukraine's foreign policy during Kuchma's time as president. The overall policy can aptly be described as vacillating and vague. The analysis has focused on Ukraine's multicenter arena and especially its competing regional networks. Kuchma's leadership mattered for Ukraine's foreign policy, but it is important to underline that he was in many ways highly constrained by the multicenter arena. For decades, the constraints of the multicenter arena were difficult for Ukraine's political leaders to overcome and, as is shown in subsequent chapters, those leaders who tried ended up on the losing side in elections at best, or had to flee the country. Kuchma skillfully maneuvered between regions and allies to remain in power and used Ukraine's foreign policy orientation in this context. While never fully dropping either Russia or the West, Kuchma's foreign policy priorities reflected shifts in domestic political alliances. Shifts in the regional balance of power influenced Ukraine's foreign policy because of the different geopolitical views within these regions, especially in relation to Russia. The relative lack of interest in democracy and the rule of law within Kuchma's administration shows that living up to these values was not the main driver of Ukraine's pro-West foreign policy in the late 1990s.

A rival explanation is that western lack of interest in Kuchma after 2001 explains Ukraine's shift back closer to Russia. While this argument makes some sense, it is important to look at it in context. The West's overall interest in Eastern Europe actually increased during the period, and the EU and NATO pursued enlargement reaching up to Ukraine's borders. The West's criticism of Kuchma reflected domestic crises within Ukraine as a result of Kuchma's

[110] Interview, Viktor Yushchenko, 2018.

attempts to remain in power in a highly competitive political arena. Thus, western lack of interest was mostly a product of Kuchma's own administration rather than a general western disinterest. Moreover, Georgia's President Shevardnadze was criticized by the West in a similar way in the early 2000s for democratic shortcomings and corruption, but Shevardnadze did not move closer to Russia in the way that Kuchma did. How can we explain this difference? First, Shevardnadze had few domestic political allies that would support a shift closer to Russia, with Aslan Abashidze in Ajaria being a possible exception. This can be contrasted with Kuchma's alliance with the Kyiv and Donetsk clans and popular support for such a policy in Ukraine's east and south. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 5, Shevardnadze's administration was influenced by painful experiences in relation to Russia in the first half of the 1990s, which, as we have seen, strongly shaped Georgia's foreign policy in the late 1990s and beyond.

Chapters 5 and 6 have explored Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies at a time of relatively low geopolitical competition between Russia and the West. The subsequent chapters will analyze these two states' foreign policies at a time of high geopolitical competition. In this period, Russia's capabilities increased and President Putin gradually promoted a more assertive Russian agenda in the post-Soviet region. Moreover, the US freedom agenda advocated by the Bush administration, and discussions on NATO and EU enlargement reached countries like Georgia and Ukraine. These shifts in the external environment provided new opportunities for the smaller states in the region but also raised the stakes.

7. Georgia's continued westward orientation after the Rose Revolution, 2003–2012

This chapter aims to explain Georgia's pro-West foreign policy after the Rose Revolution, when mass demonstrations in response to electoral fraud and corruption resulted in the ousting of President Eduard Shevardnadze in 2003. Why did Georgian leaders deepen the already close relationship with the United States and the administration of US President George W Bush? Why did it clash fundamentally with the Putin regime? The main argument is that the new government led by Mikheil Saakashvili was strongly influenced by the traumatic outcome of Georgia's formative period. The government wanted to strengthen the state, restore territorial integrity and limit Russian dominance in Georgia. Foreign policy played an important part in this endeavor. Georgia aligned itself even more closely with the United States than Shevardnadze had, and aimed for a fast track to NATO membership. Moreover, Georgia had a very difficult relationship with the Russian leadership and a short Russian-Georgian war took place in 2008. Due to Georgia's single center arena and traumatic formative experience, Saakashvili's administration faced little resistance to its overall foreign policy. The chapter first describes Georgia's political arena after the Rose Revolution. It then discusses the importance of Georgia's formative period in shaping the Saakashvili team's main priorities. It then analyses Georgia's foreign policy vis-à-vis key external actors in the period after the Rose Revolution. The focus is especially on Georgia's policy toward the United States, NATO and Russia. The final section discusses alternative explanations for Georgia's continued pro-West orientation and ends with a conclusion on how the chapter relates to the dissertation's overall argument.

Structure of Georgia's political arena, 2003–2012

A brief overview of Georgia's pre-revolution political landscape is necessary to set the scene for what happened after the Rose Revolution. In the early 2000s, Georgia's political arena was less regionally diverse than in Ukraine. In part, as discussed in Chapter 5, this was a legacy of Georgia's formative period. Abkhazia and South Ossetia had seceded in the early 1990s and their elites did not participate in Georgian politics. In Samegrelo in northwestern

Georgia, the Shevardnadze government had marginalized the political opposition following the death of Georgia's first President, Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Beyond Ajaria, no strong regional parties directly influenced Georgian politics in a significant way. Thus, it differed from Ukraine's multicenter arena in that Georgia was closer to a single center than a multicenter arena. Georgia's longstanding president Shevardnadze operated at the top of the pyramid. In the early 2000s, however, both domestic opposition and international allies were increasingly critical of Shevardnadze's leadership due to widespread corruption and mismanagement.

In response to protests in 2001, Shevardnadze sacked the government and promised to step down as president when his term ended in 2005 (P. Baker, 2001). In the same year, Minister of Justice Mikhail Saakashvili, who was one of the "young reformers" (see Chapter 5), resigned in protest at corruption in the government and formed the National Movement (NM) political party. Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and Speaker of Parliament Nino Burjanadze also joined the opposition and formed the Burjanadze-Democrats (BD) (Berglund, 2013; Nilsson, 2009). NGOs such as *Kmara!* (Enough!), a civic youth resistance movement supported by western donors and the Georgian Liberty Institute, protested against the government.[111] Shevardnadze increasingly relied on Ajarian strongman Abashidze for support, while EU and US representatives communicated to Shevardnadze that they expected the coming parliamentary election in 2003 to be free and fair.[112]

The Rose Revolution

The 2003 parliamentary elections turned out to be even more fraudulent than expected (Mitchell, 2009b, pp. 68–72).[113] In response, NM and BD called for demonstrations in Tbilisi, soon labeled the Rose Revolution, and for Shevardnadze's resignation. The demonstrations peaked when Shevardnadze called the start of a new parliamentary session. Saakashvili and his supporters stormed parliament with roses in their hands and interrupted Shevardnadze in the middle of a speech. Shevardnadze's bodyguards led the president out by a backdoor while – theatrically and typical of his leadership style – Saakashvili finished the president's tea at the podium (Berglund, 2013).

Shevardnadze, under increasing pressure, declared a state of emergency and called the Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov. Shevardnadze had a strained relationship with the Russian leadership (see Chapters 4 and 5) but Ivanov and Shevardnadze's personal friendship went back to 1985. Ivanov traveled to Tbilisi but soon realized that his old friend had lost domestic support. Shevardnadze apparently understood this as well and had confidence in

[111] *Kmara* was modeled on the Serbian *Otpor!* that had played an important role to defeat Slobodan Milosevic's regime in 2000.
[112] President Bush even sent the former Secretary of State James Baker to communicate this point directly to Shevardnadze.
[113] It took almost two weeks before Ajaria sent in the results to the Election Administration.

his former protégés Saakashvili and Zhvania – that they would not go after him as long as he resigned.[114] Due to the structure of Georgia's political arena, Shevardnadze had no major support besides Abashidze to remain in power.

The leading opposition trio, Saakashvili, Zhvania and Burjanadze, announced snap presidential and parliamentary elections. Saakashvili presented himself as the coalition's presidential candidate based on his popularity following the Rose Revolution. Zhvania and Burjanadze eventually agreed and supported Saakashvili (Mitchell, 2009b). Unlike in Ukraine during the same period, Saakashvili faced no serious competitor and won the presidential election in January 2004 with a striking 97 percent of the votes. Saakashvili and his allies took advantage of the political vacuum after Shevardnadze's sudden resignation. After the elections, the leadership trio merged their parties into the United National Movement (UNM) and divided the most influential political positions among themselves. Saakashvili became president, Zhvania prime minister and Burjanadze parliament's speaker. In the parliamentary election in March 2004, the UNM won 67.75 percent of the vote and a clear majority in parliament.[115]

Georgia's political arena, 2003–2012

Saakashvili's administration and the UNM dominated Georgia's political arena until 2012, although popular support declined over time. Saakashvili's government delivered notable anti-corruption reforms and economic growth, but the opposition as well as local and international experts became increasingly critical of how it merged party and state, and put pressure on the political opposition and independent media (Berglund, 2013; Mitchell, 2009b). Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania – who complemented Saakashvili's energetic and impulsive character – died under mysterious circumstances in 2005.[116] Other key figures either resigned or were dismissed, including speaker Nino Burjanadze who went into opposition in 2008, but Saakashvili's core group remained loyal to him.

Saakashvili and his allies promoted a firm pro-West orientation (see below). It is questionable however whether this foreign policy was driven by democratic values. In November 2007, for example, Saakashvili's government experienced a major domestic crisis. A group of opposition politicians, united mainly by an intention to dismiss Saakashvili, participated in the biggest demonstrations since the Rose Revolution. The government responded

[114] The exception to this informal agreement was Shevardnadze's son-in-law. He was arrested for tax evasion but was soon released after his wife paid a high fine to the state (Greenberg, 2004).
[115] The closest challenger was a coalition of the New Rights and the Industrial Party, which received 8 percent of the vote.
[116] The official cause of death was carbon monoxide poisoning from a faulty heater.

with riot police, teargas and water cannon, and closed down Imedi, an opposition television channel. (De Waal, 2019, p. 208). Dozens of activists were injured and Saakashvili declared a state of emergency. Facing strong domestic and international criticism, Saakashvili temporarily stepped down and announced early elections in 2008. In the presidential election of January 2008, Saakashvili (53.47 %) won in the first round against his main challenger, Levan Gachechiladze (25.69 %). In the parliamentary election of May 2008 the UNM secured a landslide victory (59.18 %) that translated into 119 of the 150 seats (OSCE, 2023). Both the domestic opposition and international partners became increasingly critical of Saakashvili and the UNM for their authoritarian tendencies.

Unlike in Ukraine, which had a strong opposition after the Orange Revolution, the Georgian opposition was fragmented and divided. Georgia did not have something like the Ukrainian Party of Regions that could organize a strong opposition. In part because of Georgia's single center arena, Saakashvili and his allies were able to implement their domestic and foreign policy agenda. At the same time, this agenda was heavily influenced by Georgia's painful experiences in the 1990s. Only when Georgia's richest man, Bidzina Ivanishvili, entered politics (see Chapter 9) did Saakashvili and the UNM lose power.

Similarities and differences between the Rose and Orange Revolutions

In hindsight, experts argued that the Rose Revolution and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (see Chapter 8) belonged to a similar class of events dubbed "Color Revolutions" (Mitchell, 2012).[117] Demonstrations in response to corruption and fraudulent elections resulted in the overthrow of the *ancien régime*. From this dissertation's theoretical perspective, however, the balance of power in the political arena reflects an important difference between the Georgian and Ukrainian cases. In Georgia after the Rose Revolution, the new leadership trio and the UNM had, at least initially, strong support from the Georgian population to pursue its domestic and international agenda. The only significant political force with ties to Moscow that could hypothetically have challenged the pro-West orientation was that of the regional strongman, Aslan Abashidze. However, the power of the Ajarian leader was constrained after the Rose Revolution, until he escaped to Moscow in May 2004 (see below).

In Ukraine, as discussed in Chapter 8, Viktor Yanukovych, the Party of Regions and their allies remained a powerful force after the Orange Revolution and could obstruct the Orange coalition's agenda. In Georgia after the Rose Revolution, a consensus existed on continuing and strengthening the

[117] Some analysts include the overthrow of Slobodan Milosevic and Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution in 2005 in this category, while others include a broader range of events where protests resulted in the ousting of the ruling coalition. Putin and Kremlin officials refer to the revolutions as CIA-backed coups d'état.

pro-West foreign policy initiated by Shevardnadze's administration. Saakashvili's pro-West agenda, however, was less about EU integration and democratization, and more about achieving security and coming to terms with Georgia's difficult transition to independence. The chapter now turns to an analysis of Saakashvili's political agenda, with a particular emphasis on foreign policy.

Georgia's foreign policy after 2003: the US patron and the Russian spoiler

An important argument of this dissertation is that formative moments, and especially traumatic experiences, can shape a state's foreign policy priorities. In Georgia, Shevardnadze gradually started to reorient Georgia's foreign policy to avoid Russian domination after the difficult transition (see Chapters 4 and 5). The priorities of Saakashvili's government also reflected Georgia's traumatic 1990s. In line with this dissertation's overall argument, the agenda should be understood in light of legacies from the formative period: loss of territory, Russian assertiveness, state weakness and corruption, as well as economic hardship. The new government was trying to overcome these problems.

The broader contours of Georgia's foreign policy after the Rose Revolution were more about continuity than change. Saakashvili's administration wanted to continue the pro-West direction set out by Shevardnadze. As expressed by a minister close to Saakashvili, "the [foreign] orientation we did not have much discussion [about] because Shevardnadze was, at least verbally, supporting [a] western orientation".[118] Thus, Georgia's pro-West orientation continued.

The link between territorial integrity, state building and foreign policy

Saakashvili's administration, like Shevardnadze's, tried to deal with Georgia's territorial fragmentation and "escape geography" by building a close partnership with western countries and organizations (Toal, 2017, p. 111). Thus, a connection existed between territorial integrity and foreign policy. Saakashvili's administration was deeply dissatisfied with Georgia's troubled 1990s and about the problems Shevardnadze had been unable to resolve. The new government wanted to correct these mistakes, as one analyst noted: "For many of them the Rose Revolution and Saakashvili's election represented nothing less than a rebirth of independent Georgia" (Mitchell, 2009b, p. 87). This view had implications for the details of foreign policy. Saakashvili believed that Shevardnadze had failed to connect Georgia's international agenda to domestic reforms and to questions of national unity and territorial integrity. The new president argued that his predecessor had "a very Soviet taste and

[118] Interview, Giorgi Baramidze, 2019.

mentality" (Ostrovsky, 2004), and Saakashvili made clear from the start he was a state builder who wanted to overcome the failures of Georgia's transition to independence:

> People compare my style with that of JFK, but in terms of substance, I feel much closer to Ataturk or Ben Gurion, or General de Gaulle – people who had to build nation states. Shevardnadze had a chance to become a founding father of the nation, but he missed that chance, so I now have this honour to become one, along with my friends (Cited in Ostrovsky, 2004).

Hence, Saakashvili wanted to become the founding father of modern Georgia and while the overall international priorities remained, foreign policy goals had to align with domestic reforms. According to one minister:

> Well I would say, the grand strategy we maintained. A grand strategy [of] joining NATO, joining the European Union, but as I said no one was taking it seriously, not almost taking it seriously before we were starting to do the serious reforms of this country. Because I mean, you want to join NATO. Okay, that may not happen because about 70 percent of your economy is in the shadow, corruption is epic and state institutions are ineffective.… But what was the difference? The Saakashvili administration had the will to modernize the country and do real reforms and had a strategy and thoughts [on] how to do it, which are both important. Foreign policy is nothing but the continuation of internal policies.[119]

The vision, as expressed by one of Saakashvili's closest advisors, was that Georgia would become the opposite of what it had turned into during the difficult 1990s and get out of what it called "the post-Soviet swamp":

> So, I think this was kind of a messianic idea that many of us had, that we should after the civil war, after devastating wars with Russian proxies and Russia's involvement, complete collapse of not only Soviet institutions, which by itself was a good thing, but dysfunctionality and inability to build new institutions, collapse of social structure, danger of crime. I mean, and in contrast to Estonia who showed us how smoothly they managed to get out of it, I mean this really made us obsessed that we should be able as a country and as a generation to tackle that ambition.[120]

Thus, overall, Georgia's pro-West orientation remained after the Rose Revolution but differed from Shevardnadze's view on how to reach broad goals such as NATO and EU membership. Importantly for this dissertation's argument, the approach resonated with painful memories of Georgia's traumatic transition.

The most important legacy from the formative period that shaped the Saakashvili administration's agenda was the loss of territory. Saakashvili's top

[119] Interview, Vasil Sikharulidze, 2019.
[120] Interview, Giorgi Bokeria, 2017.

priorities were to restore Georgia's territorial integrity and to strengthen the state (Nilsson, 2009). On the eve of his presidential inauguration, Saakashvili visited the grave of King David the Builder to take a spiritual oath. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Georgians consider David the Builder to be one of their most successful kings, known for uniting the country and for being an architect of Georgia's "golden age". During the visit, Saakashvili laid out the goals he and his allies envisioned, "Georgia's territorial integrity is the goal of my life. At the grave of King David we must all say: Georgia will be united strong, will restore its wholeness and become a united, strong state" (Civil Georgia, 2004).

Saakashvili wanted to restore Georgia's territorial integrity during his first presidential term and said he aimed to hold his inauguration for a second term in Abkhazia's capital, Sukhumi. As noted by one long-term Georgia observer, "after the drift of the Shevardnadze years, it was a clear statement of his intent to shake up the status quo" (De Waal, 2019, p. 199). This vision, which was connected to foreign policy, had been developed earlier. In the mid-1990s, Saakashvili started writing a dissertation on international law at George Washington University. His chosen topic was *uti possidetis* – the principle that states previously belonging to empires should inherit their colonial administrative borders. Saakashvili's main argument was that according to this principle, Abkhazia and South Ossetia should belong to Georgia, and their separation from Georgia in the 1990s constituted "illegal acts" (Steavenson, 2008). Many of Saakashvili's allies shared this view. Why was it so important for the government to restore Georgia's territorial integrity? As First Deputy Minister Nikoloz Vashakidze explained:

> Because it [loss of territorial integrity] is [an] extremely traumatic thing for the Georgian society. [I]t is a small country. When about 300,000 people are withdrawn, many of them killed before that, and you know during this quite difficult period of time, the 1990s, with severe economic conditions and all these people are to be settled down in different parts of your country. It is a terrible picture to witness – and the pain of loss of part of your territory is also something which is quite understandable as a problem for representatives of any country, I think.[121]

As a first step, Saakashvili's administration confronted Aslan Abashidze in Ajaria. Abashidze's ability to control the important coastal western region had been a constant humiliation for Georgian governments since independence. Abashidze's connections in Moscow and the Russian military base in Ajaria, led the new government to consider him a pro-Russian leader, although the reality was arguably somewhat more complicated. As Saakashvili's then minister of internal affairs noted:

[121] Interview, Nikoloz Vashakidze, 2019.

> They [Abashidze's people] were not saying openly that we have to be pro-Russian, but they were obviously not very happy about the pro-western orientation. Abashidze himself was a Russian general officially. He had this rank and was not hiding this, and totally his power was based on Russian support and next door to Batumi, there was this military base, and Ajaria was an autonomous republic, and if we compare the situation with pre-war Abkhazia autonomous republic, in Ajaria it was [an] even worse situation in terms of legal point of view. Because Abashidze changed Ajaria's constitution that [to directly contradict] Georgia's constitution.[122]

In early 2004, the Saakashvili government started investigating Ajarian business groups and trade through the Batumi port, reiterated earlier demands for democracy in the region and threatened to expel Abashidze and his loyalists if these requirements were not met (Lynch, 2006). Abashidze blew up the bridges leading into Ajaria to block advancing Georgian troops. To mediate, Abashidze invited Russia's Igor Ivanov to Batumi. Ivanov heard shooting in Batumi and the media reported that a Georgian battalion was heading to the city. According to Ivanov, Abashidze claimed he had enough men to fight but to avoid bloodshed, Ivanov convinced Abashidze and his family to come with him on his government aircraft to Moscow (Roxburgh, 2021). Facing strong pressure from the Georgian government, Abashidze accepted the offer and fled to Russia. Saakashvili's administration considered Abashidze's resignation an important early triumph in strengthening Georgian statehood:

> I think post-Rose Revolution, our goal, our first target was Abashidze, [a] pro-Russian leader, a thug, a threat, security-wise, economically. It would be impossible to have any success without removing him from office, and the fact was our goal, post-Rose Revolution, was to do those things quickly enough that Russia would not – and Putin in particular would not – have enough time to position himself. We were lucky it happened quickly, the Russians did create a lot of trouble initially if you dig out their statements during the Ajaria-crisis […]. So that is why we were lucky to remove the biggest threat at the time for Georgian statehood.[123]

On Georgian television, Saakashvili told the audience this was the beginning of Georgian unification: "Aslan has fled! Ajaria is free! I congratulate everyone on this victory". He continued, "Georgia has to be united and rise up. Georgia will be united" (Bransten, 2004). Prime Minister Zhvania declared it a very special day in Georgia's long history. Restored control of Ajaria resonated beyond government supporters. For example, Georgia's most popular person, Patriarch Ilya II of the Georgian Orthodox Church, supported the agenda, "I congratulate you on St George's Day! And now, on to Abkhazia and Tskhinvali [de facto capital of South Ossetia]!" (Bransten, 2004).

[122] Interview, Giorgi Baramidze, 2019.
[123] Interview, Giorgi Bokeria, 2017.

Saakashvili's government promised continued autonomy for Ajaria but, in practice, "reinstated central control in all the strategic areas of governance" (Nodia, 2005, p. 56), marginalizing the region's role in Georgian politics. Nonetheless, as discussed below, the two so-called breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia continued to play an important role in Georgia's relationship with external powers, and with Russia in particular.

The Saakashvili administration promoted a state-building agenda and initiated reforms at rapid speed, which can also be seen as a response to Georgia's painful 1990s, as a state on the brink of collapse. For example, the government strengthened tax collection, decreased the informal sector of the economy to some extent, reformed the corrupt traffic police and confronted organized crime (World Bank, 2012). In the 1990s, Georgia had gone from being a popular tourist destination in the Soviet era to a place seen by many as too dangerous to visit because of poverty, instability and organized crime. The Saakashvili government's ambition to break with the traumatic memories of the 1990s was again visible. As one analyst noted, Georgia's domestic reforms were closely intertwined with its international agenda:

> The Saakashvili government implemented police reforms as part of a broader agenda of reversing the decay of the Georgian state in the post-Soviet period and reasserting its control of the national territory and its effective independence from Georgia's neighbour, Russia (Light, 2014, p. 318).

The final component, which resonated with future Georgian NATO membership, was to strengthen the state's coercive capacity. As a deputy defense minister noted, "the president and the government declared that the military was one of the priorities of the country".[124] Georgia's defense spending increased tenfold between 2003 and 2007 and "it of course played a dramatic role in the defense capabilities".[125] In 2007, defense spending peaked at 9.2 percent of Georgia's gross domestic product (GDP), the second highest in the world at the time (Toal, 2017, p. 145). According to estimates, at its peak the defense budget was one-third of total government expenditure (Steavenson, 2008). Moreover, the Saakashvili government modernized and upgraded military bases, including a base in Senaki close to Abkhazia, and a base outside Gori near South Ossetia (Tagliavini, 2009, p. 15). From the government's perspective, a strong army could be used as a lever in negotiations on territorial integrity and increase Georgia's chances of becoming a NATO member. As shown below, the painful experiences of and memories from the 1990s and the ambition to reintegrate the Georgian state played an important role in shaping Georgia's foreign policy after the Rose Revolution.

[124] Interview, Nodar Kharshiladze, 2017.
[125] Interview, Nodar Kharshiladze, 2017.

Georgia's pro-West foreign policy: America first

As discussed in Chapter 5, Georgia had developed a close relationship with the United States during Shevardnadze's time in office – a partnership the Saakashvili administration wanted to strengthen (Nilsson, 2015; Toal, 2017). This raises various questions: Why did Georgia see the United States as its closest partner? Why did the White House – geographically located 9000 kilometers away from Tbilisi – consider Georgia a close partner? Why was this increasingly the case after the Rose Revolution? Georgia was at the time seen as one of the most pro-US countries in the world (Asmus, 2010) but at first glance Georgia's choice of external partner is not obvious.

This dissertation suggests that the main driver was that Saakashvili's administration identified the United States as a potential rescuer from Georgia's traumatic past and from Russian dominance. Moreover, the Georgian leadership identified the United States as the opposite of Russia or anything post-Soviet, which provided an image of a different Georgian future. Therefore, the Georgian government identified and connected with US policymakers, both Republicans and Democrats, and especially with members of the Bush administration (Nilsson, 2015). While Saakashvili's administration viewed the US primarily as a rescuer from Georgia's traumatic past, the Bush administration primarily viewed Georgia as a potential success story for its freedom agenda in the post-Soviet region and beyond. As discussed below, this mismatch in terms of goals and identification later presented challenges for the partnership.

The US patron: Georgia's rescuer from a troubled past?

Saakashvili and many of his allies identified the United States as a potential rescuer from Georgia's traumatic past and Russian domination. Saakashvili identified the United States as a crucial external partner and role model to turn Georgia into the opposite of what it had become in the 1990s and to escape anything post-Soviet. US President Ronald Reagan was considered the greatest hero of all since he had stood up against "the evil empire", as he famously called the USSR in a speech in 1983. In Saakashvili's view, Reagan more than anyone else symbolized the US role in the break-up of the Soviet Union. The US president had also provided hope, as President Saakashvili declared in a speech in 2012:

> For all of us who grew up behind the iron curtain, Ronald Reagan was, and will always remain, the initiator of our liberation. […] For all of us oppressed people living in a depressing society that was hated with our soul, heart, and mind, Ronald Reagan was a symbol of freedom and hope… Reagan gave me not just a kind of hope but a belief which lifted me from that place and put me somewhere else I couldn't imagine. (Saakashvili, 2012)

The Saakashvili administration even built a bronze statue of Reagan in downtown Tbilisi, which was unveiled in 2011.[126] Reagan and the Republican Party served as inspirations for many in Saakashvili's administration who believed in a small bureaucracy.[127] Under the leadership of Kakha Bendukidze, the Saakashvili government pursued a libertarian agenda – a small state was considered the opposite of the enormous Soviet bureaucracy the Georgian government despised (De Waal, 2019).[128] During and after the Cold War, the US was also the leader of NATO – the only alliance, for Saakashvili and his allies, that could offer protection from Russian dominance.

The Saakashvili administration viewed the George W Bush administration as standing up for values such as territorial integrity, the protection of small states, freedom and continued NATO enlargement. Saakashvili called Bush's statement in Warsaw in 2001 a landmark speech. In Warsaw, Bush had declared that the days when great powers dictated their will to smaller states were over: "No more Munichs, no more Yaltas" (Cited in Toal, 2017, p. 93). A few years later, in 2004, the "big bang" NATO enlargement took place in which the three Baltic states, among others, became new members. From the perspective of Saakashvili's administration, Bush represented American exceptionalism, as one minister put it:

> I would say that I still have big respect for the Bush administration because, in my opinion, we can speak about effectiveness, we can speak about mistakes made in Iraq, but on the other hand, the administration is the so far last administration with I would say American exceptionalism, which in the modern understanding of it defining its foreign and security policy objective beyond its immediate political and economic needs, which is what leaders do. But I mean this American exceptionalism in general, trying to define the national interest far beyond immediate needs. That is important, and that is why I embrace this leadership.[129]

Saakashvili's administration linked American exceptionalism to opportunity and considered a close partner helpful for Georgia in achieving the vision of a unified and strong state. Ronald Asmus, a Democratic Party diplomat with a keen interest in the South Caucasus, had close contacts with Saakashvili. In Asmus' view, the US played a key role in Saakashvili's vision to make Geor-

[126] Saakashvili's deputy minister told this author he encourages his students to read Ronald Reagan's doctrine, an example of a successful way to contain Russia. Interview, Batu Kutelia, 2017.
[127] Interview, Giorgi Bokeria, 2017.
[128] Before the Rose Revolution, Kakha Bendukidze worked in Russia and attempted to liberalize the Russian economy. Bendukidze's libertarian programs had both advocates and critics inside Georgia.
[129] Interview, Vasil Sikharulidze, 2019.

gia fully sovereign and break free from a quasi-colonial relationship with Russia: "American power, principle, and diplomacy were essential in his [Saakashvili's] eyes if he was to ever succeed" (Asmus, 2010, p. 57).[130]

Thus, a close partnership with the United States played several important functions for Saakashvili and his allies. First, according to the Saakashvili government, the US was the opposite of anything post-Soviet and Russian. It provided an image of a possible Georgian future – a strong state free from Russian influence. Second, the United States was seen as the only country that could realistically help Georgia escape its traumatic past. From this perspective, the US, with its diplomatic, economic and military power, had stood up against Moscow during the Cold War. After 1991, it remained the leader of NATO and, in the Bush administration, Saakashvili found leadership with an active international agenda that supported Georgia. In other words, the United States represented both a glimpse of hope for a prosperous Georgian future and a potential rescuer from Georgia's troubled past.

Strengthening the Georgian-US partnership

Saakashvili and his allies had learned from the 1990s that they needed to build a case to convince the US political elite why Georgia was important (see Chapter 5). Saakashvili, Zhvania and others in the government belonged to a new generation of politicians who had not been part of Soviet politics. Many were educated in the West, spoke fluent English and had visited the US and EU member states many times (De Waal, 2019). Saakashvili and Zhvania realized early on the importance of personal connections in Washington. As young politicians, Saakashvili and Zhvania made several trips to Washington and "knocked on any door on Capitol Hill that might open". The message they presented echoed a Cold War and geopolitical narrative with Georgia a US partner against an assertive Russia: "We would have a big map and tell them, 'This is America. This is Russia. This is Georgia. This is the pipeline. This is why Georgia matters'" (Cited in Steavenson, 2008). Another member of Saakashvili's group continues:

> From day one, it was our political goal, let's say [to] entice the US political class into a vision of Georgia as a strategic interest of continuation of Euro-Atlantic integration, of Europe whole and free, and their strategic interest. And partially, this job of cultivating connection began even prior [to] the Rose Revolution, and in that sense Shevardnadze's factor was helpful because he provided a name recognition, which enabled the next class of politicians in [the] end of [the] 1990s to establish political contacts on the [Capitol] Hill and elsewhere. So, I think we were successful in that, by building on a relationship that was there since [the] 1990s, but then by spending a lot of political resources in

[130] Asmus worked for some time as an informal advisor to Georgia's Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania; thus his evaluation of Georgian-US relations should be treated with some caution. On the other hand, as an insider he had deep knowledge of the relationship and both praised and criticized the Saakashvili government.

> cultivating relationships on the Hill and the political class and think tank communities everywhere.[131]

Over the years, Georgian politicians had built an impressive bipartisan network with US politicians who supported Georgia's cause. Republicans such as John McCain and Lindsey Graham, as well as Democrats Richard Holbrooke, Anthony Blinken, Joe Lieberman, Joe Biden and Ronald Asmus, were all Georgia supporters (Mitchell, 2009b; Toal, 2017).[132] They viewed Georgia as a potential role model in the region for democracy and the market economy. In an unusual bipartisan initiative in 2005, Senators John McCain and Hillary Clinton even nominated Saakashvili for the Nobel Peace Prize (Asmus, 2010). The Saakashvili administration presented several arguments to gain the Bush administration's support. The new Georgian government reiterated Shevardnadze's message that Georgia, together with Azerbaijan and Turkey, formed an important energy transit corridor linking Europe and Central Asia as an alternative to Russia and Iran.[133] In addition, Saakashvili's government tapped into two key policies of the Bush administration: the Global War on Terror and the Freedom Agenda.

Shevardnadze had already sent Georgian troops to Afghanistan and Iraq but Saakashvili prolonged and strengthened this commitment. Moreover, the Georgian government opened its airspace and helped US military aircraft reach Afghanistan. For years, Georgia had the largest military presence per capita in Afghanistan and was the largest non-NATO troop contributor. From 2007, Georgia was the third largest troop contributor in Iraq, behind the US and the UK (Allnutt, 2007). While many countries withdrew or downsized their military in these operations, the Georgian military maintained or even increased its presence. From Georgia's perspective, a strong military presence over a long period demonstrated Georgia's loyalty to the United States. One purpose was to demonstrate that Georgia, notwithstanding its territorial conflicts and difficult relationship with Russia, was a net security contributor for the US and NATO. As articulated by Georgia's minister of defense, "If we seriously want to become members of the alliance, naturally we have to assume partial responsibility and operate like the alliance members do" (RFE/RL, 2007). Georgia's participation also gave its army combat experience and US military training.

Moreover, Saakashvili's administration aligned, at least rhetorically, with the Bush administration's Freedom Agenda. A cornerstone of Bush's foreign policy became promoting democracy around the world. This idea increasingly served as a rationale for the wars in and reconstruction of Afghanistan and

[131] Interview, Giorgi Bokeria, 2017.
[132] Interview, Batu Kutelia, 2017.
[133] Interview, Giorgi Bokeria, 2017.

Iraq. The Rose Revolution gave the new government an opportunity to promote Georgia as a former Soviet state that had performed a sudden, successful democratic transformation. As portrayed by a Saakashvili ally,

> But post-Rose Revolution when we managed to have the penetration of our message all around, this brand new example of transformation and democracy march… provided us with the opportunity of really pushing for US interest in this region, in Georgia, and Euro-Atlantic enlargement, and President Bush's figure and team around him were crucial in that. So if you look from Saakashvili and from our team's effort from 2004, it was very intense, physically very intense diplomacy, across the Atlantic, but in Eastern Europe and everywhere cultivating Georgia as a strategically important country. Both as an idea as success of the western transformation, and practically for security reasons too, and of course, I mean, partially you can say that our participation in the missions in Iraq and Afghanistan it served our security. But also it helped us to demonstrate that Georgia is an important place if it is successful to be a western ally, for projection of western power.[134]

As discussed in Chapter 5, US policymakers had already invested in democracy promotion programs in Georgia and since Bush was looking for a success story, Georgia turned out to be a good fit.

The Georgian-US partnership manifested itself in multiple ways but perhaps most visibly during frequent high-level meetings between members of the Saakashvili and Bush administrations. For example, US Secretary of State Colin Powell attended Saakashvili's presidential inauguration. Powell noted in retrospect that Saakashvili, after the inauguration, had invited him to a town hall meeting, televised throughout Georgia, in a building decorated with dozens of Georgian and US flags. Meanwhile, other guests, including senior officials from Russia, had to wait outside (Roxburgh, 2021, p. 136). Such symbolism and practices were typical of the Saakashvili administration, which wanted to demonstrate the importance of the US to Georgia.

The Bush administration reciprocated and invited Saakashvili and his cabinet members to Washington in February 2004, where the Georgian president met with Bush and others in the administration. The young Georgian leaders reportedly impressed the audience and the US president (Stent, 2014). At a joint press conference, Bush called the Rose Revolution a "historic moment" and praised Saakashvili: "I am impressed by this leader. I am impressed by his vision, I am impressed by his courage. I am heartened by the fact that we have such a strong friend, a friend with whom we share values....And I am proud to call you friend" (White House, 2004).

Bush expressed hope for a better Georgian-Russian relationship but made clear he was on Georgia's side on the issue and called on Russia to abandon its military bases in Georgia: "We expect the Russian government to honor the Istanbul commitment. The Istanbul commitment made it very clear that

[134] Interview, Giorgi Bokeria, 2017.

Russia would leave those places. We will continue to work with the President and President Putin on that commitment" (White House, 2004). Saakashvili responded during the same press conference:

> It is a great honor for me and for the people of Georgia to be here in this Oval Office….We consider ourselves a very close ally and friend of the United States. We are proud to be friend of the United States. I am speaking on behalf of every Georgian….Georgia will become stronger, Georgia will become more democratic….And I think Georgia can become a role model for the whole region. And this is very important. We need US help in that....And we are so proud that we were supported in our fight for democracy and for people's right to choose by the United States, and Washington was the first to come and help us. And I'm sure we will never forget that. (White House, 2004)

Saakashvili knew how to get Bush's attention. As one advisor to the Bush administration recalled, "He [Saakashvili] was terrific, he was on message. He came into the president with a message about the importance of recognising that his legacy was building a democratic Georgia. This was music to our ears, this was the right message" (Cited in Roxburgh, 2021, p. 253). Another senior US official explained in an interview with this author the initial significance of the Rose Revolution for the United States:

> It was hope. I remember the rise of Saakashvili, and we regarded Shevardnadze, you know for all of his achievements in the late Soviet period and his skills as foreign minister and he deserves a lot of credit for that. He was not a successful president, I do not know what happened, but he seemed helpless. And Saakashvili's early years were productive. He got the country moving. But he was a charismatic figure who did not build the institutions needed to make permanent the changes he was introducing. It was all about him.[135]

In 2005, Bush made the first ever US presidential visit to Georgia. In front of a massive audience, Bush declared Georgia a "beacon of liberty".[136] Bush's visit was highly important for the Georgian government since it demonstrated that Georgia was no longer a post-Soviet state. According to one member of the administration:

> And this was the time when President Bush was travelling to Georgia in 2005 saying we were a beacon of democracy, and that really embolden us, and for domestic consumption as well as politically. Ok, now we are not a failed state, not post-Soviet, but we are a western state, and we know [the] US president says this, Georgia is a democracy.[137]

[135] Interview, Daniel Fried, 2020.
[136] In yet another symbolic gesture, the Georgian government decided to honor President Bush by naming a boulevard leading to the international airport after him.
[137] Interview, Batu Kutelia, 2017.

From a comparative perspective, it is notable that Bush canceled plans for a presidential visit to Kyiv at the time due to Ukraine's political turbulence (see Chapter 8). Many senior officials in the Bush administration visited Georgia in the following years. Such intense diplomatic activity is noteworthy given Georgia's small size and limited material resources. Clearly, Tbilisi had started to play an important role in Bush's international agenda. At least in part, this was a result of the Georgian side's intense high-level diplomacy in Washington. The Georgians even bypassed normal diplomatic protocols by making constant calls to the White House and the State Department (Toal, 2017). As one Georgia leader explained: "Yes, we were criticized for being disproportionally present in Washington, but that is exactly the goal of any country; to be disproportionally present in the capital of the leader of the free world".[138] The Georgian government financed a Georgian "lobby" in Washington and worked with a US firm, Orion Strategies, to boost its messages.[139]

Beyond diplomatic support, Washington provided high levels of economic assistance to Georgia, including military aid programs intended to strengthen the country's armed forces.[140] In 2008, the US reportedly had over 100 military advisors on the ground in Georgia (Tagliavini, 2009, p. 15).

Georgia's NATO ambitions

A central foreign policy goal of the Saakashvili administration was to be given a NATO membership action plan (MAP) as soon as possible, which eventually would lead to Georgia's NATO membership. The Georgian government preferred a fast process because many in the administration believed Russia constituted a threat to Georgia's security.[141]

NATO membership was the number one pillar of Euro-Atlantic integration for Georgia but Saakashvili viewed NATO membership not primarily as an aim, but as a means to achieve his main goal – territorial integrity. As stated at a session of the Georgian National Security Council in 2005:

> The main task of the Georgian State is restoration of its territorial integrity; this is the goal of my life, which will be achieved….The second: Euro-Atlantic integration, which is a means to achieve our top priority [restoration of territorial integrity]. I plan to solve the issue of our membership into NATO during my first presidential term [before 2009]. Good diplomacy will allow us to solve this issue. (Civil Georgia, 2005)

This statement is another indicator that Saakashvili's administration tailored its foreign and domestic policies toward the overall goals of territorial integ-

[138] Interview, Giorgi Bokeria, 2017.
[139] Interview, Giorgi Bokeria, 2017.
[140] The primary US goal was to strengthen and prepare Georgian troops for missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.
[141] Interview, Giorgi Bokeria, 2017.

rity and strengthening the state. From this dissertation's perspective, this priority follows from Georgia's traumatic transition to independence, and an ambition to make Georgia a truly independent and sovereign state.

The NATO membership process had two main components. Georgia needed to reform its army in line with NATO standards and to convince NATO members that Georgia would be an advantage to the organization.[142] The Georgian government viewed the United States as important to help Georgia join NATO. Leaders within the Bush administration, such as President Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, NATO Ambassador Victoria Nuland and National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley, reportedly supported NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Minister of Defense Robert Gates were skeptical. President Bush understood a NATO MAP as part of the Freedom Agenda and decided to lobby to get Georgia and Ukraine into NATO (Stent, 2014). New NATO members with recent experience of Russian occupation, such as the Baltic states, Poland and the Czech Republic, also supported Georgia's and Ukraine's bids for a MAP.

Influential European countries such as Germany and France were more skeptical, however, and allegedly took Russian objections to NATO enlargement into account (Asmus, 2010). The debate within the alliance culminated at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008. The two camps had a heated debate at the summit until finally reaching a compromise. Georgia and Ukraine did not receive a MAP but a declaration that Georgia and Ukraine would one day become members of NATO. The declaration was deliberately vague and did not specify how or when the two states would become members. For many within the Georgian government, the decision was disappointing and worsened an already strained relationship with the German leadership. From the Georgian perspective, not getting a MAP limited Georgia's ability to strengthen its sovereignty. As a government official noted:

> It was very much frustration for us because we are more idealistic toward this process, and one of the biggest frustration I personally had was the Bucharest Summit. And then the arguments that were revealed after the summit finished. But okay, it is a "realpolitik" world, it is different and we have to live with it. But I strongly believe that not giving Georgia [a] MAP at the time was the reason why Russia decided to take a military adventure in Georgia.[143]

According to Georgia's then minister of Euro-Atlantic integration, who participated in Bucharest, Saakashvili warned of the consequences if Georgia did not receive a MAP:

> During the Bucharest Summit, President Saakashvili, the day before the summit there are these side events that NGOs always are organizing, but the same

[142] Interviews, Batu Kutelia, 2017; Nodar Kharshiladze, 2017.
[143] Interview, Batu Kutelia, 2017.

> politically important people are gathered there and discussing acute issues and the agenda of the summit. President Saakashvili said: 'if tomorrow you won't be able to give Georgia a MAP, Russia will attack Georgia, and you will be blamed, remember this, because you show Russia weakness, and that will be the signal for Russia to attack us'. I mean how more clearly and absolutely blunt and non-diplomatic could we say the truth about it?[144]

The *Economist* (2008) reported that Saakashvili in closed meetings at the time compared not offering Georgia a MAP with appeasement of Nazi Germany in the late 1930s. Germany's Foreign Minister, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, later confirmed that such analogies had been made in Bucharest and that he felt deeply insulted (Roxburgh, 2021, p. 258). Although one can discuss the usefulness of such comparisons, this illustrates how important NATO membership was for the Georgian government. Their experience of Russian dominance made the issue acute. Unlike Ukraine, which closed down its NATO aspirations between 2010 and 2014, Georgian governments continued to aim for NATO membership throughout the period studied in this dissertation.

Strong support for NATO membership inside Georgia

Compared to Ukraine, which at the time faced strong opposition to NATO membership at home (see Chapters 8 & 10), a clear majority of Georgia's political elite and society supported NATO membership. In March 2007, all the major parties in the Georgian parliament signed a memorandum declaring NATO membership to be the best way to guarantee Georgia's security, territorial integrity and democracy (Civil Georgia, 2007).[145] The memorandum also ruled out neutrality as a viable option. In the 2008 presidential election, Saakashvili's main challenger, Levan Gachechiladze, also supported NATO and EU membership. Only Irina Sarishvili opted for neutrality, but she received 0.17 percent of the votes in the election (Nodia, 2009).

A majority of the Georgian population supported NATO membership. In a plebiscite held in January 2008, 72.5 percent of the participants favored NATO membership (Civil Georgia, 2008a). Polls also indicated strong support for NATO and EU membership (Nodia, 2009). Only after the Georgia-Russia war in 2008 (see below) did some opposition figures express criticism. The Labour Party's Shalva Natelashvili, for example, proposed neutrality after the war since Georgia's drive for NATO membership, in his view, had come at the cost of a Russian invasion (Civil Georgia, 2008b).

Nino Burjanadze, one of the leaders of the Rose Revolution, resigned as speaker before the war and became a vocal critic of Saakashvili. She argued

[144] Interview, Giorgi Baramidze, 2019. This author has not been able to independently verify this claim.

[145] The UNM, the New Rights, the Industrialists, the Conservatives and the Republicans all signed the memorandum.

that aiming for NATO membership was futile, and that Georgia should reorient its foreign policy closer toward Russia. Burjanadze even met several times with Vladimir Putin (Menabde, 2013). After these declarations, however, neither Natelashvili nor Burjanadze had any success in Georgian elections.[146] Importantly, opposition leaders such as Irakli Alasania, David Gamkrelidze and David Usupashvili criticized Saakashvili's government on many issues but supported a continued pro-western orientation. As Usupashvili recalled:

> It was kind of a surprise for many outside when they learned that we are all equally pro-western, pro-European, and we were all people who saluted the Rose Revolution, but were disappointed where things went, and our concern was that the policy which Saakashvili was following, especially internally, is raising frustration or dissatisfaction [with] the western lifestyle, because people looked at the development and asked, is this Europe?[147]

In other words, Georgia's support for a pro-western foreign policy orientation remained strong even after the 2008 war. To sum up this section, Georgia's relationship with the US and its ambition for NATO membership were closely related to the ambition to come to terms with Georgia's difficult formative period.

Georgia's relationship with Russia after the Rose Revolution: from reset to war

As seen, Georgia's foreign policy after the Rose Revolution was pro-western. At the same time, Saakashvili initially reached out to Vladimir Putin after the Rose Revolution to establish a better relationship. This approach was, however, not comparable to a multivector or non-bloc policy pursued, for example, by Viktor Yanukovych in Ukraine. As told by a Georgian deputy minister, neutrality or a non-bloc status was not an option, primarily because of Georgia's negative experience with Russia in the 1990s:

> I mean I served as the deputy minister with Shevardnadze, then with Saakashvili, we have never discussed it [neutrality], it was never on the agenda. Because of our negative historical experience with Russia, that is why, and because we knew that Russia contributed a lot to [the] conflicts in Georgia. It was very clear, they were so straightforward, they outraged Georgia so many times, and I was witnessing it. And this historic experience, our experience with Russia I mean, it demonstrated very well that Russia is not a reliable partner… we never felt any keen desire from Russia to contribute to the strengthening of Georgia's statehood […] On the [contrary], you know. I was always feeling

[146] In her best performance in the 2013 presidential election, Nino Burjanadze received 10 percent of the votes.
[147] Interview, David Usupashvili, 2019.

> that even Georgia's presence at any negotiation table in capacity of [an] independent entity was very irritating to Russia.[148]

A diplomat in the Georgian foreign ministry who became state minister of reintegration and ambassador to the United Nations in Saakashvili's government explained to this author how the 1990s – the loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as Russian involvement – shaped Georgia's foreign policy thinking:

> Look, [the early years] had a profound impact because obviously this de-occupation came on the foreign policy agenda, and it is very difficult when you have a problematic agenda in your foreign policy. […] So it kind of shapes or affects rather, your foreign policy thinking that from day one you have a problem [...] but it also helped to shape the foreign policy. Saying that, you know what, we do not want to deal with Russia in a way that we cannot be successful. So it is lunacy for us to deal with Russia directly on the bilateral level.[149]

Thus, because of Georgia's painful experience with Russia it was unthinkable to pursue neutrality or a non-bloc status. Saakashvili's government wanted to continue the pro-western foreign policy and negotiate with Russia on two problems that remained from the 1990s – a permanent solution for Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Ajaria, and a withdrawal from Russia's remaining military bases in Georgia. Economic cooperation was on the agenda but only in so far as it did not compromise Georgia's pro-western orientation (De Waal, 2019). The Saakashvili administration's Russia policy thus connected to his main goals: uniting Georgia and establishing full sovereignty. This attempt failed, however, as discussed below, and the relationship became negative and highly emotional, including between Saakashvili and Putin personally.

A restart with Russia that failed

Saakashvili and some within his team wanted to reach out to Moscow to resolve the problems mentioned above. Several in the administration – especially those with experience of the 1990s – were skeptical of such a reset. Batu Kutelia, for example, had worked in the diplomatic service under Shevardnadze. He later held key positions in the intelligence service before becoming first deputy minister of defense under Saakashvili. He had low expectations of a rapprochement with the Kremlin because he had seen what such cooperation with Russia had meant for Georgia in the 1990s:

> Saakashvili thought he would have some personal chemistry with Putin, explaining to him, you know a democratic pro-western Georgia is in Russian interest, because at the time Chechnya was an issue, stable borders, general things, which rationally should be in Russian interests. But this rationale never

[148] Interview, Valeri Chechelashvili, 2019.
[149] Interview, Temur Yakobashvili, 2019.

> worked with Russia, so personally me and many of us did not have high expectations that there would [be] a positive change in Georgian-Russian relations. But he [Saakashvili] made this move, which gave him the higher moral ground, saying 'I tried my best', kind of our own reset with Russia, like Obama did and most every American president does. When talking to our western partners, [we could say] you know we tried but they [the Russians] never really wanted to work with us.[150]

One of Saakashvili's closest allies argues (with the benefit of hindsight) that a reset was an attempt to avoid an early crisis with Moscow:

> Our joint goal was to not have an immediate crisis [with Russia], at a minimum. And if we would be lucky, and there were some in minority that said, yes we can have a modus with Putin which would not put us on [a] collision course. If that was doable, while not compromising on our fundamental goal. Of course, that would be a good result. I mean, I can be, quote-unquote, proud of being a skeptic at the time that [it] would happen. But it was surely a correct strategy, at the minimum, to win some time. We had at least, six-seven months until the first big crisis.[151]

Another deputy minister with experience of working in the National Security Council under Shevardnadze was also skeptical:

> So Saakashvili and many of his comrades, so to say, thought that the big deal of our bad relationship with Russia comes from Shevardnadze's personality, who was really very much hated in Russia because of this perestroika period of time. Generally, Shevardnadze at that time was already very much hated in Russia and so on, but it was a big mistake to treat this fact as the main reason for our bad relationship with Russia because the reason, unfortunately, was and still is [a] much more deep and strategical one, not just about personalities. Though, personal things always are there.[152]

Clearly, it is difficult to validate fully if many in Saakashvili's administration at the time were critical of a rapprochement with Russia as these interviews were conducted after the reset had failed. Nonetheless, in line with this dissertation's theoretical argument, we would expect government officials with previous negative experience of Russia to be skeptical of a reset with Moscow.

In early February 2004, Saakashvili visited Putin in Moscow. While Putin had developed a habit of letting his guests wait, likely to demonstrate power, this time Saakashvili arrived at the Kremlin half an hour late, keeping Putin waiting (Levy, 2009).[153] Despite the bad start, the meeting went quite well.

[150] Interview, Batu Kutelia, 2017.
[151] Interview, Giorgi Bokeria, 2017.
[152] Interview, Nikoloz Vashakidze, 2019.
[153] According to Georgians present at the meeting, Saakashvili had lost track of time while swimming in the hotel pool.

Saakashvili reportedly felt he had chemistry with Putin. They discussed economic cooperation and a joint ambition to fight terrorism and to restart the Sochi process – a trilateral format between Georgia, Russia and Abkhazia. Putin, however, criticized the Georgian government's close ties with the Bush administration (Roxburgh, 2021). The new Georgian government also sent signals during the meeting that it would not take orders from Moscow:

> Putin at the time still had an attempt, or maybe illusions, that he could play the new political elite to his advantage by directly asking President Saakashvili to keep this or that guy in place. Like the former security minister [who] was their open spy, spy meaning something hidden, he was their resident, [Valeri] Khaburzania. And one of the first requests by Putin when Saakashvili and he met in Moscow was that he is a very good guy, you should keep him, and of course… we fired him, not immediately but soon enough.[154]

This was an early indication that a restart would be difficult, as noted by a deputy minister: "He [Saakashvili] dismissed this guy, and the Russians were upset. [This was] one indicator that the reset with Russia would not work".[155]

Georgia signaled it had its own independent policy from Moscow. At the same time, it illustrated the dilemma Georgia faced with Russia. Each step the Georgian government took to decrease Russia's influence in Georgia was met with an assertive response from the Kremlin. However, the alternative was to remain close to Russia and abandon the pro-western orientation and the goal of territorial integrity. This alternative was not an option for most Georgian policymakers.

Russia as a spoiler of Georgia's territorial integrity

As discussed above, the Georgian government in power after the Rose Revolution felt an urgency to restore Georgia's territorial integrity. From the government's perspective, Abkhazia and South Ossetia in particular were gradually drifting away from Georgia. In Georgia's view, the Russian leadership was using the regions to strengthen its influence in Georgia and had not fulfilled the UN mandate to work as a true mediator or show political will to help resolve the conflicts.[156] The Georgian government increasingly viewed the conflicts as primarily between Georgia and Russia, rather than with Sukhumi or Tskhinvali (International Crisis Group, 2004). As one minister noted:

> Well, the main security problem or challenge for Georgia has always been Russian policy, and Russia always considered this region as a special interest, and I mean since the very beginning in the 1990s they started this issue in Abkhazia

[154] Interview, Giorgi Bokeria, 2017.
[155] Interview, Batu Kutelia, 2017.
[156] As discussed in previous chapters, the West had in the 1990s welcomed Russia taking responsibility in the United Nations for these conflicts. See for example Saakashvili's speech in the UN in 2006 (Civil Georgia, 2006b).

> and in the Tskhinvali region [South Ossetia]. Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region always has been a Georgia-Russian problem, with certain elements of ethnic elements but of course the primary – and this is mostly misunderstood – that sometimes people call them ethnic conflicts which is not ethnic conflict by definition. It is a dispute between Georgia and Russia, and a Russian-Georgian problem, with certain components but not really the key component.[157]

Assertions that Russia did little to resolve the conflicts were not without merit. As discussed in Chapter 5, Russia had distributed passports to Abkhazians and Ossetians, which turned the population into Russian citizens. This obviously complicated the process of reintegrating Abkhazians and Ossetians into Georgia but also provided a rationale for the Kremlin to defend Russian citizens in the regions if deemed necessary. Moreover, ethnic Russians gained influential posts in de facto governments. After Eduard Kokoity, a former Ossetian wrestler with close ties to the Kremlin, became president in South Ossetia in 2001, Russian KGB officials were put in key government positions. Kokoity showed little interest in a Georgian-Ossetian political settlement, and in 2004 repeatedly called for integration with Russia (International Crisis Group, 2004). In Abkhazia, the situation was more complex. Sergei Bagapsh became de facto president in 2005, despite Moscow's heavy backing for his rival, Raul Khajimba. After the elections, Bagapsh continued to lobby for the international community to recognize Abkhazia as an independent state, but also declared support for Moscow (De Waal, 2019, p. 205).[158] Thus, the Saakashvili government's argument that the de facto states had close ties to Russia was not groundless. The question was how Saakashvili's government would respond.

As mentioned above, Saakashvili's government successfully ousted Abashidze from power in Ajaria without violence in the spring of 2004 and established control over the region. Russia played a passive role by not defending Abashidze and instead offering him amnesty in Moscow. In an interview, Saakashvili later said he had called President Putin to thank him for the help in Ajaria, and that Putin responded, "OK, Mikheil Mikheilovich, we helped you on this one, but remember very well, there will be no more free gifts offered to you, on South Ossetia and Abkhazia" (Roxburgh, 2021, p. 141).

At the same time, a Georgian political opposition leader recalls that Saakashvili returned enthusiastic after a meeting with Putin:

> I guess it was in St Petersburg, he went there in summer 2004….He [Saakashvili] told this story to some of us, civil society people: well Putin is ready to give South Ossetia back tomorrow, he needs some time about Abkhazia, because if he does this immediately as well, he will have problems internally,

[157] Interview, Vasil Sikharulidze, 2019.
[158] As with other elections in de facto states, the election was not recognized by organizations such as the OSCE.

> public opinion will not be so easy to overcome. But towards South Ossetia, [Saakashvili] was joking that Putin did not even know where it is, that he thought that it is bordering Abkhazia, and how close it is […] and when [Saakashvili] explained, [Putin] said, 'really just take it'.[159]

In relation to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the Saakashvili government worked with a dual strategy. One component was to boost the economy and root out corruption in Georgia to make it more attractive for the two regions. If that strategy did not achieve quick results, Saakashvili wanted to strengthen Georgia's military and internal troops, not the least to back up the rhetoric on territorial integrity. In a speech, he declared, "I do not want to use troops in Abkhazia, but we should have [a] strong economy and army to restore territorial integrity" (Civil Georgia, 2004).

Georgia's attempt to take control of South Ossetia in 2004

In the summer of 2004, the Georgian government tried to reintegrate South Ossetia. Inspired by the success in Ajaria, the government pursued an anti-smuggling operation, which had started in late 2003, to strike at the informal economy. The anti-smuggling operation was complemented by a humanitarian aid offensive. The goal seems to have been to delegitimize the Kokoity regime but the strategy backfired. Among other things, the Georgian authorities closed down the Ergneti market, which had problems with smuggling and organized crime, but was also a lifeline for many in the region and a meeting place for the Ossetian and Georgian populations (De Waal, 2019). Saakashvili reached out to the local population, addressed the Abkhazians and Ossetians in their native language and offered them benefits from various social and economic projects (International Crisis Group, 2004). At the same time, Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) troops, led by Interior Minister Irakli Okruashvili (later Minister of Defense), took control of strategic positions within South Ossetia. Okruashvili, born in Tskhinvali, South Ossetia's de facto capital, was known for having a tough position vis-à-vis Ossetians and Russia. Saakashvili declared on national television that the troop positions would allow them to "quickly take control of the entire South Ossetian territory" if necessary (Peuch, 2004).

Both Georgians and Ossetians mobilized troops and the media reported gunfire. In a rather chaotic situation, Georgia's ministers of defense and the interior were on the frontline, guiding their troops via mobile phones without personal security (Miles, 2007, p. 290). The Georgian government accused the Russian military of supporting the Ossetians. In July–August, the operations resulted in the killing of 17 Georgians and five Ossetians before Georgian troops withdrew. One senior Georgian official declared, "At this stage it is

[159] Interview, David Usupashvili, 2019.

impossible for Georgia to restore its territorial integrity militarily" (International Crisis Group, 2004, p. 14). Kokoity strengthened his position in South Ossetia by portraying himself as the only person who could stand up to the Georgian threat. The operation began a new downward spiral in Georgian-Russian relations. In a speech, Putin warned Saakashvili not to use force to solve the conflicts: "What we see today is a repetition of what happened in the early 1990s. […] This is the reason why it is important that the negotiation process continue with a view to creating an atmosphere of trust and preserving peace and stability. Russia will do its utmost to foster this process" (Peuch, 2004).

From the Georgian perspective, such promises rang hollow – Moscow had repeated similar statements for a decade but had suggested few solutions to the conflicts. At the same time, respected organizations such as the International Crisis Group (2004) criticized the Georgian leadership for showing a limited understanding of the roots to the conflicts with South Ossetia and Abkhazia. As the crisis unfolded, Saakashvili traveled to Washington to meet senior officials of the Bush administration. At a think tank forum, Saakashvili defended his government's actions in South Ossetia:

> Georgia will never again be a failed state. […] How would any other country react? It would have the right and obligation to protect its borders.
>
> He described South Ossetia and Abkhazia as led by: criminal and separatist regimes that have profited for years from corruption, protected by [Russian] 'peacekeepers' of the former [Soviet] empire. (Eurasianet, 2004)

In private, Secretary of State Powell told Saakashvili to be careful and that the US would provide very limited backing if Georgia got into a hot conflict: "I think the president over-reached too early. I had to make clear to him that, 'You might think this is in your vital national interest – we're not so sure it is. But it isn't in our vital national interest. So don't get yourself into a situation that may overwhelm you and think we are going to race in to rescue you from any difficulties you get into. So be careful'" (Roxburgh, 2021, p. 143). The Bush administration feared the situation could escalate into a Georgian-Russian military conflict. The US ambassador to Georgia suggested a Bush visit to Tbilisi:

> [T]o make it clear to Saakashvili that we didn't approve of the use of force to settle the issues between Georgia proper and South Ossetia or Abkhazia. That was the primary purpose of the President's visit in May of 2005 and, I must say, President Bush was quite forceful in talking to Saakashvili about that. (Miles, 2007, p. 290)

Hence, Bush's 2005 visit was not only about the Freedom Agenda but also to express concern over Saakashvili's behavior vis-à-vis South Ossetia. The US

government showed official support for Georgia's territorial integrity but asked Georgian officials behind the scenes to avoid a confrontation with Russia and not to spend too much political capital on the breakaway regions, given Russia's advantage there (US_EMB, 2006a).

Georgia's ambition to integrate the two regions persisted. In 2006, Georgian authorities conducted an operation in Upper Kodori, Abkhazia (an area not controlled by the Abkhazian authorities) and outmaneuvered a local warlord who had controlled the area: "The thing was that Russia [was] more than happy to exploit any instability, any weaknesses in Georgia that they could find. Another such place was Kodori valley or Upper Abkhazia where we had this pro-Russian local warlord, Emzar Kvitsiani, so we had to deal with him too".[160]

Georgia set up institutions and moved a Tbilisi-loyal Abkhazian government-in-exile into the area. Russian officials criticized the move and, in protest, the Abkhazian side withdrew from further negotiations. In 2007, Georgia backed Dmitry Sanakoyev, a former Ossetian minister who was critical of the South Ossetian leader Kokoity. The Georgian authorities provided financial support and security to Sanakoyev and made him head of an "interim administration" located in South Ossetia, less than 10 kilometers from Tskhinvali (De Waal, 2019, p. 206). Again, the Georgian government mixed conflict resolution initiatives with hawkish statements. Defense Minister Okruashvili declared in May 2006, "If we fail to celebrate New Year in Tskhinvali on January 1, 2007 I will no longer be the Defense Minister of Georgia" (Civil Georgia, 2006a). Saakashvili's administration frequently presented a narrative of Georgia's traumatic past as a victim, and that the situation had to be changed. In a speech in Jerusalem in 2006, Saakashvili compared Georgia's experience in the 1990s with Israel's struggle for statehood and security:

> We were losing everything, because we had no state. We were losing control of our territories, reputation and prestige, while a part of Georgians lost a sense of pride in their own country. […] Today, Georgia has changed. Today's Georgia has peaceful intentions and has well-trained and well-equipped armed forces. […] The Jews used to say for centuries that they should not forget Jerusalem, because living without it is equal to being without their right hand. The same is true with Abkhazia and Sokhumi for the Georgians. Georgia without Abkhazia is a country without its right hand, while we need that right hand very much. (Civil Georgia, 2006c)

This again illustrates the role territorial integrity played in Saakashvili's agenda, and also how the traumatic 1990s motivated the Saakashvili government's policies. This goal and how the Georgian government acted to achieve it fundamentally clashed with Russian ambitions in Georgia and the broader region.

[160] Interview, Shota Utiashvili, 2017.

Withdrawal from Russian military bases

Another high-priority issue for the Georgian government linked to territorial integrity was the withdrawal from Russia's military bases. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, Russian military bases were another legacy of Georgia's turbulent transition. Yeltsin and Shevardnadze had agreed on a withdrawal in Istanbul in 1999 – but this had few results when it came to three of the bases in Gudauta, Akhalkalaki and Batumi.[161] Saakashvili's government wanted to change the status quo. It criticized Russia for doing little and for using talks about joint Georgian-Russian counterterrorism centers as a pretext for preserving its military presence in Georgia.

Compared to Ukraine at the time, where only some political parties and part of the population viewed the Russian military base in Crimea as a threat to Ukraine's sovereignty, Georgians agreed that Russia's military bases were a threat that had to be removed. In a unanimous vote in March 2005, the Georgian Parliament passed a resolution demanding Russia provide a timetable for its removal of two military bases. If Moscow failed to do this, the Georgian Parliament would treat Russia's military presence in Georgia as "illegal" from 1 January 2006 (Mite, 2005a). After long negotiations, Tbilisi and Moscow came to an agreement and Russia withdrew from Akhalkalaki and Batumi in 2007, but maintained its military presence in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Deterioration in Georgian-Russian relations: heated rhetoric and emotions

After a short reset, the Georgian-Russian relationship quickly deteriorated. Georgia and Russia disagreed over South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The Kremlin also viewed Georgia's close relationship with the US and NATO in a highly negative light (Stent, 2014). A major difference between Georgia and Ukraine was that from the Russian point of view, the Kremlin had a partner in Viktor Yanukovych and the Party of Regions in Ukraine. In Georgia, the Kremlin had difficulties finding an influential partner. Instead, Russia primarily relied on its advantage in South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

In 2006, a series of events worsened Georgian-Russian relations. Explosions in North Ossetia damaged Russia's main gas pipeline to Georgia. Saakashvili's government accused Russian officials of deliberately sabotaging the pipeline to put pressure on Georgia, while Moscow blamed terrorists (Sindelar, 2006). Russia imposed sanctions on Georgian wine and agriculture products, and later on mineral water – all important Georgian export products to the Russian market. In September, the Georgian authorities arrested four Rus-

[161] Russia had already withdrawn from the Vaziani military base outside Tbilisi. Russia also claimed to have withdrawn from Gudauta in Abkhazia. Few Georgians believed the latter claim since Russian soldiers remained in place under the label "peacekeepers", and Georgians did not get access to inspect the military base.

sian army officials for espionage. In a televised event, the Russians were deported to Moscow. Putin responded furiously, calling Georgian behavior "state terrorism" and comparing it to actions by Joseph Stalin's infamous secret police chief Lavrentiy Beria.[162] Saakashvili retaliated at a press conference by calling the collapse of USSR "the happiest day of his life".[163] He continued,

> The message of Georgia to our great neighbor Russia is, 'Enough is enough'.…We want to be constructive. We want to have dialogue. But we cannot be treated as a second-rate backyard of some kind of – in the minds of some politicians – re-emerging empire (Allnutt, 2006).

In response, the Russian government closed rail, road, sea and postal links with Georgia and denied visas to Georgian citizens. The Saakashvili government claimed that Russia was hindering Georgia's success, and in 2007 Foreign Minister Gela Bezhuashvili shared his view on how best to deal with the Kremlin:

> Do not appease Russia; that is my message. The appeasement of Russia will not bring you results. No, if they feel that you are weak, they will put you down, put you down, using your weakness. They play on weakness all the time. So, be strong, don't show your weakness, and try to engage them from a position of strength. Build alliances (Keinon, 2007).

Thus, the Georgian approach was different from some influential parties in Ukraine, such as the Party of Regions which preferred accommodation to Russian interests to avoid "provoking" Moscow (as discussed in Chapters 8 & 10).

The Georgian-Russian relationship turned increasingly negative, fueled by heated rhetoric and emotions. One analyst noted, "The quarrel showed Russia reverting to its worst bullying instincts, while the Georgians could not resist provoking Russian dignity. Perceived honor and pride took precedence over strategic interests" (De Waal, 2019, p. 206).

Saakashvili and his team delivered emotionally loaded statements aimed at the Russian leadership. A Georgian diplomat offers the following assessment of the Saakashvili-Putin relationship: "They hate each other, I heard, many times, very emotional statements from Saakashvili and from people around him about Putin. And unfortunately, this personal element in the political life of Russia as well as Georgia is still very important" (Levy, 2009). Another Georgian diplomat, generally critical of Russia's actions in Georgia, considered Saakashvili's rhetoric counterproductive:

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[162] Both Lavrentiy Beria and Joseph Stalin were of course ethnic Georgians.

[163] This was a response to Putin's statement one year earlier that the collapse of the USSR had been the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.

> So, you know, from that time, August 2004, when Georgia failed to take Tskhinvali, personal relations between Putin and Saakashvili worsened, and he [Saakashvili] started mocking him, calling him you know, Lili-Putin, Gas-Putin and so on. A big mistake.[164]

Putin reportedly showed an unusually emotional side when Georgia came up in meetings with western leaders. In a meeting outside Moscow between Putin and US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in 2006, Ambassador William Burns, who was accompanying Rice, described how Putin suddenly stood up and wagged his index finger when Rice brought up Georgia. These are Burn's meeting notes on Putin's words:

> If Saakashvili uses force in South Ossetia, which we are convinced he is preparing to do, it would be a grave mistake, and the Georgian people would suffer most. I'm going to tell you something that no one in there knows yet. If Georgia causes bloodshed in Ossetia, I will have no alternative to recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and responding with force….We are not the ones causing tensions. Why are the Georgians buying arms from NATO countries? Why have they doubled their military budget over the last year? Why is their Defense Minister actively planning to initiate hostilities in South Ossetia? Georgia is a puppet of the United States, Putin continued heatedly, and the US needs to pull back on the strings with Saakashvili. You replaced one puppet, Shevardnadze, with another, and now you need to control him. Bloodshed in South Ossetia would inevitably destabilize North Ossetia, and "create another Chechnya in the Russian Federation. I will not let that happen again". Putin concluded emphatically, "I understand that there will be problems in US-Russian relations if we act in South Ossetia, but what good is a strong US-Russian relationship to me if I lose Russia? (Burns, 2006)

Interestingly, Putin and Saakashvili both believed they were defending their country's sovereignty in South Ossetia, although the international community recognized South Ossetia as part of Georgia. After the 2008 war, Putin told President of France Nicholas Sarkozy he wanted to hang Saakashvili "by his balls", and Russia's foreign minister insisted in talks with his US counterpart that Saakashvili had to resign (Roxburgh, 2021). These are only a few of many examples of distrust and emotions that had built up over time in the relationship. For Saakashvili, Putin was a Russian KGB officer who was trying to sabotage the goal of his life – to restore Georgia's territorial integrity. For Putin, Saakashvili was an arrogant US-backed puppet who had tried to challenge Russia's control of Moscow's near abroad. Putin portrayed Shevardnadze and Saakashvili in the same category of "US puppets", which illustrates that not only Georgian but also Russian officials saw much continuity from the 1990s in Georgian-Russian relations.

[164] Interview, Senior Georgian diplomat 1, 2017.

The Russian-Georgian war of 2008

In the summer of 2008, relations between Tbilisi and Moscow came to a head. Despite international attempts to prevent a conflict, Russian-Ossetian and Georgian tensions escalated into a five-day war in August 2008. At least 850 people lost their lives, many more were wounded and 100,000 civilians fled (Tagliavini, 2009). The war ended in a humiliating Georgian defeat, although Russia's military performance was far from impressive. The war started in South Ossetia but spilled over into Abkhazia. Russian forces, slow moving at first, launched a large-scale military operation and even moved into Georgian cities such as Gori and Poti. Georgia lost control of areas in South Ossetia and Abkhazia (primarily the Upper Kodori) that had been under Georgian command, and the two breakaway regions ended up fully under Russian military control. Tens of thousands, primarily ethnic Georgians, were displaced and unable to return home. On 26 August 2008, Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The causes of the war are complex and multifaceted, and analysts point to causes at several levels of analysis (Asmus, 2010; Cornell & Starr, 2009; De Waal, 2019; Tagliavini, 2009; Toal, 2017). Most accounts blame the Russian government for using South Ossetia and Abkhazia to pressure Georgia into a difficult situation, and for a disproportionately strong response when the war began. At the same time, the Georgian government was criticized for its uncompromising position vis-à-vis South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and for shelling Tskhinvali late on August 7, followed by a large military operation that, according to most accounts, started the actual five-day war.[165] The aim of this dissertation is not to go into detail about the war, or to position itself in the highly politicized debate on who started the war and why. A few comments are necessary, however, to put the war into the context of Georgia's broader foreign policy that this dissertation seeks to explain.

First, analysts emphasize the broader political conflict Russia perceived it had with the West. At the Munich Security Conference in 2007, President Putin presented a long list of perceived grievances in Russia's relationship with the West (Stent, 2014). Second, the increasingly volatile relationship between the Russian and Georgian governments, as laid out above, probably made Georgia a useful target for the Kremlin to pressure the West. Soon after the West's recognition of Kosovo's independence and ahead of the NATO

[165] The view that Georgia started the war by shelling Tskhinvali just before midnight on 7 August is supported by several experts (Asmus, 2010; Toal, 2017), including the investigation of the conflict initiated by the EU, led by the Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini (2009). Even members of the Bush administration, such as Defense Minister Robert Gates, noted that "the Russians had baited a trap and Saakashvili had walked right into it, and so they were both culpable" (Roxburgh, 2021, p. 282). Georgia's political opposition also criticized the government for the war. The debate continues on whether the Georgian government acted pre-emptively against a forthcoming Russian invasion or war could have been avoided if Georgia had not shelled Tskhinvali.

summit, the Russian Duma requested Russia's president to recognize Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence, and to defend Russian citizens. In April, Putin authorized formal relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia but not their independence.[166] Russian officials openly warned that the two regions would be lost forever to Georgia if it gained NATO membership (International Crisis Group, 2008). Moreover, the Russian government sent troops to Abkhazia to repair the railway between Abkhazia and Russia, and increased the number of "peacekeepers". Russian military aircraft entered Georgian airspace and large-scale military exercises were held in the North Caucasus that simulated a conflict scenario in Abkhazia (Asmus, 2010; International Crisis Group, 2008). Hence, there is no doubt that the Kremlin used the breakaway regions to increase its pressure on Georgia.

Third, the Saakashvili government's goal of territorial integrity and increased frustration with the situation on the ground, as well as local conditions between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, all mattered. To attract voters to his campaign for re-election in early 2008, Saakashvili once again promised a speedy reintegration of the breakaway regions (De Waal, 2019). In March 2008, Georgia's government withdrew from the Joint Control Commission (JCC) and demanded a new, more balanced peacekeeping format. In a reportedly heated conversation in April 2008, Saakashvili demanded that Putin annul the decision to establish official relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, something the Russian president refused to do (International Crisis Group, 2008).

Saakashvili's government proposed a peace plan for Abkhazia but Abkhazian officials had no trust in the Georgian government and rejected it. At the same time, western leaders received worrying signals that Saakashvili's government was desperate and that hawks in the government were looking at the option of a military operation in Abkhazia (Asmus, 2010, p. 144). In May 2008, for example, the US sent Matthew Bryza, a senior official, to Sukhumi and then to Tbilisi. In Tbilisi, Bryza met with Georgia's Minister of Internal Affairs, Vano Merabishvili, considered by the US embassy to be "among the most hawkish on Abkhaz issues of President Saakashvili's advisors" (US_EMB, 2008c). Bryza warned Merabishvili that any military action in Abkhazia would be likely to fail and encouraged new negotiations. According to the document, Merabishvili agreed to keep an open mind but doubted Abkhazian officials wanted to negotiate and was worried about Russia's "creeping annexation" of Abkhazia (US_EMB, 2008c). The Georgian government felt the West was not taking its warnings about increased Russian pressures seriously enough.[167]

[166] In practice, Russian sanctions against Abkhazia had not been active for a long time, but the decision was symbolic and a clear signal to Georgia that Russia had changed its position.
[167] Interviews, Giorgi Bokeria, 2017; Batu Kutelia, 2017.

In early August 2008, the situation started to spin out of control, following the killing of Georgian and Ossetian police officers, and Ossetian mobilization. After mortar exchanges on August 7, Saakashvili announced a unilateral ceasefire. Only hours later, just before midnight, the Georgian government reportedly launched artillery attacks and a military operation on Tskhinvali. On August 8–9, Russia responded with a large military offensive that ended on August 12. The offensive included a second front in Abkhazia and attacks on Georgia proper before it ended (Tagliavini, 2009; Toal, 2017). Sarkozy brokered a ceasefire very much on Russian terms. Just as in the 1990s, Georgia faced a humiliating defeat and was forced to sign an agreement on Russian terms.

Members of the Georgian government felt they had found themselves in a difficult situation before the war with no good options. Saakashvili's ministers applied lessons from the 1990s on the potential consequences if they did not act firmly enough:

> I personally think we did absolutely right to reciprocate militarily to them [in 2008], because it was a legitimate war from our side, on our territory, and actually, again, in a broader context that was something Russia had tried before in Georgia, with Shevardnadze. And why I told you this bigger [context], there is one case. They tried a similar provocation in 1998, ten years earlier, with Shevardnadze. And Shevardnadze had two options: [to] respond militarily or swallow this pill. Shevardnadze decided not to react militarily, it was the Gali events in 1998. And we received 20,000 additional refugees from Gali in 1998. International engagement there was not that strong, to condemn Russia, or not to revert it back. And really, Shevardnadze took the biggest hit at that time, and that's when Shevardnadze started moving westward. Knocking on NATO's door, and Russia started punishing. But that was the heat that really destroyed the credibility of the Shevardnadze government, which ended in 2002–2003. So, with the same playbook, they tried to play with Saakashvili. Saakashvili again had two options. Saakashvili chose this different option, his sovereign right to use [the] military.[168]

Hence, the Georgian government, at least in retrospect, viewed its choices as limited: either to surrender its key goal of territorial integrity or to stand firm. Such a dichotomy can, of course, be problematized, but it seems to have been the perception of the Georgian government before the war. This demonstrates the importance of formative experiences in shaping a country's perceived foreign and security policy options.

Georgia's foreign policy after the war

Georgia's foreign policy remained stable after the war. The Saakashvili government kept EU and NATO membership as Georgia's main foreign policy goals and signed a "Charter on Strategic Partnership" with the outgoing Bush

[168] Interview, Batu Kutelia, 2017.

administration. The administration of US President Barack Obama formally supported Georgia's territorial integrity but took a cooler stance vis-à-vis Saakashvili – especially during the US reset with Russia in 2009, only seven months after the war, which worried the Georgian government (Stent, 2014). Joe Biden, then US vice president, visited Tbilisi in 2009 with the message that the US supported Georgia (RFE/RL, 2009). A stagnated NATO process and a less vibrant US partnership led the Georgian government to put more effort into relations with the EU and the new Eastern Partnership (discussed in Chapter 9).[169]

Political and diplomatic relations between Georgia and Russia were frozen. Delegations met only in the so-called Geneva International Discussions to manage the aftermath of the conflict. An important priority for Georgian diplomacy became avoiding international recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia:

> In terms of foreign policy, this war with Russia went into a broad international arena, because Russia mobilized all its efforts and forces to broaden this process of recognition of the occupied territories worldwide, and our main diplomatic effort was directed to somehow oppose and stop this, and we did it actually.[170]

This focus illustrates how Georgia once again put much political and diplomatic capital into a painful experience that had haunted the country since the 1990s. International recognition of the breakaway regions would have been deeply humiliating for Georgia.

Alternative explanations for Georgia's foreign policy

A counterargument to the proposed explanation is that a European identity and democratic aspirations functioned as drivers of Georgia's pro-West foreign policy. Georgian leaders, most famously Zurab Zhvania, made declarations about Georgia's European historical connection. However, if a European identity was the main driver of Georgia's foreign policy after the Rose Revolution, why Georgia's leadership prioritized relations with the US and NATO over the EU must be explained.[171] As a senior EU diplomat who worked in Georgia at the time noted:

> It is important to understand that Georgia's foreign policy is driven by an ambition to free itself from Russian influence. If Georgia was located closer to the United States it would fit Georgia's political interests better. Especially

[169] Interview, Giorgi Bokeria, 2017.
[170] Interview, Nikoloz Vashakidze, 2019.
[171] This priority was evident and confirmed by several of my Georgian respondents in the Saakashvili government.

> Saakashvili and his government were very pro-American. Some in the government were critical of the European Commission and thought it resembled organs in the USSR, with all its regulations.[172]

Some EU officials even called Georgian ministers "Bush's children".[173] Moreover, Saakashvili's difficult relationship with Germany, a key EU member state, and its leaders Angela Merkel and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, is well documented (Asmus, 2010). Other countries such as France were also blocking Georgia's NATO aspirations, which resulted in political difficulties. Saakashvili's European friends were primarily the EU member states in Eastern Europe.

What about the importance of democratic ideals? Georgia was certainly less authoritarian than many other former Soviet republics but Saakashvili's government prioritized state building and territorial integrity over democracy (Berglund, 2013; Mitchell, 2009a). If democratic aspirations had been a crucial factor in Georgia's pro-West orientation, progress in this regard would have been expected after the Rose Revolution. The crackdown on demonstrators in 2007 and the gradual merging of Saakashvili's party with the state indicated that democracy was not the government's highest priority. Nations in Transit (2022) for example ranked Georgia's democracy even lower in 2011 than under Shevardnadze in 2002.

Finally, what about arguments that post-Soviet leaders whose political survival is threatened tend to balance their foreign policy toward Russia? This prediction does not hold in the Georgian case. Neither Shevardnadze nor Saakashvili turned Georgia's foreign policy closer to Russia when under pressure in 2003, 2007 or 2012. Finally, a pragmatic approach to the strongest regional power, Russia, suggested by many realists, was ultimately not an option for the Saakashvili administration.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to answer two main questions: What foreign policy orientation did the Georgian government pursue after the Rose Revolution? How can this foreign policy be best explained? The overall answer to the first question is that the Saakashvili administration pursued a pro-West or even pro-US foreign policy. The account offered here identifies much continuity in overall foreign policy with the previous administration. When going into detail, the chapter has shown a strong emphasis on the Georgian government's close ties with the Bush administration, which strengthened an already close Georgian-US partnership. Georgia invested much political capital in rapidly

[172] Interview, Per Eklund, 2016.
[173] Interview, Batu Kutelia, 2017.

getting closer to NATO. EU membership was also a declared goal, but less acted on until the final years of Saakashvili's time in office. Finally, Georgia's relationship with Russia became even worse than in Shevardnadze's time. After a short reset, it took only half a year before the relationship began to break down. Many of the problems established during Georgia's turbulent formative period continued to complicate the relationship between Georgia's political elite and the Russian leadership. Georgia's emphasis on territorial integrity put issues such as Russia's military bases and the breakaway regions in the spotlight. Moreover, Georgia's NATO ambitions clashed with the Russian leadership's interest in controlling what it perceived as its near abroad. Tensions increased and finally escalated into war in 2008. After the war, Saakashvili's government continued its pro-West foreign policy, whereas its relationship with Russia completely broke down.

How, then, can we best make sense of Georgia's foreign policy after the Rose Revolution? This chapter has argued that the foreign policy of the Saakashvili government was, in important aspects, shaped by the legacies of Georgia's traumatic formative period, 1989–1994. Saakashvili's administration dominated Georgia's political arena between 2004 and 2012, which made it easier to maintain a stable foreign policy (compared to Ukraine's tumultuous political landscape after the Orange Revolution, discussed in the next chapter). At the same time, a strong majority outside the government also supported Georgia's pro-West orientation, inside political parties and in society. Saakashvili was a driven leader but the pro-West foreign policy and the goal of uniting the country resonated in Georgia more broadly.

Saakashvili's foreign policy shows that within the broader legacies, there is also room for agency and reinterpretation. The Saakashvili administration, primarily a younger generation of politicians, was dissatisfied with the status quo and wanted to come to terms with Georgia's weak statehood and get out of what they called "the post-Soviet swamp". Saakashvili wanted a strong state, to restore territorial integrity and to become the founding father of modern Georgia. As he himself declared, a strong and united Georgia was the goal of his life – a theme frequently repeated by people in the administration. Foreign policy played an important role in this endeavor. Saakashvili's government identified the Bush administration as the opposite of anything post-Soviet and the only power that could help secure what Georgia had lost during its formative period. Georgia allied with EU member states in Eastern Europe but had a more difficult relationship with Germany and others that blocked Georgia's path to NATO membership.

This dissertation's theoretical perspective can also help make sense of Georgia's difficult relationship with Russia. Many of the same problems that Shevardnadze had with Russia remained after the Rose Revolution. When it became clear that Russian leaders would not help to restore Georgia's territorial integrity, the Georgian government lost patience. Georgia's policy vis-à-vis Russia was risky for a small state without external security guarantees but

from the government's perspective, it was a better alternative than to gradually lose influence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This underlines how a traumatic experience at a critical juncture can shape the priorities and perceived options of a country's foreign policy elite. Strong emotions, distrust and mutual suspicion between Georgian and Russian leaders were already present in the 1990s and increased after the Rose Revolution. Finally, while Russia's increasingly assertive policies under Vladimir Putin provide part of the answer to Georgia's foreign policy, Russia also had to base its policy on conditions established in the 1990s. Unlike in Ukraine, Moscow had no strong "Trojan horses" inside Georgia's political arena, and primarily had to rely on its influence in the breakaway regions.

8. Ukraine after the Orange Revolution: foreign policy contestation, 2004–2009

In November 2004, Viktor Yanukovych's attempt to steal the presidential election resulted in mass protests in Ukraine. These demonstrations became known as the Orange Revolution (Wilson, 2005).[174] Protests in support of free elections and against Yanukovych continued for many weeks in freezing winter temperatures. Yanukovych had backing from President Putin and the incumbent president, Leonid Kuchma. The EU and the US supported free and fair elections, and therefore backed Viktor Yushchenko during the demonstrations. The protests were eventually successful. In a repeat of the second round, the opposition candidate Yushchenko got 52 percent of the votes and Yanukovych 44 percent. The success of the peaceful mass protests combined with Yushchenko's declared pro-West foreign policy agenda raised expectations among many Ukrainians and in western capitals. After a period of decaying relations during the end of Kuchma's final period in office, many expected the revolution to bring Ukraine's cooperation with the West to a new and higher level. An expert captured the mood at the time, noting that the Orange Revolution: "set a major new landmark in the postcommunist history of eastern Europe, a seismic shift Westward in the geopolitics of the region" (Karatnycky, 2005, p. 50).

Overall, however, the high expectations of the Orange Revolution were not met. The following years were a highly chaotic period in Ukrainian politics with gridlocks, paralysis, a polarized climate and a stagnating reform agenda. Political conflicts also tapped into issues related to Ukraine's relations with Russia and the West. In 2010, Yanukovych surprised the world by winning the presidential election, which experts considered mostly free and fair. Yanukovych immediately dropped Ukraine's goal of NATO membership, turned to a business-like relationship with the EU and declared his intention to return to "business as usual" with Russia (see Chapter 10).

This chapter explores why the political agenda put forward by Yushchenko's administration ended in chaos and stagnation, and why Ukraine faced a return to closer relations with Russia only five years later. It is argued

[174] The opposition candidate, Viktor Yushchenko, deliberately used orange in his campaign, not yellow and blue as many national democrats had in the past. Activists in civil society also started to use orange during the protests, hence the Orange Revolution. Yanukovych used blue colors in his campaign.

that Ukraine's multicenter arena constrained the possibilities of the pro-West reform agenda announced by the Orange coalition. Yushchenko's administration faced strong opposition from Yanukovych and the Party PoR, which had backing from voters and regional elites in eastern and southern Ukraine. Cooperation problems between Yushchenko and Tymoshenko made them vulnerable to opposition initiatives to block the political agenda. Moreover, foreign affairs were deliberately used in the broader struggle for political power, especially by Yanukovych and his allies, making a firm pro-West policy even more difficult to pursue. External pressures from Russia and the West tapped into pre-existing disagreements and political conflicts inside Ukraine. External pressure was greater after 2004, due to the increased competition between Russia and the West. However, Ukraine's political leaders also contributed to a raised level of political conflict related to foreign affairs. The broader disagreements between Russia and the West therefore took on a particular character in Ukraine, partly because of its multicenter arena. Finally, Ukraine's legacy of a peaceful formative period contributed to the popularity of a pragmatic approach to Russia – an approach that was also visible in earlier periods.

The Orange Revolution and Ukraine's multicenter arena

As discussed briefly in Chapter 7, media experts and scholars identified a common theme in the Orange, Rose and other color revolutions in post-communist countries. An important difference between Ukraine and Georgia was that Georgia's Saakashvili had a strong mandate when he became president in 2004. Yushchenko had fairly strong support initially but as a result of Ukraine's multicenter arena, soon faced strong opposition. One example of this structural dimension is that to get a rerun of the second round of the election, which Yanukovych had tried to steal, Yushchenko had to accept amendments to the constitution that weakened the power of the president. In other words, the multicenter arena, including strong support for Yanukovych in Ukraine's east and south, pushed Yushchenko into a compromise (Way, 2015, p. 71). These constitutional changes entered into force on 1 January 2006 and contributed to the political deadlock during Yushchenko's presidential term.

The Orange Revolution had a strong civil society component and protesters showed up from all over Ukraine. Nonetheless, a majority of the protesters came from western and central Ukraine. Studies show that 37 percent in Ukraine's west and 50 percent of adults in its largest city, Lviv, protested in support of Yushchenko. In eastern and southern Ukraine, numbers were around 3 percent. In fact, 36 percent of all pro-Yushchenko/Tymoshenko protesters came from Galicia in western Ukraine, even though the area had approximately 10 percent of Ukraine's total population (numbers in Way, 2015, p. 70).

Furthermore, surveys show that speaking Ukrainian increased the likelihood of protesting by 382 percent (Beissinger, 2013). Generally, Yushchenko

had low support from Russian speakers in eastern and southern Ukraine. According to one analyst: "[t]he election tapped into widely shared anti-Russian nationalist sentiments dominant in the west of the country..." (Way, 2015, p. 69). A survey in March 2005 showed that a majority in Ukraine's east considered the Orange Revolution either a coup d'état supported by the West, i.e., the EU and the US (50 percent), or a coup d'état supported by the opposition (14 percent). In Ukraine's west, the same event was seen as a conscious struggle by citizens to protect their rights (60 percent) or as a spontaneous public protest (18 percent) (Lane, 2008, p. 537).

The contrasting interpretations of the revolution contributed to increased polarization. The election campaign was dirty from the start and got worse when Yushchenko was seriously poisoned by dioxin, which left him in a critical condition and off the campaign trail for weeks.[175] Moreover, Yanukovych and his allies accused the Orange coalition and the demonstrators of a coup d'état. Thousands of special forces units and tens of thousands of Yanukovych's supporters were bussed to Kyiv. According to one report, the leadership of the Ukrainian Security Service (SBU) refused to stop the Orange revolutionaries, which helped prevent a violent outcome (Chivers, 2005).[176] Moreover, in late November 2004, Yanukovych's supporters held a conference in Severodonetsk in Luhansk that suggested a referendum on the federalization of Ukraine if Yanukovych did not become president (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 132). While no violence occurred on the Maidan in 2004, and the Luhansk conference did not get broad support, these examples illustrate the polarized political environment.

Ukraine's multicenter arena, with its regional differences, was also seen in terms of voting patterns (see Figure 8.1). In the repeated second round in 2004, Yushchenko received over 90 percent of the votes in several *oblasts* in Ukraine's west and did well in Ukraine's center, including in Kyiv. Yanukovych received strong support in Ukraine's east and south despite evidence he had tried to steal the elections a few weeks earlier. In Donetsk and Luhansk, over 90 percent supported Yanukovych, and over 80 percent did so in Crimea. Given intense international and domestic monitoring of the repeated second round, the numbers were probably quite accurate. Once again, the peripheries in Ukraine's east and west were, with few exceptions, strongly divided, but it is important to note that differences were less strong elsewhere.

[175] In an interview in 2009, Yushchenko claimed that the people responsible for the poisoning were living as free men in Moscow. He had appealed to the Russian president three times to let Ukrainian investigators question the suspects, but without any positive response from Moscow (Yushchenko, 2009).

[176] In 2014, in contrast, the Ukrainian authorities responded with violence. See Chapter 10.

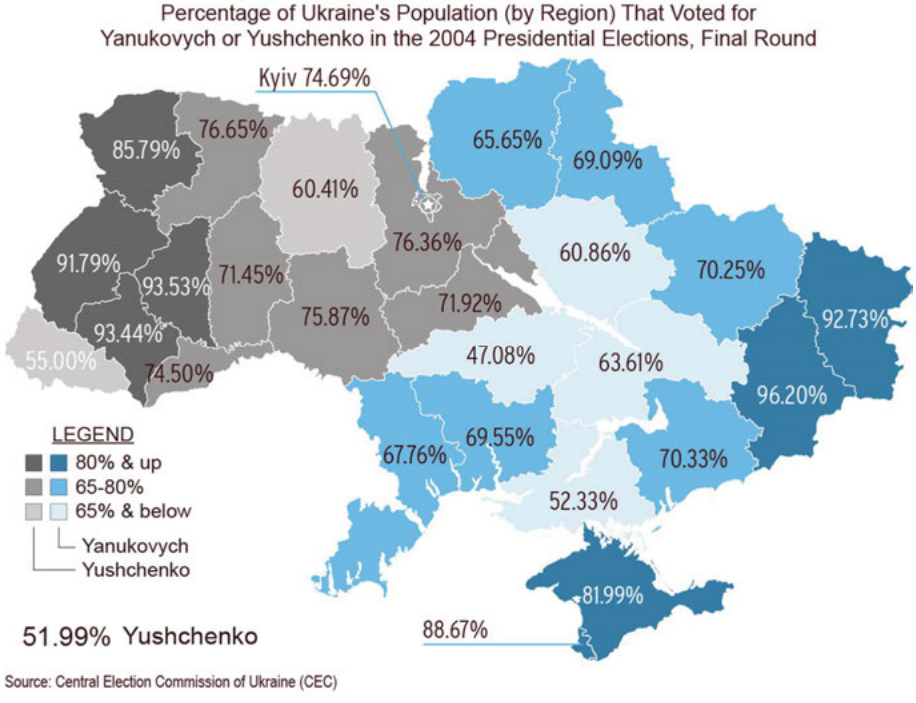

Figure 8.1. Results of the 2004 Ukrainian presidential election by region

The international dimension

The Orange Revolution also had an international dimension, which tapped into Ukraine's existing cleavages. As mentioned in Chapter 6, Yanukovych had strong backing from the incumbent, Kuchma, and as from Vladimir Putin. The Russian leadership provided economic support to Yanukovych's campaign and sent a team of Russian so-called political technologists to manage it. Kuchma's head of the presidential administration, Medvedchuk, worked closely with Putin's aids to facilitate a Yanukovych victory (Zygar, 2023). One of Yanukovych's campaign slogans was "Ukraine-Russia: stronger together". In September 2004 Yanukovych promised to make Russian an official language of Ukraine. The Yanukovych campaign also portrayed Yushchenko as an ultra-nationalist, even though Yushchenko avoided nationalist rhetoric, and as an agent of the United States, using slogans such as "Viktor Bushchenko" (Wilson, 2005, p. 95). Putin, who at the time was popular in Ukraine, visited the country multiple times in 2004 and made several campaign visits in the autumn to support Yanukovych (Zygar, 2023). The Russian leadership quickly congratulated Yanukovych on his "electoral victory" and backed him during the high-level international negotiations that followed.

The EU and the US underlined the importance of free and fair elections but did not officially support a candidate. However, Yushchenko's vocal support

for European and Euro-Atlantic integration, anti-corruption reforms and democracy made him a preferred candidate in the West. When electoral fraud became obvious, the West openly backed the Orange coalition. US Secretary of State Colin Powell considered the election illegitimate and warned that: "[i]f the Ukrainian government does not act immediately and responsibly there will be consequences for our relationship, for Ukraine's hopes for a Euro-Atlantic integration and for individuals responsible for perpetrating fraud" (Powell, 2004). Among others, EU High Representative Javier Solana and President of Poland Aleksander Kwasniewski led the international negotiations to find a solution to the conflict, together with their Russian counterpart Boris Gryzlov. Disagreements between Russia and the West thus tapped into preexisting rivalries in Ukrainian politics. Unlike in Georgia, Russia had in Yanukovych and the PoR an influential political force to support in Ukraine. As discussed in Chapter 6, Yanukovych and the PoR had their base in Donbas, a historically distinct region located at the Russian border.

After the Orange Revolution: stalemate and political conflicts

An important point of departure for this chapter's analysis is that the structure of Ukraine's multicenter arena did not change with the Orange Revolution. Three parties dominated the scene in 2005–2009. Yushchenko's Our Ukraine party (OU) and the Yulia Tymoshenko bloc cooperated before and during the Orange Revolution. OU had strong support in Ukraine's west, especially in Galicia, and the Tymoshenko bloc had strong support in Ukraine's west and center (Wilson, 2005). Centrist oligarchs such as Petro Poroshenko initially backed the coalition financially. The PoR, led by Yanukovych, was the dominant opposition party and Ukraine's largest party at the time, with strong support in Ukraine's east and south. Two additional opposition parties, the Communist Party (CPU) and the Lytvyn bloc did not achieve over 5–6 percent of the votes in the 2006–2007 elections. The Socialists wavered on who to support and lost political influence after 2007.

The Orange Revolution created high expectations but, as mentioned above, these were not met. Ukraine's political landscape after the revolution was fragmented and characterized by political conflicts and gridlock. Ukraine's multicenter arena, with its competing political actors and increased political polarization, made it difficult for Ukrainian governments to have a united and focused agenda, including in foreign affairs. In addition, the clash of personalities among the leaders of the Orange coalition contributed to instability. As a member of Yushchenko's administration portrayed it, "It is even hard to imagine right now how difficult it was for President Yushchenko to get all those political animals into one direction".[177] After 2004, Ukraine seemed even more difficult to govern than in the previous decade.

[177] Interview, Ukrainian diplomat 2, 2018.

The Orange coalition, which included Yushchenko, Tymoshenko, the Socialist Party and various oligarchs, was fragile right from the start, having united shortly ahead of the election in 2004 (D'Anieri, 2019b). In return for supporting Yushchenko during the Orange Revolution, Tymoshenko wanted to be prime minister, which the new president agreed to. Yushchenko appointed Petro Poroshenko, an oligarch from Central Ukraine, Secretary of the National Defense and Security Council.[178] Poroshenko was in other words rewarded for financial support to Yushchenko's campaign and for having one of the few television channels that covered the opposition during the election. Poroshenko, however, wanted the position of prime minister and tried to expand his influence at the cost of Tymoshenko (Sindelar, 2014). Furthermore, Yushchenko and Tymoshenko could not see eye to eye, and this soon became an antagonistic relationship. After several months of political maneuvering in 2005, Yushchenko's chief of staff resigned accusing leading figures in the coalition, including Poroshenko, of corruption. In a context of political turbulence and worsening personal relations, Yushchenko dismissed Tymoshenko only eight months after her appointment. To dismiss her, Yushchenko needed support from the PoR. Measures had been taken against Yanukovych and his allies after the Orange Revolution, particularly against oligarch Rinat Akhmetov who temporarily fled the country. In September 2005, however, a memorandum was signed to stop the "repression of the opposition". After this, the PoR approved Yushchenko's new choice of prime minister (Kudelia & Kuzio, 2015, p. 260). Although my theory does not account for personal leadership conflicts, it predicts that in a multicenter arena, there is a greater likelihood of fragile and broad coalitions vulnerable to leadership disputes. As seen in previous chapters, fragile coalitions had been the rule rather than the exception in Ukraine since independence.

The unstable Orange coalition opened the door for a comeback by Yanukovych and the PoR. The PoR became the largest party with 32 percent of the vote (186 of the 450 seats in parliament) in the 2006 parliamentary election. The Yulia Tymoshenko bloc (129 seats) and Yushchenko's OU (88 seats) competed for votes in Ukraine's west and center while the PoR dominated in Ukraine's east and south. A majority of voters punished Yushchenko's OU for the political turbulence in 2005.

After the 2006 election, political uncertainty continued for several months with deadlock in negotiations over the formation of a new government. The Socialist Party leader Moroz became Chair of the parliament and supported Yanukovych as prime minister. The PoR entered an alliance with the Socialists and the CPU in a so-called anti-crisis coalition. These three parties were critical of NATO membership and supported closer ties with Russia. To avoid further division, Yushchenko signed a declaration on "national unity" with the

[178] Poroshenko was also godfather to Yushchenko's children. In 2014 he became Ukraine's fifth president.

anti-crisis coalition (Socor, 2006). As the new prime minister, Yanukovych immediately appointed high-ranking party members and other loyalists to key positions, a majority of whom were from the Donbas in eastern Ukraine.

The PoR also seized control of the important state gas monopoly *Naftogaz* (Kudelia & Kuzio, 2015). The declaration of national unity turned out to be ineffective. Political conflicts between the presidential administration, on the one hand, and the prime minister's office and a majority in parliament, on the other, made Ukraine notoriously difficult to govern. As discussed below, these divisions and political obstructions also influenced Ukraine's foreign policy at an important stage in Ukraine's potential European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The PoR co-opted members of parliament and threatened to change the constitution to weaken Yushchenko even more (Way, 2015). Yushchenko's administration, with the help of Yulia Tymoshenko's bloc (BYuT), dissolved parliament and announced new elections. The results of the parliamentary election in September 2007, however, echoed existing divisions, although the BYuT secured additional seats.

Yushchenko's administration decided to support Tymoshenko as prime minister and she was endorsed by the Ukrainian Parliament by a narrow margin (US_EMB, 2007). Political conflicts continued to dominate and in late 2008, following new attempts by parliament to diminish his power, Yushchenko tried to dissolve the parliament again but failed.

A new coalition in parliament never materialized and relations between the prime minister and president remained dysfunctional. Those who had supported the Orange Revolution lost faith in Yushchenko, who had no chance of winning the 2010 presidential election. The constitutional changes made in 2004, which reflected the country's multicenter political arena, amplified by regional divisions during and after the Orange Revolution, contributed to political deadlock and turbulence (Way, 2015). As discussed below, political polarization and strong opposition obstructed the coherent pro-West foreign policy that Yushchenko's administration wanted to implement.

Foreign policy after the Orange Revolution

Already before the Orange Revolution, there were two major foreign policy approaches in Ukraine, which broadly also had the support of different parts of the country. As described below, Yushchenko represented one of these approaches and Yanukovych the other.

Yushchenko's foreign policy approach

Yushchenko announced a more ambitious pro-western agenda compared to his predecessor, Kuchma, and his successor, Yanukovych. Yushchenko told

this author in an interview that his overall goal as president was to develop a national consciousness in Ukraine.

> So I think that the main mission of my years as president was to bring people to the point from where you begin developing what I call the national consciousness. The moment people understand that they are belonging to a different nation, that we are unique in being Ukrainians. The moment people understand that this uniqueness is what unites us as a nation; the moment people understand that we have our own unique language, our own unique history, our pantheon of heroes, our own church, traditions and customs, that makes you unique. The second thing that people want when they realize all that is that you want your own country.[179]

The foundation of Yushchenko and his allies' foreign policy is presented below.

Ukraine's historical distinctiveness from Russia

Yushchenko's administration emphasized Ukraine's long and separate history as a nation distinct from Russia. As portrayed in 2017 by two members of Yushchenko's administration,

> First of all, just to underline that there is no, I would say, only 26 years of Ukrainian statehood or Ukraine's foreign policy choices. There is a long-lasting tradition and [a] long-lasting concept of what Ukraine brings to the world, and what values and principles Ukraine would like to follow.[180]

> I was involved in Ukraine's foreign policy since 1975… and I must underline the Ukrainian Foreign Service, not [the] Soviet Foreign Service.[181]

Furthermore, Yushchenko spent time and effort supporting projects that emphasized a Ukrainian history distinct from Russia and the USSR. This view played a role in shaping the relationship with Moscow, since Russian officials emphasized Russian-Ukrainian "brotherhood and unity" (Plokhy, 2023). As President Yushchenko explained, the approach was linked to the earlier imperial occupation of Ukraine.

> Because the occupation, or invasion as I would call it, was very deep and very comprehensive. The Ukrainian language was basically destroyed by the Russians over these years. [The Ukrainian language] was prohibited by many official decrees by the Russian Empire. Our history books were completely rewritten. We were all learning the Russian version or the Soviet version, or the Polish version of Ukrainian history. Even church life was closely controlled and monitored by the Russian church.[182]

[179] Interview, Viktor Yushchenko, 2018.
[180] Interview, Ukrainian diplomat 1, 2017.
[181] Interview, Borys Tarasyuk, 2017.
[182] Interview, Viktor Yushchenko, 2018.

Another related theme emphasized historical difficulties in Ukrainian-Russian relations, and that Moscow historically had sabotaged Ukraine's attempts to gain independence. As President Yushchenko put it in 2018,

> If you look into the history of Ukraine we have had numerous projects to establish Ukrainian statehood. For example, if we talk exclusively about the 20th century. Beginning with the year 1917 and ending with August 1991, Ukrainians have declared independence six times. In 1991 Ukrainians declared its newest independence and have been enjoying this independence for the last 27 years. If you look for the reason why those [earlier] attempts failed, the reason for that in most cases was a foreign invasion….Most of the invasions came from Russia. That's why when I became president, I tried to explain to my people that if you want to be independent, and if you want independence to be sustainable, you have to move away from the Russians.[183]

A foreign policy advisor to Yushchenko continues,

> At that time, 100 years ago, Ukraine's independence was simply destroyed by Russia, Ukraine was occupied and colonized and then became a part of the Soviet Union, meaning that it was another form of the Russian Empire, simply with a communist ideology, so that was kind of a prolongation of the Russian Empire's existence.[184]

Representatives of this approach argued that many Russian politicians did not see Ukraine as a fully independent state. As Yushchenko said in a television documentary in 2005,

> I understand that for very many generations of Russian politicians – especially politicians, not for the people of Russia or business people, but for this cohort at the top political establishment – for a long time to come they will see Ukraine as a vassal and a province. (BBC Monitoring Ukraine & Baltics, 2005)

In another interview at the time, he added,

> The Russians are a great people – we respect them and strive to have good relations with them. But how can these relations improve if our sovereignty is continually called into question? (Yushchenko, 2009)

The historical understanding that emphasized Ukraine's differences from Russia, and the view that Russia had not fully recognized Ukraine's sovereignty corresponded with views popular in Ukraine's west and to some extent the center, at the time, and among others who emphasized Ukraine's distinctiveness and difference from Russia.

[183] Interview, Viktor Yushchenko, 2018.
[184] Interview, Ukrainian diplomat 1, 2017.

NATO and Ukraine's right to form an independent foreign policy

Ukraine's distinctiveness from Russia and the understanding that Moscow did not fully accept Ukraine's independence translated into an ambition for a more pro-West foreign policy. In a speech in Washington in 2008, Yushchenko drew parallels with Ukraine's history to argue for Ukraine being in NATO. "In the 20th century Ukraine declared its independence six times and five times we lost it. And there was only one reason: because there were never any international guarantees for our territorial integrity" (Yushchenko, 2008). For Yushchenko, NATO remained:

> [T]he only way for our country to protect our national security and sovereignty. When the borders of NATO expand, so too does the region of peace and stability.… I want to remind all political forces in our country that shout about the possible neutral status of Ukraine, that neutrality can come at a very high price. (*The Times*, 2008)

According to two foreign ministers appointed by Yushchenko, NATO membership was necessary since Russia, in their view, wanted to dominate Ukraine: "We, Ukrainian diplomats, were opposing being encircled by this Kremlin geopolitical idea of creating CIS, another Soviet Union".[185]

> So for Ukraine it was also quite, in my view, understandable to put a question, okay this is Russia, it is [a] separate system of security, we do not want to be under Russian influence, because Russia created in the early 1990s the so-called Tashkent Pact [the Collective Security Treaty]. Frankly speaking, it was a union of some post-Soviet republics under Russian rule. We had said no… we do not want to have this supervisor [for] Ukraine, and it is really threating our security. So, from the other side it was only NATO, we have no other security system that can be important for us.[186]

Yushchenko and his allies underlined Ukraine's right to conduct its own foreign policy, "The choice in national security is a personal matter for each country [and] no country has the right to express its agreement or disagreement with regard to a desire to join a certain system of collective security" (Tarasyuk, 2005). Furthermore, they criticized Kuchma's multivector policy as "Byzantine politics", arguing it had damaged Ukraine's international reputation (BBC Monitoring, 2004b). In the view of Yushchenko's administration, Ukraine had a leadership independent of Russia for the first time. According to Yushchenko's chief of staff:

> Before the Orange Revolution there was practically a must, any serious Ukrainian politician who was running for presidency must have had a prior

[185] Interview, Borys Tarasyuk, 2017.
[186] Interview, Volodymyr Ohryzko, 2017.

> clearance in Moscow. Yushchenko was the first president who was elected against [the will of the] Kremlin.[187]

Moreover, they emphasized the goal of EU membership for Ukraine. While other parties also discussed the idea of a partnership with the EU – primarily if it benefited Ukraine's economy – Yushchenko underlined Ukraine's shared history with Europe,

> [The Orange Revolution] has shown that Ukraine is part of [a] European civilization not only geographically, but also in terms of values, politically, spiritually and mentally…our ties should proceed from the recognition of Ukraine as an inalienable part of united Europe (BBC Monitoring, 2005a).

This view is in line with an alternative explanation of foreign policy: a European identity as a driver. However, this understanding was not a dominant one.

Yanukovych's foreign policy approach

As discussed in Chapter 6, Yanukovych was the leader of the PoR, which had rapidly replaced the CPU's dominance in the Donbas. Eventually, the PoR co-opted smaller parties and expanded its influence into most of Ukraine's south and east, developing into a "political machine" (Kuzio, 2015), and becoming the largest party in the Ukrainian Parliament in three consecutive parliamentary elections as a result (2006, 2007 & 2012). Based on my interviews with key officials, diplomatic cables and official statements it is possible to trace several themes that reflect the foreign policy thinking of Yanukovych and his allies.

A pragmatic and close relationship with Russia

First, Yanukovych and the PoR preferred pragmatic and close ties with Russia, although not necessarily to join Russian-led organizations. Yanukovych and his allies wanted to avoid antagonism with Moscow. As an advisor to Yanukovych explained in a meeting with US diplomats, the PoR took Russia's vital interests seriously into account when designing Ukraine's foreign policy. He condemned a "black and white approach to foreign policy"; that is, a policy that treated the West as good and Russia bad (US_EMB, 2009). The PoR accused Yushchenko's allies of unnecessary confrontation, as expressed by Yanukovych's foreign minister:

> His [Yushchenko's] first meetings [with Russian leaders] were not destructive, but later it really started to be unnecessarily, unnecessarily, adversarial. If you are looking for issues to exacerbate the difficulties, you will find them, and

[187] Interview, Oleh Rybachuk, 2018.

> when you are dealing with a much larger power than yourself [Russia], you do it to your own detriment.[188]

Yanukovych wanted to minimize friction and avoid rhetoric that, in his view, could worsen relations with Russia. For example, Yanukovych, in contrast to Yushchenko, avoided portraying Holodomor, the mass famine that killed millions of Ukrainians, as a genocide against the Ukrainian people. The PoR wanted stronger rights for Russian speakers in Ukraine and accommodated Kremlin demands in the sphere of security policy (see below). Most of these policies corresponded with views held by many PoR voters in Ukraine's east and south.

Ukraine as a bridge between Russia and the West

A popular idea within Yanukovych's foreign policy circle was to take advantage of Ukraine's geopolitical position. According to Yanukovych's second foreign minister (2012–2014), "Ukraine appeared as a country to be a link between East and West". Ukraine, in this view, could help manage tense relations between Russia and the West, and trade was one area in which this approach might work: "If Ukraine wanted to be a bridge, we should have two free-trade zones, on the West and on the East, it was possible".[189] Yanukovych promoted similar ideas publicly. A related argument was that *if* Ukraine decided to pursue European and Euro-Atlantic integration, it should do so together with Russia. Although many in Ukraine's east and south sympathized with the idea of "Ukraine as a bridge", in practice this gave Russia a veto on Ukraine's foreign policy. As long as Russia did not pursue western integration, it hindered a robust Ukrainian pro-West foreign policy. Connecting Russia's and Ukraine's foreign policies differed from Yushchenko's approach, which underlined Ukraine's right to design its foreign policy independent of Russia.

No to NATO membership

Yanukovych and the PoR were against NATO membership, a position expressed openly after 2004 (Hedenskog, 2006). Several motivations underpinned this position. First, many of Yanukovych's advisors were against NATO in principle, which corresponded with a Soviet identity and anti-NATO sentiments popular in Donbas and Crimea but also in other parts of eastern Ukraine. In the words of a PoR foreign minister: "Ukraine appeared as an independent state having some preconditions, and the non-bloc status was one of them… some parts of the Soviet Union would never be members of NATO or other military blocs".[190] This hotly debated view of what NATO

[188] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017.
[189] Interview, Leonid Kozhara, 2018.
[190] Interview, Leonid Kozhara, 2018.

leaders had promised Russia coincided with the view expressed by many Russian politicians, including Vladimir Putin. To another senior Yanukovych advisor, NATO membership "made no sense" for Ukraine (US_EMB, 2009). Moreover, PoR leaders such as Mykola Azarov (prime minister 2010–2014) and Dmytro Tabachnyk (vice prime minister in 2003–2007 and minister of education 2010–2014) reportedly held strong pro-Russian and anti-NATO views (Hedenskog, 2006).

A second reason was NATO's unpopularity among the PoR voter base in Ukraine's east and south, especially in Donbas and Crimea. Yanukovych benefited politically from taking an anti-NATO stance and used this rhetoric during election campaigns (Hedenskog, 2006). Moreover, the PoR cooperated with the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and smaller parties such as the People's Opposition Bloc of Nataliya Vitrenko, which were against NATO (US_EMB, 2006d).

A third reason was to avoid a political conflict with Russia, and economic sanctions that could follow if Ukraine attempted to join NATO. In closed meetings with US diplomats, Yanukovych explained that Kyiv had to avoid provoking Russia with pro-NATO rhetoric since it could lead to higher gas prices and other negative consequences (US_EMB, 2006b). Anatoliy Orel, a senior Yanukovych advisor, argued similarly that a pro-NATO position would only complicate the relationship with Russia (US_EMB, 2009).

A final reason from the PoR's perspective was that Ukraine had "no chance" of becoming a member of NATO, and probably not of the EU either. As Yanukovych's first foreign minister noted,

> The example of Turkey with EU was very much in [the] minds of many people here as well; nobody wanted to have 60 years of negotiating something, which does not have a chance of being completed in the next 20 to 30 years anyway.[191]

In sum, the PoR and other parties with support primarily in Ukraine's east and south had a different view than Yushchenko and other Ukrainians who favored NATO membership. The two approaches disagreed on what a NATO membership process would mean for Ukraine's security. Yanukovych did not propose a formal Ukrainian-Russian military alliance but wanted Ukraine to be a "non-bloc" state. The Kremlin seemed to accept Yanukovych's idea – as long as Ukrainian officials declined NATO membership, Ukraine would remain inside Russia's perceived sphere of influence.

A business-oriented approach to foreign policy

Both in the public discourse and in closed diplomatic meetings, Yanukovych's allies advocated a pragmatic business-oriented foreign policy approach. According to one advisor, Yanukovych was not driven by ideology but wanted

[191] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017.

to get "the best deal" (US_EMB, 2009). A senior US official who discussed foreign policy one-on-one with Yanukovych presents the following account:

> He [Yanukovych] provided some insights into his own thinking because he wanted to have a good relationship with me. So he said: 'Well, you know, if you want to increase the odds that Ukraine would join NATO or the EU, you have to demonstrate to them that there is economic advantage'. So he was all about economic advantage.[192]

Even though Yanukovych said no to joining NATO, he wanted to cooperate with NATO countries on industrial projects beneficial to Ukraine's economy (US_EMB, 2006b). This businesslike approach was in line with Yanukovych's overall governing style. Especially after becoming president in 2010, Yanukovych worked hard to enrich his inner circle and his family (Kudelia, 2014).

The PoR also received financial support from influential gas trading oligarchs, as one expert noted, "[t]he Party of Regions supported good relations with Russia based on oligarchic economic interests, rather than ideology or nostalgia" (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 106). These oligarchs benefited from continuing energy relations with Russia. Among others, oligarchs worked with Yuriy Boyko, a PoR representative from Donbas appointed to key positions in the energy sector and known for his close ties to Russia. First, he was chair of Ukraine's energy company, Naftohaz, and later Yanukovych's energy minister. Compared to Georgian politicians, who saw dependence on Russian energy as a threat and tried to limit such dependence, influential Ukrainians benefited from continuing energy ties with Russia. Many of these actors worked closely, but not exclusively, with Yanukovych and the PoR.

Yanukovych's allies saw European integration as a long-term possibility for Ukraine but mostly focused on short-term economic benefits. Yanukovych criticized Yushchenko's "Euro-romanticism" and declared that Ukraine would not need an EU membership perspective until it had met "European social and technical standards" (US_EMB, 2010). It is important to point out that until 2013, a partnership with the EU was less contested and polarizing within Ukraine than NATO membership. Relatedly, it took a long time for the Russian leadership to argue that Ukraine's relationship with the EU was a problem for Moscow. To sum up, Yushchenko, Yanukovych and their respective allies had several fundamental differences when it came to Ukraine's relationship with Russia and the West. Below I explore how Ukraine's multicenter arena acted as a structural constraint on Ukraine's foreign policy after the Orange Revolution.

[192] Interview, John Herbst, 2019.

Foreign policy incoherence within Ukraine's multicenter arena

After Yushchenko's victory in 2004, his administration presented the top priorities of Ukraine's foreign policy agenda. European and Euro-Atlantic integration was the main priority with the ambition to seek membership of NATO, the EU and the WTO (Gretskiy, 2013).[193] In addition, Yushchenko wanted Russia to be Ukraine's strategic partner. Russia policy is discussed further below. To be clear, Yushchenko's foreign policy goals were not new in Ukrainian politics. Kuchma had declared comparable goals. However, as discussed in Chapter 6, Kuchma's relations with the West deteriorated and he strengthened his relations with Russia in 2002–2004. In this context, Yushchenko's foreign policy agenda and priorities provided a clear shift to a more pro-West orientation.

This was also the understanding in Russia and the West. For the first time in Ukraine's history, a presidential inauguration was attended by top EU officials, including EU High Representative, Javier Solana (Gretskiy, 2013, p. 8). Colin Powell led a US delegation to Kyiv and President Bush called Yushchenko on the eve of the inauguration to congratulate him on his victory. In February 2005, Yushchenko traveled to Brussels, where he signed a joint EU-Ukraine action plan, attended a NATO-Ukraine summit and addressed the European Parliament. After years without a presidential visit, Yushchenko traveled to the US in April 2005, where he received "a warm, even boisterous reception" (Pifer, 2017, p. 278). Bush and Yushchenko presented a joint statement on "A New Century Agenda for the Ukrainian-American Strategic Partnership".

At a meeting in Strasbourg in January 2005, Yushchenko underlined the strategic goal of EU membership but said his government would be "reorganised to add a real, rather than rhetorical, dimension and content to the process of integration into the European Union" (BBC, 2005). Borys Tarasyuk, an advocate for Ukraine's pro-West orientation, became foreign minister, and Anatoliy Hrytsenko, a supporter of NATO, became defense minister. Oleh Rybachuk, a close Yushchenko ally, was appointed to a new post, deputy prime minister on European integration.[194] With these appointments, Yushchenko signaled an ambition for a more robust pro-West agenda.

The Yushchenko administration's drive for EU and NATO membership was another indicator that a shift was taking place. In 2005, Yushchenko's administration immediately started to adapt Ukrainian legislation to EU standards and unilaterally offered EU citizens a visa free regime to enter Ukraine.[195] In December 2005, the EU granted Ukraine market-economy status. Yushchenko hoped to sign an EU-Ukraine Association Agreement in 2007 and Rybachuk predicted Ukrainian EU membership within 10 years. At the same

[193] Interview, Volodymyr Ohryzko, 2017.
[194] Interview, Oleh Rybachuk, 2018.
[195] Interview, Volodymyr Ohryzko, 2017.

time, the EU remained silent on Ukraine's prospects for future EU membership (Gretskiy, 2013).

Ukraine's partnership with NATO also improved after the Orange Revolution. In 2005, Ukraine and NATO started negotiations on a Ukrainian NATO MAP. Yushchenko and his allies wanted to be given a MAP at the NATO summit in Riga in November 2006.[196] Defense Minister Hrytsenko stated that Ukraine might become a NATO member before 2009. As noted by Yushchenko's chief of staff:

> I was strongly from the very beginning saying that NATO is more important, more feasible, and more realistic for us than the EU. Because NATO politically was willing in 2006, the Riga Summit. We could get this invitation if we would ask for it.[197]

In sum, Ukraine's foreign policy shifted to a more pro-West orientation immediately after the Orange Revolution. This included explicit goals of EU and NATO membership and an urgency to join these organizations, a leadership committed to a pro-West orientation and initial steps taken toward these goals.

Political paralysis and foreign policy obstruction

Nonetheless, as discussed above, Ukraine's political environment after the Orange Revolution was polarized and fragmented. Conflicts soon appeared within the Orange coalition and between Yushchenko's administration and the political opposition. The polarized political climate had immediate effects on Ukraine's foreign relations. In June 2006, for example, President Bush had planned to visit Kyiv to support Yushchenko's commitment to democracy and Euro-Atlantic integration (comparable to Bush's trip to Georgia in 2005). This would have been the first visit to Ukraine by a US president since 2000. However, in the context of Ukraine's political turbulence after the 2006 election, Bush cancelled the trip, in a symbolic blow to Yushchenko's administration (Pifer, 2017, p. 281).

After Yushchenko and the opposition signed the national unity agreement in August 2006, Yanukovych returned as prime minister. The document, which was not legally binding, had vague formulations on foreign policy. It included Ukrainian cooperation with EU, NATO and Russia, but no formulations on pressing issues such as a MAP (Ukrayinska Pravda, 2006). In September 2006, a senior US diplomat communicated to Ukraine's leadership that a precondition for NATO membership was serious political will. He noted that "Ukraine over the past four months had not sent a clear signal of its intent; the US could not support Ukraine's aspirations more than Ukraine itself" (US_EMB, 2006c). Later that month, Yanukovych used his role as prime min-

[196] Interview, Borys Tarasyuk, 2017.
[197] Interview, Oleh Rybachuk, 2018.

ister to influence Ukraine's foreign policy agenda. Behind closed doors, diplomats from NATO member states had made clear that the path for Ukraine's NATO process would depend in important parts on how Yanukovych acted at an upcoming meeting in Brussels (US_EMB, 2006c). When Yanukovych traveled to Brussels, he declared that Ukraine was not ready for a NATO MAP. Yushchenko, Tarasyuk and Hrytsenko pushed back against Yanukovych, arguing that his statement was against Ukraine's national interests – but the damage had already been done (Gretskiy, 2013).

Thus, Yanukovych attempted to block the NATO process, which, according to Tarasyuk, derailed Ukraine's chances of a NATO MAP at the Riga Summit in late 2006.[198] Moreover, at a press conference ahead of his trip to Brussels, Yanukovych spoke out against "Euro-romanticism" within the Orange coalition and called for balanced Ukrainian relations with the EU and Russia: "We must not allow the imbalances that arose in the past year-and-a-half to continue" (BBC Monitoring, 2006).

This turned into a heated political debate in Ukraine between the president, the prime minister, and the parliament over who had the right to conduct Ukraine's foreign and security policy. Yushchenko underlined the president's constitutional right to shape Ukraine's foreign policy. Yanukovych, on the other hand, continued his own foreign policy agenda anyway and had his own foreign policy team, with Kostyantyn Gryshchenko functioning as shadow foreign minister.[199] As one analyst noted about Ukraine's NATO policy at the time, "there is no position of Ukraine as a state… [a]ny statement or decision of one of the authorities may be refuted by a statement from another authority" (Hedenskog, 2006, p. 47). As discussed in Chapter 1, such fundamental foreign policy disagreement within governmental structures is not expected by realist scholars, at least not on core national interests such as alliance building. If we instead analyze the development as part of a struggle in a multicenter arena, the behavior makes more sense.

Yanukovych and the PoR also tried to dismiss foreign minister Tarasyuk. Putin's dislike of Tarasyuk was well known and PoR representatives believed the foreign minister's antagonistic position against Russia complicated relations with Moscow (US_EMB, 2006e). In December 2006, after Yanukovych had paid a visit to Moscow, the Ukrainian Parliament voted to dismiss Tarasyuk. The minister was even physically prevented from attending cabinet meetings (Hedenskog 2006, p. 48). Although Yushchenko tried to protect his foreign minister, Tarasyuk stepped down in January 2007.[200] The PoR and its allies also tried to dismiss Yushchenko's defense minister, Anatoliy Hrytsenko, but failed to do so.

[198] Interview, Borys Tarasyuk, 2017.
[199] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017.
[200] Interview, Borys Tarasyuk, 2017.

Regional resistance to a pro-West foreign policy

Resistance to Ukraine's pro-West orientation was also visible at the regional level. Resistance to NATO membership was stronger in Crimea than anywhere else in the country. In the summer of 2006, local pro-Russia Crimean parties, together with members of the CPU and the PoR, organized anti-NATO protests in Feodosiya against what was portrayed as unauthorized NATO intrusion into Ukrainian territory (Maksymiuk, 2006). The protests occurred in the context of planned naval exercises with units from Ukraine and NATO countries. The exercises had yet to be approved by the Ukrainian Parliament, which fueled reaction from the opposition. To lower the level of political conflict, the Sea Breeze exercise was canceled.

The anti-NATO protests were covered extensively by Russian language media in eastern Ukraine and Ukraine's presidential administration argued that the protests had been supported by Russian organizations (Hedenskog, 2008, p. 24). The PoR was the largest party in the Crimean Parliament and aligned with smaller Crimean pro-Russian parties. In December 2006, an unofficial referendum held in Crimea revealed that 98 percent of the participants were against Ukrainian NATO membership (Hedenskog, 2008, p. 44). Moreover, several cities in and around Crimea declared themselves "NATO-free territories". The CPU tried to make Kharkiv in eastern Ukraine – one of Ukraine's largest cities – a NATO-free zone (US_EMB, 2008a). Although the Ukrainian authorities considered such declarations illegal, this illustrates the resistance to NATO in parts of Ukraine's south and east.

Ukraine's foreign policy after 2006: increased contestation

After Tymoshenko became prime minister for a second time, cooperation between the prime minister and the president initially functioned somewhat better. The government reached an important goal when Ukraine became a member of the World Trade Organization in May 2008. It is telling that this occurred after the PoR changed its mind on WTO membership and agreed with Yushchenko and Tymoshenko, unlike on most other foreign policy issues (Kuzio, 2009). Prior to the NATO Summit in Bucharest in 2008, the Ukrainian president, prime minister and parliament speaker signed a joint open letter to NATO's Secretary General asking for a Ukrainian MAP at the summit. In private conversations with US diplomats, Yushchenko and Tymoshenko stressed that, for the first time since independence, all three branches of government agreed on the goal of pursuing Euro-Atlantic integration. Yushchenko urged NATO members not to give Russia a de facto veto on membership and reminded US diplomats that Ukraine had declared independence six times in the 20th century, only to lose it five times (US_EMB, 2008a). Tymoshenko, however, distinguished between a NATO MAP and membership. In the meeting, she cautioned that moving forward with membership before the public was ready could risk a territorial division of the country (US_EMB,

2008a). Thus, Tymoshenko took into account Ukraine's internal differences and Russia's interest in exploiting these domestic rifts for political purposes.

The Ukrainian opposition published its own open letter to NATO. The letter declared a NATO MAP to be against the interests of a majority of the Ukrainian people (Gretskiy, 2013). Ahead of the Bucharest Summit, President Bush visited Kyiv to offer the Ukrainian leadership his support. As mentioned in Chapter 7, the US delegation failed to convince skeptical members such as France and Germany to offer Ukraine (and Georgia) a NATO MAP. After a heated debate, the summit declaration at Bucharest stated: "NATO welcomes Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO" (NATO, 2008). The declaration was deliberately vague. It postponed the question of a MAP and included no explicit timetable or roadmap for membership (Stent, 2014). In the view of Yanukovych's allies, Bucharest showed that NATO did not want Ukraine as a member.[201]

Compared to the heated discussions on NATO, debates about Ukraine's relations with the EU were less politicized. In part, this had to do with the EU's mixed reactions to Ukraine's interest in membership. Yushchenko's administration repeatedly asked for an EU membership perspective but received no response.[202] The PoR, as discussed above, supported a partnership with the EU as long as it benefited Ukraine's economy and did not spoil the relationship with Russia. Nonetheless, Ukraine's turbulent politics, primarily as a result of its multicenter arena, negatively influenced the relationship with the EU. Ukraine's gridlocks and political polarization made it difficult to deliver the reforms requested by the EU, which soon led to "Ukraine fatigue" in many EU member states. In the context of an EU-Ukraine Summit in late 2009, the EU delegation criticized the Orange coalition for being slow on political and economic reform. At the summit, the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, expressed his disappointment that Ukraine's government had not fulfilled the expectations of the Orange Revolution (Gretskiy, 2013).

External constraints such as limited interest among EU member states in further enlargement probably contributed to Ukraine's stalled pro-West agenda after the Orange Revolution. But as one analyst concluded: "the greatest hindrance to progress in EU-Ukraine relations was Ukraine's own, virtually permanent political instability" (Gretskiy, 2013, p. 12). Another expert noted, "during a period in which the West was most favorably inclined to increasing integration with Ukraine, Ukraine itself was in chaos" (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 146).

This section has demonstrated how Ukraine's multicenter political arena contributed to inconsistency and paralysis in Ukraine's foreign policy after the

[201] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017.
[202] Interview, EU diplomat, 2016.

Orange Revolution. Yushchenko presented an ambitious pro-West agenda but faced strong domestic opposition. Yanukovych and the PoR led an opposition that tried to block the foreign policy agenda, and in particular the NATO membership process. Yanukovych's administration presented an alternative foreign policy agenda, toppled a pro-West foreign minister and contributed to gridlock in parliament. Deadlock and political instability made it difficult for Yushchenko and his allies to fulfill their foreign policy agenda. Such policies were also met with regional resistance, including in Crimea and parts of Ukraine's east. The next section analyzes Ukraine's relationship with Russia during the period. Although Yushchenko's team gradually shifted to a more antagonistic approach to Russia, many other political forces in Ukraine preferred pragmatic relations with Moscow.

Ukraine and Russia: strategic partners?

As discussed above, Ukraine's foreign policy became more pro-West after the Orange Revolution. At the same time, Yushchenko initially wanted to pursue western integration and keep Russia as a strategic partner. The intended basis for this partnership was mutual respect, international agreements, high-level diplomacy and Russia's acceptance of Ukraine's right to design its own foreign policy. Yushchenko's administration changed its approach only when Russia's resistance to the pro-West agenda increased. Sensitive issues included gas disputes in 2005–2006 and 2009, a NATO MAP, Russia's Black Sea Fleet and the Russia-Georgia war in 2008. In 2008–2009, the relationship between the Ukrainian and Russian presidents turned increasingly antagonistic. However, before 2014, influential Ukrainian political parties supported a pragmatic approach to Russia.

After Yushchenko's victory, he underlined that Russia remained Ukraine's permanent strategic partner. The day after the inauguration, Yushchenko traveled to Moscow to meet with President Putin. Putin reacted positively to Yushchenko's proposal, "What you just said about strategic partnership is a very good and very pleasant sign", and called for "adher[ence] to Russian-Ukrainian relations based on experience. In this sense we expect continuity in the relationship" (Cited in Socor, 2005). A Ukrainian diplomat who served as deputy foreign minister at the time recalls:

> It was also our understanding, our philosophy... that our first priority of our foreign policy is to have the best possible ties, connections, with all our neighbor countries because they are neighbors. So we want to have really the best possible relations with Ukraine's neighbors, including Russia, why not? Why do we have good relations with say Poland, but not with Russia? We have had pretty big amount of bilateral trade, it was beneficial for our industry, we have had many relatives of Ukrainians in Russia and vice versa, humanitarian ties, why block them? We started from the point that if we are friends, if we are partners, if we are strategic partners, so why not? You have your interests, we

> have our interests, we don't want to make some problems for you, please don't make problems for us. It was absolutely a normal approach.[203]

Ukraine's foreign minister Tarasyuk underlined that a partnership had to be based on equality, not on Russian domination. Prime Minister Tymoshenko expressed hopes for a constructive relationship without Ukrainian subordination: "I know the Russian political elite got used to Ukraine suffering from an inferiority complex, but I want this to disappear from our relationship" (Cited in Kuzio, 2005c).

Putin visited Kyiv in March 2005 and meetings between the presidents were reportedly held in a constructive atmosphere. Ukraine and Russia created a commission led by Yushchenko and Putin intended to handle difficult issues related to security, borders, the economy and humanitarian affairs (Mite, 2005b). Thus, Yushchenko's ambition was to continue ties with Russia while at the same time moving Ukraine toward the EU and NATO. Yushchenko and his allies also drew on previous lessons and experiences. Difficult political conflicts with Russia were resolved in the 1990s, so why would it not work in the 2000s? As Ukraine's foreign minister noted:

> Yes, the list of rough edges that you named can, unfortunately, be extended. But hasn't that ever happened before in the history of Ukrainian-Russian relations? Let's recall the dramatic start of the 1990s, if nothing else. How many problems we had then! And they were far more acute and explosive than they are today. As a participant in, and a witness of, the development of relations with the Russian Federation at all stages, I remember periods when some people were already saying that a military clash was inevitable. But we got through that period all right, thank God, and showed the whole world that we were capable of tackling problems of an unprecedented scale like, for example, nuclear weapons and the Black Sea fleet. We managed at that time to build up relations on new principles without any serious complications (Cited in BBC Monitoring, 2005b).

Ukraine had not diversified its energy sector during the Kuchma era, which left Kyiv vulnerable to Russian pressure. The corrupt practices in Ukraine's energy sector continued. For example, RosUkrEnergo (RUE), a controversial intermediary between Russian Gazprom and Ukrainian Naftogaz, remained after the Orange Revolution. As Yushchenko's first chief of staff (who was critical of the solution) recalls: "Ukraine had no choice. Yushchenko's position was: Putin is president; yes I understand gas is a dirty business but we can't do business with Russia in any other way" (Cited in Roxburgh, 2021, p. 181). Ukrainian-Russian energy relations had been difficult since independence but the conflict level intensified after the Orange Revolution and included two major gas disputes. Difficult negotiations at the highest political level were required to resolve these disputes.

[203] Interview, Volodymyr Ohryzko, 2017.

From a strategic partnership to no contact

The Ukraine-Russia relationship became increasingly antagonistic. For Yushchenko and his allies, it became clear that Russia was not treating Ukraine as an equal partner or accepting its right to follow an independent foreign policy, free from Russian red lines. For Yushchenko's administration, this made a strategic partnership difficult:

> Our first proposal [was] to elaborate with Russia, say, a road map of good Ukrainian and Russian relations, and then President Yushchenko asked me and Borys Tarasyuk, former foreign minister, to elaborate ten very concrete actions we can do with Russia. [To] create [a] better atmosphere, really good conditions for business, so to make our relations as adequate, as pragmatic as possible. Do you think it was taken seriously? No, he [Putin] presented something what was very far from reality, and the main purpose of the Russian proposal was to stop Ukraine's path to the West, and to make Ukraine more dependent [on Russia] in the framework of the so-called Commonwealth [CIS].[204]

Yushchenko emphasized Ukraine's sovereignty and its right to have an independent policy from Russia. This principle was demonstrated in several policy areas. According to Yushchenko, NATO membership was the only way for Ukraine to be secure: "NATO membership and Ukrainian independence are almost synonyms" (BBC Monitoring, 2009a). This corresponded with the historical thinking common, especially in Ukraine's west, that Ukraine had been occupied by the Soviet Union and needed protection from Russian domination.

Furthermore, the Yushchenko administration did not want to extend Russia's lease on the naval base in Sevastopol. The agreement (see Chapter 4) was due to expire in 2017 but could be extended for another five-year period if both parties agreed (US_EMB, 2008b). In 2005, Yushchenko's team indicated that Russia would have to find a port outside Ukraine for its fleet when the agreement expired. In their view, this corresponded with Ukraine's constitution, which did not allow foreign military bases on Ukrainian territory – the Russian base had only been a temporary exception.[205] Foreign minister Tarasyuk was convinced that the 1997 agreement had been a major mistake: "[the Russian] military base in Crimea, this was a geopolitical mistake of the first president, Kravchuk, and this was a time bomb".[206] The Russian side, however, considered Ukraine's decision premature. It postponed negotiations and warned that Ukraine's position risked destroying trust in the Moscow-Kyiv relationship, which could jeopardize the 1997 Friendship Agreement. Moreover, the Kremlin argued that Ukraine was preparing for NATO ships to operate from Crimea. Politicians such as Moscow mayor Luzhkov reiterated rhetoric

[204] Interview, Volodymyr Ohryzko, 2017.
[205] Article 17 of the Ukrainian constitution.
[206] Interview, Borys Tarasyuk, 2017.

from the 1990s that Sevastopol was a Russian city (US_EMB, 2008b). Yushchenko responded that such claims were illegal and added that "[t]hese are things that humiliate someone's independence and territorial integrity" (BBC Monitoring, 2009a). In 2009, Yushchenko's administration insisted that intelligence operations in Crimea by the Russian Security Service (FSB) had to stop (BBC Monitoring, 2009d).[207] Ukraine's handling of the BSF was in line with its ambition to rely on signed agreements with Russia, and the Russian approach of postponing the issue frustrated Yushchenko and his allies (US_EMB, 2006f).

Another contentious issue concerned Yushchenko's position on the Russia-Georgia war in 2008 (see Chapter 7). During the war, Yushchenko traveled to Tbilisi to support Saakashvili and condemn Russia's actions. After the war, the Yushchenko administration warned that Russia was a threat to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Moscow's disagreements with Yushchenko became visible in an open letter to Yushchenko published by the new Russian President, Dmitri Medvedev, in 2009:

> [W]hat we have witnessed during the years of your presidency cannot be interpreted as anything other than the Ukrainian party's departure from the principles of friendship and partnership with Russia, embodied in the Treaty of 1997.…A negative public reaction was caused by Ukraine's anti-Russian stance in connection with the brutal attack on South Ossetia by Saakashvili's regime….Ignoring the views of Ukrainian citizens as well as Russia's well-known position, the political leadership of Ukraine stubbornly continues to pursue accession to NATO. And as a so-called argument you hint at a "Russian threat" to Ukrainian security, something which, as you are well aware, does not and cannot exist….I would like to inform you that in view of the anti-Russian position of the current Ukrainian authorities I have decided to postpone sending a new Russian ambassador to Ukraine. (Medvedev, 2009)

Medvedev criticized Yushchenko for "historical revisionism" and a "nationalistic interpretation" of the Holodomor, portraying it as genocide against the Ukrainian people, which the Kremlin viewed as "anti-Russian". Yushchenko and his allies in contrast viewed these political positions as ways to stand up for Ukraine's rights as a sovereign state and to write a Ukrainian history free of Soviet and Russian propaganda. Seen from this perspective, foreign relations with Russia were broader than military alliances, political associations and economic agreements. Following Medvedev's letter, the Kremlin made Yushchenko *persona non grata* in Russia.

Thus, Yushchenko started out with the ambition of having a strategic partnership with Russia based on equality and international agreements. In part, this ambition reflected lessons from the 1990s in which the approach had worked. When these expectations were not met, Yushchenko's administration increasingly presented a narrative that the Kremlin would not accept Ukraine's

[207] FSB, the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation.

sovereignty and not accept a foreign policy independent of Russia. In 2009, Ukrainian-Russian relations were described as at their lowest point since independence.

Why provoke Russia? A different foreign policy approach

Yushchenko's increasingly antagonistic relationship with Moscow faced opposition inside Ukraine. In fact, several Ukrainian political parties preferred pragmatic and relatively close ties with Russia. This position remained even after the gas conflicts with Moscow, the Kremlin's assertive response to NATO enlargement and the Russia-Georgia war. Yushchenko and his allies tried, at least in some domains, to break with Ukraine's previously flexible approach to Russia. In response, the opposition criticized Yushchenko for having a "black and white" approach to Russia and the West. As one experienced Ukrainian diplomat recalled in an interview with this author in 2018:

> In Ukraine we have two types of elite, and it is also two types of thinking within our population. Those who are thinking that Russia is the key enemy of Ukraine on an existential level, and for Russia exists only one aim in foreign policy: to destroy Ukraine as a state. So the best solution for them is to be as far away from Russia as possible. I have never supported this position. But there is another mentality that Russia is a very special historical neighbor. Of course, between Ukraine and Russia exists some post-colonial syndrome from both sides, like between young and old brothers. But I am never afraid of Russia as a state, and this is a pragmatic way of thinking, that with the right geopolitical and foreign policy we can use our position, that we know Russia very well and that we have deep historical ties with Russia.[208]

According to this latter approach, popular within the PoR, the Lytvyn Bloc and the CPU, Russia had been historically and would remain a highly important partner. From this perspective, it was best not to "provoke" Russia on sensitive issues such as NATO, the Black Sea Fleet, Russia's relationship with Georgia and debates about Russian-Ukrainian history. These parties presented an alternative narrative and foreign policy vis-à-vis Russia.

NATO, the Black Sea Fleet and Georgia

As discussed above, the PoR opposed Ukraine's NATO membership. In early 2008, ahead of the Bucharest Summit, the PoR coordinated an anti-NATO campaign. Yanukovych spoke at rallies and the campaign produced a large number of "NATO No" flyers (NBC News, 2017). The Socialist leader, Moroz, was also against NATO membership. He and others in the opposition argued that seeking NATO membership would create big problems with Russia.

[208] Interview, Ukrainian diplomat 2, 2018.

Moreover, leading Ukrainian politicians argued that Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Crimea was not a threat to Ukraine's independence. Yanukovych argued that the BSF question should be resolved at the government level. He did not want to "politicize" the issue or to be seen as an unreliable partner in Russia. In his view, Yushchenko was using the BSF as "an element of blackmail" against Russia (BBC Monitoring Ukraine & Baltics, 2008). Yanukovych instead wanted Ukraine to normalize relations with Russia and allow the BSF to remain in Crimea. Instead of "provocations", Ukraine should negotiate a better deal with Russia. Yanukovych argued this would stabilize Ukrainian-Russian relations and benefit Ukraine's economy (BBC Monitoring, 2009c). Yanukovych and his allies had a highly pragmatic view of Russia in military and security affairs. Yanukovych's foreign minister, Gryshchenko, noted that Russia would not have left Crimea anyway – so why not make the best of the situation?[209] Other opposition leaders even claimed that the BSF could provide protection for Ukraine's southern borders, an idea suggested by PoR founder Mykola Azarov (2008), Ukraine's prime minister in 2010–2014. Volodymyr Lytvyn, Chair of the parliament in 2008–2012, viewed Yushchenko's approach to Russia as a complete failure. Lytvyn argued that Ukraine should avoid seeking NATO membership since it risked splitting society and noted, "[i]t is necessary to spare no effort to ensure that the Russian BSF extends the lease on the base in Crimea after 2017 on mutually beneficial conditions. The Russian Black Sea Fleet must become one of the guarantors of our security" (Cited in BBC Monitoring, 2009b). Speaking in Sevastopol in 2007, CPU leader Petro Symonenko went further and urged Yushchenko to end "provocations" against Russia. He suggested forming a joint Ukrainian-Russian BSF that would "become the cornerstone of a new – non-NATO – European system of collective security" (Cited in Interfax Ukraine, 2007). Symonenko accused Yushchenko of trying to impose NATO on Ukraine and argued that the president had damaged the previously warm Ukrainian-Russian partnership.

Moreover, the PoR criticized Yushchenko's support for Georgia after the 2008 war and even talked about recognizing Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, mirroring the Kremlin's position. The Crimean Parliament voted to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, while the PoR eventually decided not to. Responding to Medvedev's letter, discussed above, Yanukovych argued that normal relations with Russia would be impossible with Yushchenko as president: "The first thing we will do upon taking power will be to revive normal, neighborly, equal and mutually beneficial relations with our strategic partner, Russia" (Cited in Schwirtz, 2009).

Finally, echoing the experiences of the 1990s, many Ukrainian politicians believed that political problems with Russia could be managed by top-level negotiations. In the autumn of 2006, for example, Prime Minister Yanukovych made four unofficial visits to Russia and continued to meet regularly with the

[209] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017.

Russian leadership (Hedenskog, 2006:29). In 2008, Yanukovych and Yushchenko even agreed to appoint Yanukovych's foreign policy advisor as ambassador to Russia to handle the antagonistic relationship.[210] Moreover, in 2008–2009, Prime Minister Tymoshenko made several trips to Moscow and participated in long negotiations with Putin and Medvedev, including in unscheduled late-night talks. The meetings resulted in agreements, including on the energy sector. At one meeting, Tymoshenko stated, "For Ukraine, Russia is an absolute strategic partner, [w]e are very much interested in our relations being friendly and mutually beneficial" (NBC News, 2008). Thus, Tymoshenko continued to advocate a strategic partnership with Russia.

To sum up, many of Ukraine's leading politicians resorted to a pragmatic approach to Russia, one that took Moscow's interests into account and relied on formal and informal high-level negotiations with the Russian leadership to handle difficult problems. Even Yushchenko and his allies initially articulated the possibility of combining a pro-West foreign policy with a Ukrainian-Russian strategic partnership. However, except for the highly pro-Russian CPU, Ukrainian parties advocating a pragmatic relationship with Russia seemed reluctant to join Russia-led organizations and preferred a partnership with both the EU and Russia. Thus, while it would be incorrect to portray the Ukrainian opposition as strongly pro-Russian, it was much closer to Russia's position than the Yushchenko administration.

Alternative explanations

Can Ukraine's foreign policy after 2004 best be explained by the elite's strong commitment to democratic values and a European identity? Clearly, the Orange Revolution was a reaction to corruption and electoral fraud. People who protested against Yanukovych wanted Ukraine to become "a normal European country" (Onuch & Hale, 2022). Moreover, Yushchenko demonstrated leadership during the protests in response to authoritarian practices. At the same time, however, a strong minority continued to support Yanukovych after 2004. Moreover, Ukraine's political system was characterized by what Way (2015) has termed pluralism by default. According to this understanding, Ukraine was a highly competitive plural political system, but not mainly because the political and business elites embraced democratic norms. According to Freedom House's Nations in Transit (2022), Ukraine's democracy index improved for a few years after 2004 but then democracy indicators again started to decline. Ukraine faced problems of weak governance and rule of law, as well as widespread corruption. Ukraine's leaders demonstrated limited interest in or capacity to carry out important reforms to strengthen the democratic system, which led to "Ukraine fatigue" in the West. From a realist perspective, Ukraine's ambivalent foreign policy is quite difficult to explain. Especially

[210] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017.

puzzling is Ukraine's chaotic foreign policy process with deep conflicts within the executive and legislative on key matters of national security. Most realists assume that states will be united on core issues of national security. From this dissertation's perspective, Ukraine's foreign policy after 2004 was, in important parts, shaped in the context of the country's multicenter arena and strongly linked to domestic disagreements. Moreover, Ukraine's peaceful transition contributed to an understanding that was quite popular in the country – that a pragmatic and relatively close partnership with Russia was both possible and beneficial.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored Ukraine's foreign policy after the Orange Revolution. Yushchenko and his allies clearly shifted to a more pro-West foreign policy compared to the previous Kuchma administration. At the same time, Ukraine's foreign policy during this period must be considered chaotic and incoherent, and to have made limited progress. In European capitals, Ukraine fatigue was the legacy of the Orange Revolution. Why did the Orange Revolution not become the critical juncture many predicted at the time, which could have put Ukraine on a path to a stable pro-West orientation, democratization and reform?

The pro-West foreign policy advocated by Yushchenko and his allies can be explained by seeing Ukraine's history as separate from Russia and recognizing that Russian leaders did not accept Ukraine's right to make its own choices. This understanding tapped into opinions in Ukraine's west and center, which supported Yushchenko in the 2004 election and constituted a majority of the Orange protesters. At the same time, Ukraine's multicenter arena made it difficult to follow through on this agenda. Instead of carrying out political reforms and anchoring Ukraine firmly in the West, Ukrainian politicians spent valuable time and resources navigating political conflicts, handling complex negotiations and forming new coalitions. These political conflicts tapped into issues of foreign affairs. Political leaders deliberately used relations with Russia and the West to strengthen their domestic support base. At the same time, heightened political polarization inside Ukraine, especially at the edges in regions such as Galicia, Donbas and Crimea, complicated the prospects of finding a consensus on foreign affairs. In Ukraine's multicenter arena, the PoR had developed into a strong regionally based party in eastern Ukraine that remained popular in the east and south – PoR became the largest party in the 2006 and 2007 elections. Together with smaller opposition parties, the PoR was able to block and obstruct Yushchenko's foreign policy. Just as Kuchma had difficulties sustaining a focused foreign policy agenda, the Orange coalition had similar problems after 2004. This shows how the structural

conditions of the multicenter arena shaped the behavior of political leaders and limited their ability to form a coherent foreign policy.

Another aspect of Ukraine's ambivalent foreign policy could be traced to its non-violent formative period. Ukraine had secured a peaceful transition to independence in part due to successful negotiations and pragmatic ties with Russia. This pragmatic approach to Russia remained popular among Ukrainian parties after the Orange Revolution, which was far from Georgia's approach to Russia. According to the pragmatists, Ukraine could achieve security by not provoking Russia on "sensitive" matters, relying on international agreements signed in the 1990s and performing active diplomacy with the Russian leadership. The PoR and smaller opposition parties supported pragmatic ties with Moscow. Tymoshenko also relied on deals with the Kremlin, for example, by signing controversial energy agreements. Even Yushchenko and his allies wanted to have a strategic partnership with Russia, although they changed their approach when it failed to deliver results.

Moreover, Ukrainian politicians seemed less motivated than in Georgia to limit their dependence on Russia. Ukraine's dependence on Russian energy continued after the Orange Revolution, despite two serious gas conflicts with Russia that affected both Ukrainian and EU energy security. Although Ukraine's multicenter arena made it difficult to have a focused foreign policy, the Orange coalition had a chance to kickstart the agenda in 2005. It could have strengthened the pro-West orientation and carried out drastic reforms (as in Georgia) to convince domestic and international audiences that a serious shift was taking place. Instead, disagreements between Yushchenko and Tymoshenko dominated from the start. In 2006, Yushchenko even signed an agreement with his rival, Yanukovych, because he could not work with Tymoshenko. Once in power as prime minister, Yanukovych blocked the agenda. The Orange coalition could not focus, which in part can be linked to Ukraine's overall pragmatic view of Russia at the time. The main lesson from the 1990s was that Ukraine could handle relations with Russia through diplomacy and pragmatism – distancing Ukraine from Russia was not urgent. Chapter 11 shows that the situation after the Euromaidan in 2014 was very different. Ukrainian leaders then managed to consolidate a strong majority for a pro-West orientation and to distance Ukraine from Russia.

9. Georgia's continued pro-West orientation and the limits of détente with Russia, 2012–2021

In 2012, Georgia held parliamentary elections that resulted in a victory for the Georgian Dream (GD) coalition. In the following year, GD's preferred candidate, Giorgi Margvelashvili, won the presidential election. As a result, the United National Movement and President Mikhail Saakashvili stepped down, having dominated Georgian politics since late 2003. Political leaders and experts in the West welcomed what was considered an overall democratic election followed by an orderly transition of power. At the same time, some circles in the West and Georgia raised concerns about GD's leader, Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili (Macfarlane, 2015). Ivanishvili had no political experience and only a vague agenda. Moreover, he was a business leader and by far Georgia's richest man. His fortune of US$ 6.4 billion, almost half Georgia's GDP in 2012, made him number 153 on the Forbes world billionaires list (Civil Georgia, 2012). Ivanishvili criticized the Saakashvili government for authoritarian rule and an unnecessary conflictual approach toward Russia.[211] Opponents of GD, as well as non-partisan experts, cautioned that Ivanishvili might abandon Georgia's pro-West orientation and turn the country toward Russia (Chance, 2012; Zasztowt, 2013).

This chapter explores Georgia's foreign policy from 2012 until 2021. It seeks to explain why Georgia's overall pro-West orientation remained stable, at least formally. Given Ivanishvili's massive wealth and background in Russia, it also functions as a test of a rival leadership-based explanation of foreign policy. Moreover, the chapter explores why Georgia's main goals of joining the EU and NATO remained in place even though the West seemed reluctant to promise EU membership or give Georgia security guarantees.[212] The chapter also sheds light on Georgia's increasingly cautious Russia policy and discusses why it did not produce any significant results, beyond increased bilateral trade.

[211] After the Rose Revolution, Ivanishvili supported the Saakashvili government financially. It remains unclear exactly why the relationship turned sour.
[212] As we have seen, NATO members gave vague promises to Georgia and Ukraine on membership in Bucharest in 2008, but no timeline or specific details were presented thereafter.

Georgia's foreign policy, 2012–2021

Georgia's overall pro-West orientation remained stable in style and – especially during GDs first term, 2012–2016 – also in substance. As two prominent Georgia experts noted in 2022: "In spite of persistent diplomatic, economic and military pressure from Russia, there has been little substantive change in Georgia's foreign policy position for over two decades" (German & Kakachia, 2022, p. 15). GD officials referred to Euro-Atlantic integration as "irreversible", "given" and "Georgia's faith" (Rosen, 2012).

Despite Ivanishvili's wealth, accumulated in Russia, and connections with the Russian elite, he did not go down the path of Yanukovych in Ukraine (see Chapter 10). In line with some other states in the EU's Eastern Partnership, Georgia declared an interest in signing an Association Agreement (EUAA) and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA) with the EU. Russia's leadership were critical of Georgia's ambition. However, unlike Armenia or Ukraine, where governments made abrupt reorientations away from the EU in the fall of 2013, no such reorientation took place in Georgia during the period.[213] Instead, Georgia's two most influential (and rival) parties, GD and the UNM, drafted a joint foreign policy document on "Resolution on Basic Directions of Georgia's Foreign Policy". The Georgian Parliament approved the resolution unanimously in March 2013 (Civil Georgia, 2013b). The 19-point document highlights Georgia's pro-West priority and explicitly mentions EU and NATO membership and close cooperation with the US as strategic goals. For example, point three declares, "Integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures represents the main priority of the country's foreign policy course" (Civil Georgia, 2013b). GD and UNM adopted a similar resolution after the 2016 election.

At the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November 2013, EU and Georgian officials initialed the EUAA and DCFTA. Newly elected President Margvelashvili declared Georgia's ambition to become a leader of EU integration. Following preparations, the EU and Georgia signed the EUAA and DCFTA in June 2014.[214] In 2017, a visa-free agreement between Georgia and the EU entered into force, making it possible for Georgians to travel visa-free to the EU under certain conditions (De Waal, 2019). In 2020, Georgia's Prime Minister Giorgi Gakharia declared that the GD government's strategic goal was "to make an appeal for EU membership in 2024" (Agenda.ge, 2020).

Furthermore, Georgia deviated from the other five Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine) by continuing to hold on to NATO membership as a key goal. As discussed in Chapter 10, Ukraine abandoned the goal of NATO membership in 2010 and became a "non-bloc state" (but switched back in 2014), and no other Eastern Partnership

[213] In Ukraine this decision resulted in the Euromaidan, which is analyzed in detail in Chapters 10 and 11.
[214] The agreement entered fully into force on 1 July 2016.

country pursued NATO membership. Especially when following a realist logic, non-alignment in military and security affairs could have been an option for Georgia to handle Russian pressure and opposition to NATO enlargement, and NATO's unwillingness to accept Georgia as a member in the medium term. According to this thinking, being a NATO partner located at the Russian border without security guarantees left Georgia vulnerable. Some scholars even suggested a "Finlandization model" to handle Georgia's dilemma (Mouritzen, 2017).

Nonetheless, the GD government maintained NATO membership as a goal and reiterated its interest in a Membership Action Plan at the 2014 NATO summit in Wales. At the summit, Georgia did not receive a MAP but was given a "Substantial NATO-Georgia Package" (SNGP) and became an "Enhanced Opportunity Partner" (EOP), a status given only to a handful of NATO's closest partners (NATO, 2023).[215] Further steps followed at the NATO summits in Warsaw in 2016 and Brussels in 2018, and via an updated SNGP in 2020, intended to strengthen Georgia's capacity and prepare for membership. In 2015, a NATO-Georgia Joint Training and Evaluation Center (JTEC) opened outside Tbilisi and joint exercises with NATO were frequently held in the country. Georgia's mission to NATO was one of its largest diplomatic representations abroad.[216] Russia strongly criticized Georgia's NATO policy but the GD government showed little interest in reversing it (Civil Georgia, 2015). Furthermore, as a sign of loyalty to its western partners, the GD-led government kept Georgian troops in Afghanistan until the joint withdrawal together with US and NATO troops in 2021 (Agenda.ge, 2021).[217] At the same time, influential NATO members tacitly blocked the political process for Georgia to become a member, a decision linked to the view of some influential NATO members at the time that Russia should not be provoked. This position was well known in Georgian political circles, as expressed in 2017 by a senior Georgian foreign office official working in the GD administration:

> I understand that now there is no consensus, especially in Europe on our eventual [NATO] membership….We are patiently waiting for a time when [the] situation in Europe and the United States and worldwide will mature for further expansion of NATO towards [the] East, then we are obvious candidates. When this time will mature, we should be ready from a technical, practical point of view. That is why we are now focusing mainly on practical cooperation. In no way it means that we are not working with capitals on the political side, but this decision should take in the wider picture, and there we have not much influence.[218]

[215] Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan and Sweden received this status as well, followed by Ukraine in 2020.
[216] Interview, Georgian diplomat 2, 2017.
[217] Reportedly, 860 Georgian soldiers remained in Afghanistan just before the withdrawal in 2021.
[218] Interview, Georgian diplomat 2, 2017.

In sum, Georgia's pro-West orientation remained after GD came to power and led to substantial results, especially during GD's first term in office, 2012–2016.

An attempt to reduce tensions with Russia

The most notable difference in Georgia's foreign policy after 2012 was a shift in how it treated Russia. According to the definition used in this dissertation, however, it was not a change in foreign policy orientation, but a less fundamental difference in method of dealing with Russia. GD officials described this new method as "normalization" or "strategic patience" (International Crisis Group, 2020a).

First, the GD government considered some kind of détente necessary to reduce the heated rhetoric between Georgian and Russian officials that had escalated in the years before the 2008 war and continued thereafter. Second, GD rebuilt some bilateral economic ties between Russia and Georgia, including tourism. Third, the GD government hoped the approach would result in a better political climate, which was deemed necessary to resolve major disagreements between the two countries.[219] Clearly, this view differed from the UNM. Saakashvili had placed Georgia at the heart of the growing disagreements between Washington and Moscow (see Chapter 7). The GD leadership, in contrast, declared that it wanted to avoid confrontation with Russia and improve trade and tourism with its northern neighbor. What is important to note is that, from the GD perspective, a détente with Russia could not compromise Georgia's continued ambition for EU and NATO membership or a restoration of territorial integrity (MacFarlane 2015).

In November 2012, Ivanishvili appointed Zurab Abashidze, an experienced career diplomat and former Georgian ambassador to Moscow, special envoy for relations with Russia. Russia appointed a deputy foreign minister as his counterpart. Abashidze's task was to delink trade and humanitarian affairs from sensitive issues such as security policy and territorial integrity. The Georgian government underlined that this was informal diplomacy, not an attempt to reopen formal diplomatic relations with Russia, which remained frozen since the 2008 war. In Abashidze's words in 2019,

> We are trying to be constructive, we are trying to open the gaps and to look for some possibilities, some small windows of possibilities. It was our initiative of the new government in 2012 to start direct talks with Russia, non-official, informal talks on restoring trade relations, transport relations, humanitarian contacts, and we achieved certain progress in that regard….This is not formal, it is not an official meeting, we meet in a hotel in Prague….So we do not have a formal agenda, we do not commit to some agreements, we do not sign any documents, we just agree verbally on some issues and try to solve problems,

[219] Interview, Zurab Abashidze, 2019.

> just like that you know. We do not have embassies; we do not have diplomatic representations [in Russia].[220]

Partly in response, the Russian government lifted its ban on Georgian agricultural products and Russian tourism to Georgia increased (Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2023).[221] While Russian-Georgian trade relations improved, the EU remained Georgia's largest trading partner. Furthermore, GD did not seek membership of any Russia-led organizations, such as the Eurasian Economic Union or the military CSTO. Nor did it pursue a non-alignment policy. To sum up, according to the definition used in this dissertation, Georgia's overall foreign policy orientation remained pro-West in 2012–2021. The GD government did not abandon EU and NATO membership as strategic goals during the period and signed important agreements with the organizations. GD's détente with Russia was different from the UNM's approach but cannot be considered a shift in foreign policy orientation.

Explaining Georgia's foreign policy stability

One way to explain Georgia's pro-West stability is by looking at the single center political arena that had taken form since the late 1990s. Strong regionally based parties with connections to Russia, such as the wealthy and influential Party of Regions in Ukraine, were not present in Georgia. In general, the political opposition in Georgia had difficulties coordinating. The UNM looked likely to win in 2012. It had also made changes to the constitution, which weakened the post of president and made the prime minister the most important position since 2012.[222]

Georgian political opposition grew, partly as a result of the 2008 war. It criticized the UNM and Saakashvili's inner circle for authoritarian tendencies and for helping to cause the war. However, it was not until Ivanishvili entered politics in 2011 that the opposition was able to seriously challenge the UNM. At the same time, Ivanishvili, a political novice, needed allies to win the parliamentary elections in 2012. First, foreign policy representatives in the GD supported Georgia's pro-West foreign policy. For example, Tedo Japaridze, an experienced diplomat, became Ivanishvili's foreign policy advisor and chair of the parliamentary foreign relations committee.[223] Second, to stand a chance of winning, Ivanishvili had to build a coalition with other parties. Ini-

[220] Interview, Zurab Abashidze, 2019.
[221] Russia's shift was also partly a result of becoming a member of the WTO in 2012.
[222] President Saakashvili could not run for a third term. There were rumors that the constitutional change was a way for Saakashvili to remain in power as prime minister after 2012–2013.
[223] Among other things, Japaridze had been Georgia's ambassador to the US during Shevardnadze's time as president.

tially, Ivanishvili reached out to the Republican Party led by David Usupashvili and Our Georgia/Free Democrats led by Irakli Alasania. Both Usupashvili and Alasania were strong advocates of Georgia's pro-West orientation and respected in western capitals.[224] Usupashvili recalls that he was at first skeptical about Ivanishvili entering politics, but then:

> [Ivanishvili] announced that well he wants to offer a strategic partnership to two parties: the Free Democrats and the Republicans. Before he form[ed] his own party, he wanted to form a strategic partnership toward us....He gave us a picture of the future which was almost the same as we were dreaming of. It was about internal democracy, about international connections, about the ways how to overcome the crisis. We were positively surprised; now is the chance to change Saakashvili's government but to keep the main direction of development of the country.[225]

Ivanishvili later added other small parties with various backgrounds to the GD coalition, but the Free Democrats and the Republicans secured key posts in Ivanishvili's government in foreign policy and defense. The Free Democrats were given the positions of deputy prime minister and defense minister (Alasania) and state minister for Euro-Atlantic integration (Alex Petriashvili). Moreover, Maia Panjikidze, closely linked to Alasania, became foreign minister.[226] Usupashvili became Chair of the parliament and his wife, Tina Khidasheli, chaired the parliamentary committee on European integration before taking over as defense minister. In 2018, David Zalkaliani, a founder of the Free Democrats, became foreign minister. As Usupashvili recalls: "We [the Republicans and Free Democrats] took the lead in foreign relations, we had a pretty strong international team".[227]

These parties' dominance in foreign and defense policy clearly played an important role at a decisive moment – during the preparation and signing of Georgia's agreements with the EU in 2013–2014, as well as in securing an SNGP with NATO, and becoming an EOP and opening a JTEC, as discussed above. This process would probably have been less straightforward and effective if these parties had not been in charge of foreign and defense affairs. In 2012, Ivanishvili declared an interest in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union, but this proposal was unacceptable to his coalition partners and Ivanishvili quickly abandoned the idea (Civil Georgia, 2013c). Furthermore, the

[224] After the 2008 war, Usupashvili, Alasania, The Way of Georgia (a party led by former foreign minister Salome Zourabichvili who became Georgia's president in 2018) and members of the New Rights Party established an opposition to the UNM that supported a pro-West foreign policy but worried about what it perceived as Saakashvili's authoritarian turn. Interview, David Usupashvili, 2019.
[225] Interview, David Usupashvili, 2019.
[226] Panjikidze, Alasania's sister-in-law, initially belonged to the GD party. She later joined the Free Democrats.
[227] Interview, David Usupashvili, 2019.

pro-West UNM remained the largest opposition party and Saakashvili was president until the fall of 2013.

Moreover, surveys show that the Georgian population continued to support NATO and EU integration. According to the NDI's polling data between 2012 and 2021, Georgians' support of NATO membership never declined below 60 percent and most of the time remained over 70 percent. According to the same poll, the main reason for supporting membership was that NATO would provide greater security for Georgia. On average, support for EU membership was around 75 percent during the period – at times over 80 percent. Those supporting EU membership believed membership would improve Georgia's economy and security (NDI, 2022). This indicates that the idea of Georgia's pro-West orientation continued to be rooted in the Georgian population and was primarily based on security and economic concerns. The structure of the political arena thus helps to explain why Georgia in 2012, despite having a wealthy businessman in power with connections to Russia (see below), did not follow the same vacillating approach as Yanukovych in Ukraine after 2010.

In late 2014, Ivanishvili's successor dismissed defense minister Alasania, according to the latter, on political grounds and the Free Democrats, including its ministers, left the GD coalition. In Usupashvili's view, "The coalition became much weaker in terms of foreign policy direction when the Free Democrats left".[228] The dismissal of Alasania, according to polling Georgia's most popular politician at the time, demonstrated that Ivanishvili's political forces had gradually strengthened their influence on Georgian politics. Just like in previous periods, a single party increasingly dominated Georgia's political arena. The GD secured victory in the 2016 and 2020 parliamentary elections but, as discussed above, continued to insist on Georgia's pro-West foreign policy orientation.[229] To explain why this course continued, we must consider the importance of Georgia's traumatic formative experience, sensitivity related to territorial integrity and the difficult relationship with Russia.

Interpretations of Georgia's traumatic past

Possibly the most important explanation for Georgia's continued pro-West orientation after 2012 can be found in Georgia's difficult relationship with Russia and the two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia – a trauma within Georgia's political elite and society that had been ongoing since

[228] Interview, David Usupashvili, 2019. GD's official reason for the dismissal of Alasania was the latter's remarks following the arrest of MoD and general staff officials on allegations of corruption. Alasania considered the arrests politically motivated and "an attack on Georgia's Euro-Atlantic choice" (Civil Georgia, 2014).

[229] In 2016–2020 GD received support from the Alliance of Patriots, a small far-right party, labeled "pro-Russian" by some experts. There are no indications, however, that the party had any influence on the areas of foreign policy and defense (Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2023).

the 1990s. As discussed at length in previous chapters, this legacy also shaped Georgia's foreign policy agenda in earlier periods.

While Georgian Dream, like previous governments, had some flexibility, it could not resolve fundamental problems of territorial integrity. As a result, the country's painful modern history, as interpreted by a majority of Georgians, narrowed the government's room for maneuver. Anything beyond limited cooperation with Russia on "non-sensitive" issues remained a non-starter. In order to justify a détente with Russia, Ivanishvili and his allies attempted to reinterpret Georgia's situation after the 2008 war, and to develop foreign policy in reaction to the UNM's approach.

The first component of GD's approach was to avoid heated rhetoric in relation to Russian officials. The new government argued that its predecessor's confrontational rhetoric had been destructive and risked sparking another war. As one of the GD coalition leaders noted:

> Our approach vis-à-vis Russia back in 2012 was that we already have enough problems with Russia. Our understanding was that Misha [Saakashvili] was just seeking new problems, and he was trying to demonstrate again and again to the West that this is what Russia is doing. And it was done by using some very, very abusive language about persons, of Putin, and of course, Putin was doing the same [to Saakashvili]. That was a very ugly conflict, which was leading nowhere, basically.[230]

Moreover, the shift reflected lessons learned from the 2008 war. European and US leaders had provided very limited help in terms of military support. They also communicated behind the scenes that Georgia could not expect military help if there was another war:

> So, our direction was that we have enough problems already, and at the same time, we saw, and we heard more than clearly from our colleagues from the outside [in the West], that well we are not ready to be next to you if another conflict happens….So that was our original policy and nothing else.[231]

A document outlining GD's foreign policy priorities declared that Georgia's main goals were territorial integrity, and NATO and EU integration, in line with previous governments' priorities. In addition, according to the same document, Georgia would "no longer be on the list of differences between the West and Russia", and it would "be ready to launch a dialogue with Russia with the use of international mechanisms, which will aim at developing the strategy for gradual overcoming the existing crisis, the country's de-occupation and protection of its sovereignty" (Civil Georgia, 2013a). According to Ivanishvili's foreign policy advisor, Georgia was not going to be "a new Ber-

[230] Interview, David Usupashvili, 2019.
[231] Interview, David Usupashvili, 2019.

lin Wall" (as Saakashvili had suggested). "We do not want to be the new Berlin Wall. That brings nothing good to Georgia. Georgia cannot change its geography, which is why we have to consider the region. We have to settle our relations with our neighbors" (Japaridze, 2012).

Furthermore, GD representatives blamed the UNM leadership for its reckless behavior before and during the 2008 war. At a press conference, Ivanishvili criticized Russia for the war, but also criticized Saakashvili: "I also think that our government led by the president [Saakashvili] acted in an inadequate way in that situation, I consider it absolutely unjustified that military units were put on alert and military actions started before Russia crossed our borders" (Antidze, 2013). Ivanishvili's foreign policy advisor claimed that previous mistakes had to serve as lessons and be reflected in Georgia's foreign policy:

> We have to understand where Georgia is in terms of the neighborhood. It is not just the global context that we have to consider. It is the regional context….Look, Russia is a big country. But actually, whether you are small or big, you have to coexist. In 2008, we lost territories. We lost a war. I do not say that the Georgians were angels. We are not angels. We jumped into the trap. Georgia was dismembered. Saakashvili's biggest mistake was that he dragged Russia back to the Caucasus. I do not expect any easy dialogue with Russia but the discourse should be based on pragmatism and realism. (Japaridze, 2012)

Defense Minister Alasania also linked the need for a new approach to Georgia's territorial integrity:

> They [the UNM] lost the election because during their tenure in government Georgia lost territory. They lost a war against Russia. Russia attacked us. But we spent 8 billion lari ($4.8 billion) in defense spending and our army was not ready….at the end of [Saakashvili's] nine years in power, 20 percent of our territory is occupied and there are 10,000 troops on our territory – while before we were withdrawing Russian troops. (Alasania, 2013a)

In contrast to what they considered to be the UNM's approach, GD leaders proposed a policy vis-à-vis Russia that would not give Moscow "a pretext to attack" and that would practice "strategic patience" (Alasania, 2013a). This implied an ambition for stable relations with Russia by (within limits) considering Moscow's position when designing Georgia's foreign policy. The fact that the goals of EU and NATO membership remained "non-negotiable", however, made GD's concept of strategic patience quite limited in scope. Moreover, GD's leadership viewed a new approach to Russia as a prerequisite for restoring Georgia's territorial integrity and giving Georgia "breathing space" to develop. In GD's view, a functioning relationship with Russia was also essential for Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration. As Ivanishvili put it:

> With respect to Euro-Atlantic integration, we have to realize that we need to normalize the relationships with our neighbors, and especially with Russia. I am very confident that Georgian Dream will be able to open up the Russian market, regain the territories, the occupied territories [of Abkhazia and South Ossetia]. It is not an easy process. I realize it will not happen overnight. (Cited in Rosen, 2012)

In line with this reasoning, GD wanted to signal to the West that Georgia would become a more attractive NATO ally. The new leadership would not be "dragged" into a military conflict with Russia, to which some US and European leaders believed Saakashvili had contributed in 2008: "we are mature politically, we are not going to end up entangled in a military confrontation" (Alasania, 2013b).

Georgia's special representative on relations with Russia later reiterated that the strategy of combining European integration with a working relationship with Moscow had produced some results:

> Our understanding is to reduce tensions with Russia. Finding some common points of interest was part of our European program, and it helped us to implement those two achievements which I already mentioned [EU association, trade and visa-free agreements]. With having bigger problems with Russia, I am not sure if we could do it as quickly as we did in 2014, just after two years with the new government, and after four years free visa regime. So, again it helps [Georgia] to move in that European direction, a better way than having problems and headaches with Russia. But still, Russia remains our everyday concern.[232]

The fact that the Obama administration developed a "reset policy" with Russia initially helped the GD to propose a détente (Stent, 2014). However, as discussed below, Russia's negative role in Georgia's trauma limited GD's normalization with Moscow.

The limits of GD's "normalization" policy

Although GD shifted the method of how to approach Russia, Georgia's traumatic experiences and Russia's negative role, from the dominant Georgian understanding, strongly constrained the GD leadership's room for maneuver. For example, the foreign policy agreement signed by GD and the UNM in 2013 highlighted the importance of de-occupation and restoration of territorial integrity. These goals were emphasized in the preamble and in point 2. Point 18 declared that Georgia should not have diplomatic relations or join an alliance with a state that recognizes the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, or with a state occupying the two territories. These points implicitly referred to Russia, which a majority of Georgians consider to be an occupying

[232] Interview, Zurab Abashidze, 2019.

force. Furthermore, Russia is one of few countries that has recognized the independence of these entities.[233] In other words, as long as Russia controlled the breakaway regions, GD promised to avoid restoring formal diplomatic relations with Moscow. If GD had ignored point 18, Georgian society would have understood it as GD's acceptance that the territories were permanently lost. Since this remains a highly sensitive issue in Georgia, which could have resulted in a strong domestic reaction, it limited the government's room for maneuver in terms of foreign policy.

Thus, the legacy of Georgia's formative experience helps to explain why GD's policy of "normalizing" relations with Russia made only limited progress. GD could go no further than informal diplomatic channels (the Abashidze-Karasin dialogue), strengthened humanitarian ties and increased bilateral trade. Moreover, GD avoided policies that Moscow would have preferred, such as neutrality or joining Russia-led organizations. GD officials reiterated as late as 2021 firm red lines related to the pro-West orientation and Russia's control over Abkhazia and South Ossetia: "There are red lines connected with de-occupation and our integration with the West. Everything can be discussed [with Russia] within the framework of these red lines, but we cannot speak about the restoration of diplomatic relations" (TASS, 2021).

GD had justified the détente in part by saying that it would help restore territorial integrity, in a legacy from Georgia's formative period, but these hopes did not materialize. Instead, Russian officials strengthened their partnership with Abkhazia and South Ossetia after the 2008 war. Putin expressed some optimism in 2012 about the new Georgian government but underlined that Russia would not revoke its 2008 decision to recognize the two regions as independent states (BBC Monitoring, 2013).

Between 2008 and 2014, Russia signed over 70 agreements with the two regions, including on borders, and military and economic issues, and built a judicial framework for close cooperation. In 2014–2015, Russia signed an "Alliance and Strategic Partnership" and an "Alliance and Integration" agreement with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, respectively. Analysts confirmed that the agreements strengthened the two regions' dependency on Russia, both militarily and economically (Ambrosio & Lange, 2016).

The so-called borderization was another point of disagreement between Georgia and Russia (Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2023). A few years after the 2008 war, Russia started to install barbed wire, surveillance cameras and international border posts at the administrative boundary line dividing Georgia and

[233] The full text declares "18. Georgia should not either have diplomatic relations or be in a military, political, customs alliance with a state, which recognizes independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia/former autonomous district of South Ossetia or has Georgia's territories occupied. Georgia will carry out consistent foreign policy in order to secure unwavering international respect to its territorial integrity and sovereignty" (Civil Georgia, 2013b). Point 18 was not included in GD's first draft but was added after negotiations with the UNM.

South Ossetia. This author observed Russia's work in progress when participating in a European Union Monitoring Mission patrol to the conflict line. Moreover, Russian troops moved the boundary line further into Georgian territory to include areas where the Baku-Supsa pipeline, which delivers oil from Azerbaijan to Georgia's Black Sea Coast, passes. Russian troops also established a presence close to Georgia's strategically important East-West highway. Georgian politicians frequently refer to this process as "creeping annexation", a development that escalated after 2014. The main part of the borderization process occurred after GD came to power. These actions resulted in strong condemnation by senior Georgian government officials. In 2017, Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili stated that Russia's actions:

> [E]xpose once again the real intentions of the occupation force, to incorporate the integral parts of Georgia. It is unfortunate that the Russian Federation responds to Georgia's peaceful policy, and its efforts for reconciliation and trust-building between populations divided by the occupation line, with tightening the isolation of Georgia's occupied regions and with steps of annexation. (Civil Georgia, 2017)

Georgia's President Margvelashvili called developments "further annexation of Georgia's occupied territories" and urged Russian officials "to take real steps towards de-occupation of Georgia's occupied territories and fulfilling its international obligations" (Civil Georgia, 2017). Georgian officials tried to initiate bilateral talks with Russia to discuss the status of the breakaway regions, including at the level of president and prime minister in 2014, 2015 and 2018 (International Crisis Group, 2020a). Russian officials, however, responded that Russia was not a party to the conflict. As illustrated by a Georgian diplomat: "In public [Russian officials] are saying that if we want to achieve something, we should talk to Abkhaz and Ossetians, as soon as we go and talk to them, they [Russian officials] say we should not talk to [Abkhaz and Ossetians]".[234] The Kremlin declined even moderate Georgian requests, such as to expand the mandate of the EU's Monitoring Mission to the breakaway regions. Moreover, the official dialogue, the Geneva format, did not produce any substantial outcomes. As noted by a Georgian diplomat:

> It is clear that you cannot achieve anything, but all sides see it has a value. For Georgia, it is a way not to stay alone against Russia, some kind of framework. For Abkhazia and South Ossetia, it is one of the few places where they are represented [and] meet international diplomats, not only Russians. The Russians are probably the least interested, but they do not want to walk out, they want to have control over the process, often quite silent. The US is also there, so the Russians would not abandon the field.[235]

[234] Interview, Georgian diplomat 2, 2017.
[235] Interview, Georgian diplomat 3, 2017.

When GD officials initiated the détente with Russia, they acknowledged it would not be easy. At the same time, GD hoped that increased trade would gradually translate into political dialogue and change Russia's view of the two breakaway regions. As Georgia's special representative for relations with Russia noted in 2019:

> When we started with this dialogue in 2012, of course, we hoped that coming back to normality in terms of trade and so on would be translated into some political positive development, which did not happen unfortunately….This is really a big challenge for us, and again I would like to repeat that we are facing everyday problems produced by these abnormal relations with Russia, on the occupied territories, on the occupation line, and so on. Georgia is only part of a bigger broad strategic perspective and picture, and we are trying to be realistic; and we do not expect anything to happen soon. We do not see any political will in Russia to change something internally or externally. No changes, unfortunately.[236]

This illustrates the limits of GDs normalization with Russia. Since the approach did not resolve the conflicts, it was difficult for GD officials to justify a further strengthening of the relationship with Moscow. Relatedly, the West's diplomatic support for Georgia's territorial integrity made a shift in foreign policy orientation away from the West a very difficult sell among Georgia's political elite and society – many Georgians would have seen an abandonment of the pro-West orientation as accepting Russian demands.

Protests and emotional reactions to Russia's actions

The mass protests in Georgia in 2019 illustrate GD's limited room for maneuver in relations with Russia. During a session of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, Sergei Gavrilov, a Russian parliamentarian, was invited to the Georgian Parliament to deliver a speech in Russian from the speaker's chair. What looked like a relatively minor occasion for an organization of limited importance triggered mass protests in Georgia against GD and Russia's political elite. The Georgian police used teargas to prevent demonstrators from taking control of the parliament building. The clashes injured hundreds of people (including police officers), and the government and police were criticized for using hardline tactics. In response, the GD speaker in parliament resigned (Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2023). This incident illustrates how relatively minor events associated with Russian political influence in Georgia can stir up strong emotions and mass protests. Several surveys from the period indicate that Georgian society viewed Russia's political circles in a negative light. In a 2016 survey, 71 percent considered Russia to be Georgia's biggest threat, 67 percent believed Russian aggression was ongoing but 59 percent supported continuing dialogue with Russia (IRI, 2016 see also ; NDI, 2022).

[236] Interview, Zurab Abashidze, 2019.

The figures indicate Georgians' negative image of the Russian government and potentially Russia more broadly.[237]

Relatedly, Georgian political parties classified as "pro-Russian" by media outlets and experts have had very limited success. After 2008, Nino Burjanadze, one of the three leaders during the Rose Revolution, changed her political agenda. She met with senior Russian officials, including Putin, promoted closer ties with Russia and wanted Georgia to abandon the goal of NATO membership.[238] Her presidential campaign in 2013 and her party's campaign in 2016 failed to attract substantial support from the Georgian electorate. Alliance of Patriots, also labeled pro-Russian by experts, entered parliament in 2016 but received only five percent of the vote. In 2020, the party's support fell to three percent (Lebanidze & Kakachia, 2023). The failure of parties that openly support closer ties with Russia, and that want to weaken Georgia's Euro-Atlantic agenda, illustrates the limited room for maneuver that Georgian parties had in foreign policy – at least if they wanted to be successful. A majority of the Georgian electorate does not view a shift away from a pro-West orientation or toward closer ties with Russia in a positive light. In fact, such a policy could result in a massive reaction.

Alternative explanations

Let us consider alternative explanations for Georgia's stable pro-West orientation, starting with an obvious rival explanation – leadership-centered explanations of foreign policy. From this perspective, Bidzina Ivanishvili becomes central to the analysis. During the period, Ivanishvili was Georgia's wealthiest individual by far, and founder of GD – the country's dominant party after 2012. Even though Ivanishvili stepped down from the position of prime minister in late 2013, most experts assume he remained in control of the party (Nodia, 2022, p. 22). Ivanishvili appointed his protégé, Irakli Garibashvili, as his successor, who remained in the post for two years and returned to it in 2021. Although formally the most important political position in Georgia after 2012, several prime ministers resigned citing disagreement "with the leadership", meaning Ivanishvili (Reuters, 2018). President Margvelashvili, who GD supported in 2013, fell out with Ivanishvili and did not stand for re-election in 2018. Thus, few people doubt that Ivanishvili is the most powerful person in Georgia.

It is difficult to know Ivanishvili's foreign policy motivations – he has rarely discussed them openly, especially since 2013. His background, how-

[237] Georgian views of individual Russians are more complex and not the primary focus of this dissertation.
[238] Burjanadze labeled the policy "pro-Georgian" but not "pro-Russian".

ever, provides some clues. Ivanishvili became wealthy during his time in Moscow in the 1990s, where he joined an influential group called the *Semibankirschina,* together with some of Russia's richest oligarchs, such as Boris Berezovsky and Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Among other things, Ivanishvili helped Boris Yeltsin get reelected president in 1996 (Genté, 2022). In Moscow, he developed close ties with Russia's political and economic elite. Ivanishvili claimed to have sold all his businesses in Russia before entering politics in Georgia in 2011. However, according to Transparency International (2022), he continued to own businesses in Russia after 2012 through relatives and offshore companies.

According to Ivanishvili, he went into politics with one main goal: to oust Saakashvili. Members of Georgia's political opposition and some experts argue that an additional goal of Ivanishvili and his inner circle was to orient Georgia's foreign policy toward Russia and away from the West (Genté, 2022; Zasztowt, 2013). As discussed above, Ivanishvili was a key initiator of GDs "normalization policy" with Russia. Moreover, in 2013 he did not "rule out" membership of the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union, although he quickly backtracked from this statement. Ivanishvili's motives remain vague but the above indicates he was at least interested in close relations with Russia, certainly more so than other Georgian leaders. While a new influential leader with a background in Russia helps to explain the shift in method vis-à-vis Moscow, however, it does not explain why Georgia's pro-West orientation remained from 2012 until 2021 and why relations with Russia continued to be notoriously difficult.

What about theories that claim Georgia's pro-West orientation is best explained by the Georgian political elite's commitment to democratic values and its willingness to uphold and internalize norms promoted by western organizations such as the EU and NATO? International observers viewed the parliamentary election in 2012 as a step forward in Georgia's democratic development but the country remained classified as a "hybrid regime" after 2012. The election result could be evidence that Georgia's political elite genuinely shared a European identity, including values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. From this perspective, Georgia's foreign policy would be explained by the political elite's willingness to join organizations aligned with internalized democratic values.

When examining the detail, this explanation becomes less convincing. In Nations in Transit's index, for example, Georgia's democracy score temporarily improved because of the 2012 election. Between 2013 and 2021, however, Georgia's democracy score worsened, especially in categories such as national democratic governance, judicial framework and protection of civil society. The subsequent elections were competitive but, according to the report, suffered from government interference, including abuse of administrative resources, vote buying, violation of voting security and intimidation of voters by GD officials during the elections (Nations in Transit, 2022). As a

result of the protests in 2019, Ivanishvili promised fully proportional parliamentary elections in 2020. GD failed to deliver on this promise, which led to criticism from the West. After GDs victory in the first round of the 2020 parliamentary elections, the UNM and other opposition parties boycotted the runoff and refused to take their seats in parliament. Voter turnout during the runoff was the lowest since independence. The EU, led by President of the European Council Charles Michel, demonstrated a willingness to help Georgian politicians and brokered an agreement between the government and the opposition in April 2021. During the summer, GD withdrew from the agreement, although the UNM reportedly contributed to this outcome as well. Western officials viewed the behavior of Georgia's political elite and its apparent lack of interest in the democratic process negatively (Kelly & Kramer, 2021). GD officials pushed back against criticism from EU and US officials of Georgia's democratic backsliding. As a long-term observer noted, "For Georgia's ruling party, regime survival seems to trump all other considerations" (De Waal, 2021). Finally, organizations have criticized Ivanishvili's informal but influential role in Georgian politics (Nations in Transit, 2022). EU and US officials also expressed concern over potential "selective justice" after GD came to power.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings, international organizations ranked Georgia as more democratic than many of its neighbors, such as Turkey, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia. Nonetheless, as the above examples indicate, it is unlikely that a genuine commitment to democratic values and a European identity within Georgia's ruling political elite has been the *main driver* of Georgia's continued pro-West foreign policy. When in power, both GD and the UNM have shown little interest in living up to democratic norms and procedures. Moreover, as discussed above, surveys indicate that Georgians who support NATO and EU membership primarily expect it to bring security and economic prosperity.

Another explanation discussed in Chapter 1 predicts that leaders and governments should shift the country's foreign policy away from the West and toward authoritarian regimes such as Russia when their political survival is at stake. In the case of Georgia, calculations of political survival might explain why GD has not done more to implement those parts of the pro-West agenda that could threaten government control. GD, however, formally upholds the pro-West orientation and downplays criticism of not living up to democratic norms. One interpretation could be that the GD leadership assesses its political survival to be more at risk if it overturns the pro-West orientation than if it stays at least formally on track. This, on the other hand, shows how the formation of Georgia's political arena, and its negative formative experiences with Russia constrain policymakers' room for maneuver in foreign affairs.

Conclusion

As explored in this chapter, Georgia's pro-West orientation set out in the late 1990s continued throughout the period studied. From 2012 to 2021, Georgia was the only country among the six participants in the EU's Eastern Partnership to declare and never deviate from EU and NATO membership as its main foreign policy objectives. On the EU, Armenia and Ukraine made a U-turn in the fall of 2013 when their governments decided not to sign an EU Association Agreement. Azerbaijan and Belarus communicated no interest in an EUAA. On NATO, Ukraine was a non-bloc state between 2010 and 2014 (see Chapter 10), and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus and Moldova showed no ambition to seek membership. This makes Georgia stand out for its stable pro-West orientation over time. NATO's de facto unwillingness to offer membership to Georgia – at least in the medium term – has led scholars, especially realists, to suggest different models, such as non-alignment, for Georgia and for states in similar situations (Allison, 2014; Walt, 2015). Nonetheless, Georgia's international orientation has overall remained pro-West.

First, to secure a victory in the 2012 election, GD had to offer important positions in the foreign and defense ministries to committed pro-West parties. Furthermore, GD representatives referred to EU and NATO membership as irreversible and as "Georgia's fate". Regardless of whether this was a genuine belief within GD's top leadership, the party at least perceived it as necessary to continue Georgia's pro-West orientation. According to surveys, most Georgians would see a turn away from the West as siding with Russia, and a majority see Russia as an occupational force. Thus, if GD had abandoned Georgia's pro-West orientation, it would have been likely to face mass protests, as illustrated by the relatively marginal incident with a Russian parliamentarian in 2019. Moreover, it would provide a perfect opportunity for Georgia's opposition to side with the protest movement to secure a victory at the next election. The fact that parties that support non-alignment or pro-Russian positions fail is a warning sign for political actors that are thinking of abandoning Georgia's pro-West orientation.

The chapter has also tested an alternative leadership-based explanation. Ivanishvili and his inner circle's beliefs could help to explain Georgia's shift in approach vis-à-vis Russia. When it comes to foreign policy, Ivanishvili's motives are difficult to assess. His background in Russia and close contacts with Moscow's political elite indicate that he is probably interested in moving Georgia closer to Russia. His statements during the 2012 election campaign and during his short time as prime minister are other signs of this intention.

At the same time, Georgia's traumatic experience and the dominant view within the political elite and society that Georgia's territorial integrity must be restored can in part explain the shift in method vis-à-vis Russia. GD representatives argued that the UNMs approach had failed, resulting in even greater difficulty reintegrating the breakaway regions. Georgian politicians learned

from this experience and developed the concept of "strategic patience". The idea of toning down the bold rhetoric against the Kremlin seemed to have support among many Georgians in order to avoid another war. The approach succeeded in this regard but failed, however, to deliver tangible results on reintegrating the breakaway regions. This shows how territorial integrity and the loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Georgia's trauma since the 1990s, continued to play a highly important role in Georgia, including in shaping its foreign policy. It also shows that leaders that shift their method of engagement, in this case with regard to Russia, must make these adjustments and reinterpretations in relation to the dominant understanding of the trauma legacy. Leaders cannot ignore these issues but have to frame even minor adjustments within a narrative that is compelling to the majority of the Georgian population. Otherwise, even relatively minor events can lead to intense debate and mass protest.

10. The collapse of Ukraine's political arena: A new critical juncture, 2010–2014

In 2014, Ukraine abandoned its ambiguous and vacillating foreign policy, which had been a recurring theme since independence.[239] Since 2014, Ukraine has pursued a firm pro-West orientation, in contrast to what prominent realist scholars had predicted. Chapters 10 and 11 tell the story of how and why this happened. This chapter explores how increased domestic and external pressures, augmented by Yanukovych and his allies, resulted in a crisis. During this crisis, Yanukovych and his allies had multiple options, but their decisions to reject the EU and the use of violence against the demonstrations set off a reactive sequence of massive proportions. This dissertation considers the period from late 2013 to be a new formative period in modern Ukraine's political history. The sequence of events began with Yanukovych's decision to turn away from the EU and toward Russia, followed by the Euromaidan violence which was used by the authorities, Yanukovych's escape and Russia's annexation of Crimea. It ended with war and Russia's occupation of parts of the Donbas in 2014. In Chapter 11, the analysis turns to the legacies of this critical juncture and how these legacies contributed to the stabilization of Ukraine's pro-West foreign policy after 2014. Chapter 10 first discusses domestic pressures, which increased when Yanukovych and his allies attempted to dominate Ukraine's multicenter arena. The analysis then turns to Ukraine's foreign policy, which again shifted when a new president came to power in 2010. After this, the chapter turns to how domestic and external pressure, especially from Russia, triggered a crisis in which Yanukovych and his allies had to make several important decisions. Finally, the chapter examines the critical juncture – a formative period in Ukraine's modern political history.

[239] Based in part on Chapters 10 and 11, I have published the peer-reviewed article "Painful Moments and Realignment: Explaining Ukraine's Foreign Policy, 2014–2022", see Ekman (2024).

Ukraine's political arena: Yanukovych and Donetsk seek domination

Only five years after Yanukovych had failed to steal the presidential election he ran again and won the election of 2010. As discussed in Chapter 8, the Orange Revolution and its aftermath consolidated Ukraine's multicenter political arena. Political entrepreneurs such as Viktor Yanukovych, Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko had contributed to heightened political polarization. Although most Ukrainians agreed by 2009 that the Orange Revolution had failed, regional political cleavages remained and influenced the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2010 and 2012. Yanukovych and the Party of Regions (PoR) received strong support in Ukraine's east and south. Tymoshenko, the main challenger for president, received strong support in Ukraine's west and center. The discredited incumbent Yushchenko received just five percent of the vote in the 2010 presidential election.

Yanukovych campaigned for stability and economic growth in reaction to the turbulent aftermath of the Orange Revolution (D'Anieri, 2019b). The global financial crisis in 2007–2008 hit Ukraine's economy hard, and Yanukovych blamed Prime Minister Tymoshenko for much of the country's economic problems. Moreover, Yushchenko and Arseniy Yatsenyuk, two candidates with some support in Ukraine's west and center, refused to endorse Tymoshenko against Yanukovych in the second round in 2010 (Onuch & Hale, 2022).

Yanukovych, a man with a criminal past who had already tried to steal an election, reinvented himself with the help of US political consultants. He was portrayed as a moderate "man of the people" who could unify the country, and he claimed to have learned from past mistakes (Motyl, 2010). Beyond promises to strengthen the economy, he appealed to voters in Ukraine's east and south, signaling that Ukraine should restore its strategic relationship with Russia. Yanukovych also promised to strengthen the status of the Russian language and to abandon plans for NATO membership (Ukrayinska Pravda, 2009). Tymoshenko warned that Ukraine would face serious problems with Yanukovych, arguing that he would defend oligarchs and turn the country away from the west.

Yanukovych appealed to his core electorate and assumed his ability to win Ukraine's east and south would secure a victory in the election (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 53). He also had support from important oligarchs who believed a Yanukovych victory would give them economic advantages. In 2010, Yanukovych became president only five years after his "humiliating" defeat. This time the election was overall free and fair. Previous regional voting patterns remained. Tymoshenko secured over 80 percent in much of Ukraine's west and Yanukovych dominated in Ukraine's east and south, especially in the Donbas and Crimea (see Figure 10.1). The PoR's ability to politicize cultural and linguistic differences, including relations with Russia,

which also tapped into regional differences, contributed to Yanukovych's victory (Kudelia, 2014, p. 20). For the first time since independence, the winning candidate received less than 50 percent in the runoff. Like previous presidents, Yanukovych faced a legitimacy problem. He had very low support in Ukraine's west and limited support in the center. Yanukovych's controversial background and previous attempt to steal the 2004 election made the legitimacy problem even more significant.

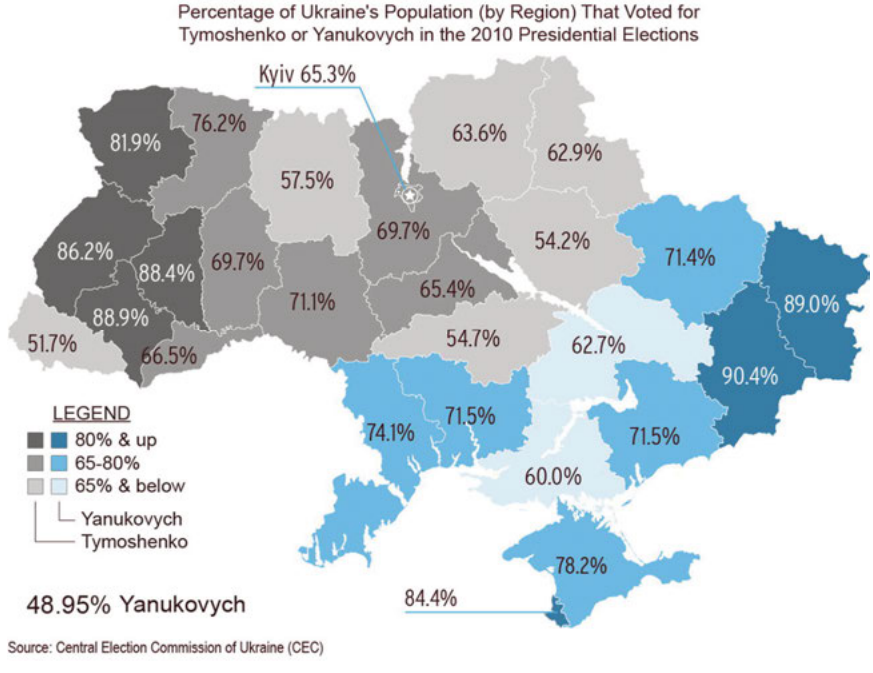

Figure 10.1. Results of the Ukrainian presidential election 2010 by region.

The return of the Party of Regions and the Donbas

Yanukovych promised to be a unifying president but his PoR did not have a majority in parliament and lacked legitimacy in parts of the country. Many observers therefore expected the new president to move slowly and build a broad coalition. Instead, Yanukovych and his allies tried to take control of Ukraine's political arena. Analysts observed a strong sense of revenge within the Donbas elite in response to the "humiliating" Orange Revolution (Kuzio, 2010). Yanukovych insisted, against all evidence, that the 2004 presidential election had been stolen from him, and that he would not let it happen again.

As discussed in Chapters 6 and 8, the PoR was a well-organized and cohesive regionally based party with roots in the Donbas. This cohesiveness stood in contrast to parties based in Ukraine's west and center, which had to create

broader coalitions to secure political influence (Way, 2015). In 2010, the PoR used this advantage to win over parliamentarians and secure a majority, which turned the parliament into a rubber-stamp institution.[240] A new majority voted for the PoR's Mykola Azarov as prime minister. This resulted in an unprecedented situation in Ukraine, in which one regionally based political center controlled the executive and legislative branches. With support from the Lytvyn Bloc and the CPU, the PoR had a majority in parliament (D'Anieri, 2019b). Moreover, Yanukovych reverted to the 1996 constitution, which gave the president stronger powers. Pressured by the government, judges resigned before the decision of the Constitutional Court and were replaced by Yanukovych loyalists (Financial Times, 2010).

The next step was to weaken the opposition. The Prosecutor General's Office and the Security Service, staffed by Yanukovych loyalists, arrested former senior officials loyal to Tymoshenko and in 2011 the Ukrainian authorities arrested Tymoshenko. A Ukrainian court sentenced her to seven years in prison and exclusion from politics for 10 years (Barry, 2011). Ukrainian authorities accused the former prime minister of illegal actions in the context of a gas deal that Ukraine had signed with Russia in 2009. Tymoshenko's interior minister, Yuriy Lutsenko, was also imprisoned, as were many others on her team.[241] The Ukrainian opposition, the EU and the US accused the Yanukovych government of selective justice.

Yanukovych's government: the influence of Donbas and Russia

Yanukovych and his allies' consolidation of power resulted in sharp domestic and international criticism. The consolidation of power to a narrow regional elite group, primarily from Donetsk, further alienated significant parts of Ukraine and increased political polarization. The magnitude of this concentration is important for the crisis that followed and is discussed briefly below.

As mentioned above, President Yanukovych, Prime Minister Azarov and Ukraine's richest man and PoR financial backer, Rinat Akhmetov, all had Donetsk as their home base.[242] Yanukovych appointed multiple regional loyalists from the Donetsk, such as Serhiy Arbuzov, first deputy prime minister, and Borys Kolesnikov, deputy prime minister. Yuriy Boyko (born in Donetsk) became minister of energy and fuel. Boyko was linked to one of Ukraine's richest oligarchs and energy tycoons, Dmytro Firtash, who reportedly backed Yanukovych (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 179).[243]

[240] MPs switching sides, dubbed political tourism, was controversial because it went against the rules and occurred in the context of bribery and intimidation (Wilson, 2014, p. 50).
[241] The US ambassador to Ukraine stated that at least 13 senior officials from Tymoshenko's government were in prison by 2012 (Wilson, 2014).
[242] Azarov was born and grew up in Russia but moved to Donetsk in the 1980s.
[243] Serhiy Lyovochkin, Yanukovych's head of the presidential administration was also one of Firtash's associates.

Two other Donetsk figures, Vitaliy Zakharchenko and Oleksandr Klymenko, connected to Yanukovych's oldest son Oleksandr Yanukovych, were appointed minister of interior and minister of revenues, in control of taxes, and Ihor Sorkin (Donetsk) became head of Ukraine's National Bank. Viktor Pshonka, a Donetsk-born lawyer who had served as regional prosecutor when Yanukovych was governor of Donetsk in the 1990s, got the important position of prosecutor general (Korduban, 2012; Kuzio, 2012).[244] Oleksandr Yefremov, who had held important positions in Luhansk in Donbas, became leader of the PoR faction in parliament.

Furthermore, Yanukovych replaced regional governors all over the country with loyalists, except for a few regions in western Ukraine (Kudelia, 2014). For some in Ukraine's west, this resembled how the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1945 had replaced local elites in Ukraine's west with "specialists" from other regions. The approach alienated parts of the country, mobilized the opposition and fueled political polarization.

Other Yanukovych nominees also alienated parts of Ukraine, as noted by one expert: the "appointment of Dmytro Tabachnyk as minister for science and education seemed calculated to inflame Western Ukrainians" (Marples, 2010). Tabachnyk argued that people in western Ukraine were "too westernized" and had little in common with what he called the people of "Great Ukraine" (Feduschak, 2010). He supported policies to strengthen the Russian language and to rewrite Ukrainian history textbooks, including downplaying the scope of the Holodomor (Motyl, 2010). Valery Soldatenko, who Yanukovych appointed the director of Ukraine's National Memory Institute, held similar views on history. Soldatenko, born in Donetsk, said in 2010 that he still had his Soviet Communist Party membership card (RFE/RL, 2010b).

Yanukovych's concentration of power also had implications for Ukraine's international orientation. Many important actors within the security sphere were Donetsk loyalists or had a Russian background. Andriy Klyuyev, a Donetsk businessman and close ally of Yanukovych, became secretary of the National Security and Defense Council and later head of the influential presidential administration. Dmytro Salamatin, minister of defense, was a former Russian citizen, and his successor, Pavlo Lebedyev, was born in Russia and had business interests in Crimea (Kuzio, 2012; Wilson, 2014). Lebedyev fled to Russia in 2014 and later moved to Sevastopol, already annexed by Russia. Salamatin and Lebedyev later came under investigation for committing treason against Ukraine in the context of the Russian annexation of Crimea (Interfax Ukraine, 2020). The Ukrainian courts would later convict Yanukovych and many of his allies of treason.

Moreover, "the security ministries too were staffed with old Yanukovych loyalists from Donetsk" (Kudelia, 2014, p. 26). Yanukovych appointed Ihor Kalinin, a former Russian citizen and former chief of his personal security

[244] Reportedly, Yanukovych was godfather to Pshonka's son.

entourage, as head of Ukraine's powerful Security Service (SBU). In 2013, Oleksandr Yakymenko, born in Russian-speaking parts of Estonia, replaced Kalinin. Kalinin worked for the Russian armed forces and the Black Sea Fleet until 1998 and was later head of the SBU in the Donetsk region (Wilson, 2014, p. 112). Finally, Viacheslav Zanevskyi – a Russian citizen who had received his training in Russia and had protected Russian officials – led Yanukovych's personal security entourage. The magnitude of Russian influence increased during Yanukovych's time in power. Two scholars summarized these appointments: "This, if nothing else, testifies to the extent to which Russia had infiltrated Ukrainian institutions – with the compliance of the Ukrainian leaders" (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 54). I return to the implications of these appointments for Ukraine's foreign and security policy below.

Family rule

Yanukovych soon started to concentrate power to an even narrower circle, portrayed in Ukrainian media as "the family" (*simya* in Ukrainian). The family included relatives of and loyalists to Yanukovych, who gradually took control of Ukraine's most important financial and law enforcement agencies (Åslund, 2012). A key figure in this circle of close friends and relatives was Viktor Yanukovych's oldest son, Oleksandr, whose business career skyrocketed – a fate Oleksandr shared with several of his friends. Yanukovych gradually reduced the number of business groups with government influence from nine to two. Thus, the Yanukovych family was small compared to regimes such as Bashar al-Assad's in Syria who at least in part relied on support from a large extended family (Wilson, 2014).

Yanukovych's concentration of power resulted in a group of disappointed politicians and oligarchs who could no longer rely on the president for wealth accumulation. Family rule augmented already established corrupt practices within Yanukovych's circle (Kudelia, 2014). In 2015, this author visited Yanukovych's abandoned luxurious estate, *Mezhyhirya*, north of Kyiv, which by then had been opened to the public. The estate included – beyond interior design that cost millions of dollars – vast hunting grounds, man-made lakes, a golf course, a yacht club with a pirate ship, a private zoo and a museum for 70 luxury cars. It was a concrete demonstration of how the family had captured parts of the state to enrich itself.

Importantly, Yanukovych's anti-democratic practices, regional concentration of power and controversial appointments started to alienate large parts of Ukraine. President Kuchma had relied on a strategy of balancing different regions and oligarchs, while Yushchenko's rule had resulted in political gridlock and chaos. In just a few years as president, Yanukovych had managed to expand his powers and blur his personal interests with the state. The regional concentration of power within the multicenter arena contributed to the political crisis that would follow.

Opposition to Yanukovych's power consolidation

In the face of Yanukovych's increasingly authoritarian practices, the opposition tried to reorganize. With Tymoshenko in prison, Arseniy Yatsenyuk led her party, Fatherland (*Batkivhchyna*). Fatherland worked with the Ukrainian Democratic Alliance for Reform (UDAR). The Freedom Party (*Svoboda*), a previously marginal right-wing nationalist party, received increasing support, especially in parts of western Ukraine, probably as a reaction to the Donbas concentration of power. Mass level protests took place for example among students in Lviv. A poll by Rating (2012) showed that 54 percent of people in western Ukraine were ready to protest to defend their interests, a much higher proportion compared, for example, to eastern Ukraine. This followed previous patterns – people in Ukraine's west, with a strong sense of Ukrainian identity, had the ability to mobilize and sustain protests.

The 2012 parliamentary election was not free and fair (D'Anieri, 2019b), but even in this context the opposition performed surprisingly well, gaining 50 percent of the vote. Fatherland, with main support in Ukraine's west and center, received 25.6 percent; UDAR, with support in Kyiv, received 14 percent; and the Freedom Party, with support in Ukraine's west, received 10.5 percent of the vote. PoR with support in Ukraine's east and south, got 30 percent and the CPU 13.2 percent. PoR managed to form a new government with the support of the CPU and independent parliamentarians having used administrative resources to secure victory in many single-member districts. A major challenge for the PoR was its inability to reach into Ukraine's west and center since most people there considered the PoR illegitimate (Way, 2015). Overall, these developments strengthened domestic pressures within the multicenter arena. We now turn to how this, combined with external pressures and Yanukovych's foreign policy, contributed to a major crisis in Ukraine.

Yanukovych's foreign policy: balancing on the edge between Russia and the West

After Yanukovych became president, Ukraine's foreign policy once again shifted its focus. The PoR, together with its allies the CPU and the Lytvyn Bloc, controlled parliament and Yanukovych was able to abandon several of Yushchenko's foreign policy priorities after the Orange Revolution. Thus, when Ukraine experienced a regional shift in the balance of power, it also experienced a shift in foreign policy. This is in line with theoretical expectations of a multicenter arena – where relatively small shifts can tilt the political balance of power, which increases the chances of foreign policy swings.

As explored in Chapter 8, Yanukovych and his allies had been critical of Yushchenko's foreign policy. In a television appearance on the eve of his in-

auguration, Yanukovych declared, "I have done everything to stop this madness for the past five years. The aim of the so-called Orange Revolution ... was to weaken Russia but not to strengthen our state" (DW, 2010a). Yanukovych and his allies instead embraced the idea of Ukraine as "a bridge" between the East and West, and between Europe and Russia. However, when summarizing the actual foreign policy of Yanukovych and his allies, the result was to reject NATO membership, a strengthened partnership with Russia and, in November 2013, albeit under Russian pressure, rejection of the EU's integration offer. Thus, Yanukovych ultimately tilted Ukraine's foreign policy closer to Russia than just seizing a middle ground.

Yanukovych's first significant foreign policy shift was to close Ukraine's door to NATO. He and his allies abandoned Ukraine's NATO commission and passed a law to make Ukraine a "non-bloc" state (DW, 2010b). President Kuchma had gradually moved Ukraine's foreign policy closer to Russia in 2002–2004 but never formally closed the door to NATO. Non-bloc could be understood as finding a middle ground between Russia and the West, but many analysts interpreted it as a step closer to Russia (Pifer, 2017). A key Russian demand had been for Ukraine to abandon the goal of NATO membership. The Kremlin did not insist that Ukraine should join the Russia-led CSTO, since it viewed Yanukovych's no to NATO as enough to anchor Ukraine firmly within Russia's sphere of influence.

In April 2010, Prime Minister Azarov met with President Medvedev to sign the Kharkiv Pact, which extended the presence of Russia's Black Sea Fleet in Crimea until 2042. As discussed in Chapter 8, Yushchenko had declared he wanted to end the agreement in 2017, since he considered a Russian military base in Crimea a major threat to Ukraine's security. According to Yanukovych's opponents, Russia's lease for an additional 25 years was not temporary, and therefore against the constitution. The Yanukovych-friendly courts however approved the agreement. The Kharkiv Pact seemed to counter Yanukovych's non-bloc policy. Forbidding any foreign military bases on Ukraine's territory would have made more sense. Furthermore, critics of the agreements argued that a Russian military presence in Ukraine until 2042 would make it very difficult for Ukraine to pursue NATO membership in the future.

Yanukovych and his allies presented several arguments to justify the Kharkiv Pact. First, the agreement was signed to avoid provoking Russia. As the then foreign minister, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, explained to this author in retrospect:

> The Kharkiv agreement was to avoid the kind of development we had in 2014. The Russians thought about building an alternative base [in Russia], but then they stopped doing anything, under Yushchenko. So, we would face the same problem in 2017. What to do? Let us take Yanukovych or any other president….what could we do with [the] Russians after the expiration? They would not have left anyway. So then you [would] really open the case for them, annexation, major conflict or whatever. So, until 2014 the treaty was working

> pretty well. We did not really have any major tensions, no substantial real threat.[245]

In 2010, Gryshchenko acknowledged the fleet's importance to Russia and claimed that the Ukrainian opposition elevated the threat, "For Russia, this fleet has an emotional and even historic memory component. This fleet has never posed a threat to us. This threat is invented by those who do not want to think about the essence of national interest" (Cited in BBC Monitoring, 2010d). According to this logic, it was better to have a pragmatic and close relationship with Russia, since Moscow would not leave Crimea anyway.

Second, Yanukovych suggested Ukraine's non-bloc status and the Kharkiv Pact were steps toward a new European collective security system that included Russia. Medvedev had already proposed such an idea, which most European leaders had treated with suspicion. (Tsygankov, 2022). Medvedev and Yanukovych declared at a press conference: "Ukraine wants to find its place and to get relevant guarantees of collective security, which fall in line with the agreement on Ukraine's nuclear disarmament [the 1994 Budapest memorandum]" (BBC Monitoring, 2010a). Thus, like several leaders before him, Yanukovych highlighted the agreements Ukraine had signed with Russia in the 1990s, and that the agreements, combined with a close and pragmatic relationship with Moscow, would make Ukraine secure.

A third argument tapped into the transactional approach of Yanukovych's foreign policy discussed in Chapter 8. Yanukovych and his economic sponsors wanted to lower Ukraine's energy prices and criticized Tymoshenko for having signed an unfavorable agreement with Russia in 2009.[246] Before signing the Kharkiv agreement, Yanukovych and Azarov stressed the importance of protecting Ukraine's economic interests. In a closed meeting with US officials in late 2009, Yanukovych's advisors explained that since Russia would not leave, why not negotiate a better deal and protect 20,000 jobs in Crimea (US_EMB, 2009)? The Kharkiv agreement gave Ukraine discounts on Russian gas of 30 percent until 2019. Yanukovych called the deal "unprecedented in the history of Ukrainian-Russian relations" (RFE/RL, 2010a).

According to reports, oligarchs close to Yanukovych, such as Firtash, but also owners of energy-intensive industries in Ukraine's east, benefited from close energy ties with Russia (Reuters, 2014). The opposition referred to the Kharkiv Pact as the "fleet for gas" deal and criticized the economic outcome. Even after the deal, Ukraine was paying higher prices than in 2008 and higher

[245] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017.

[246] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017. According to Sherr (2010), Tymoshenko outmaneuvered the company RosUkrEnergo on Ukraine's energy market in 2009, whose principal shareholder was reportedly Dmytro Firtash, backed by Yanukovych's minister of fuel and energy Yuriy Boyko and the head of the presidential administration, Serhiy Lyovochkin. All three were close to Yanukovych. This may have contributed to strong support within the PoR for acting against Tymoshenko. Russian officials criticized the arrest of Tymoshenko, arguing that the energy agreements she had signed with Russia in 2009 were legal.

than many EU member states. Medvedev welcomed the agreement, noting that "a dark streak" (referring to Yushchenko's time in office) between Russia and Ukraine was over, and that "brotherly ties could now be restored" (Harding, 2010).

Yanukovych's turn closer to Russia also included intense negotiations between Yanukovych and Azarov and their Russian counterparts, Medvedev and Putin. In the first 100 days, Yanukovych met with Medvedev seven times. In his first months as president, Yanukovych met with Russian leaders as often as all other foreign leaders combined (Pifer, 2017, p. 293). A new Ukrainian-Russian commission was set up to handle difficult issues. As discussed above, people with links to Russia's political and military elite were appointed to important positions in Ukraine's security, intelligence and defense spheres.

The Ukrainian government, like several previous ones, seemed optimistic that a constructive relationship with Russia based on agreements and intense negotiations at the highest political level would bring positive results. In part, my theory traces this optimism to Ukraine's comparatively benign formative experience with Russia, and to the idea that the approach had worked during Kuchma's presidency. From this perspective, Ukraine would receive security and economic rewards as long as Moscow was not provoked.

Potential warning signs, such as the Russian-Georgia war, Russian-Ukrainian gas conflicts and Putin's assertive rhetoric toward Russia's neighbors, did not change Yanukovych's view that a constructive relationship with Russia was possible.[247] Yanukovych, however, told a journalist in 2008 that he would not allow Russia to treat Ukraine as a "little brother" (Nemtsova, 2013). Foreign minister Gryshchenko argued that the gas conflict in 2009 had been a result of divisions and incompetence inside the Orange coalition and had no connection to military security: "Russia used this [Tymoshenko and Yushchenko's divisions], but that had nothing to do with [the] military option at all. They simply used the opportunity for their gain".[248] Thus, Yanukovych's government did not see Russia as a major security threat.[249] In 2012, the Ukrainian government approved a language law to strengthen the Russian language in Ukraine and distanced itself from calling the Holodomor a genocide against the Ukrainian people. Yanukovych used these measures strategically to mobilize PoR voters in Ukraine's east and south. At the same time, such initiatives increased political polarization in society (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 186). Moreover, in 2009, Medvedev had highlighted these issues in his confrontational open letter to Yushchenko. Thus, while scholars often do not link foreign policy to language and interpretations of history, these questions mattered

[247] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017.
[248] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017.
[249] To be fair, many in the West at the time viewed a partnership with Russia as possible, as illustrated by the Obama administration's reset with Russia in 2009.

in the Russian-Ukrainian relationship. Yanukovych signaled that he acknowledged these Russian red lines.

The opposition's response

The opposition strongly criticized the new government. Tymoshenko and Yushchenko temporarily unified to protest against Yanukovych's foreign policy. Tymoshenko called the Kharkiv agreement a threat to Ukraine's statehood and national security, and promised to annul it if she came to power (BBC Monitoring, 2010c). Borys Tarasyuk, who worked for Tymoshenko at this time, told this author:

> [Yanukovych] breached the constitution, which does not allow the presence of foreign troops on our territory. He breached the law on the international treaties, our law. So this, there was absolutely no necessity – economic, energy or political necessity – to prolong the presence of Russian troops. This was just his step to prove to [the] bosses in Moscow that he was one hundred percent their person. So, this was to my mind, to my deep conviction, this was a treason, committed by the then President of Ukraine.[250]

Yushchenko's Our Ukraine also condemned the agreement, "In Kharkiv, Yanukovych moved from the level of strategic partnership to the strategic servility in relations with Moscow" (BBC Monitoring, 2010b), and Ukraine's former defense minister Anatoliy Hrytsenko went even further:

> This is a betrayal of Ukraine. The highest state official, not someone else, did it. For a gas price discount, Yanukovych is turning Ukraine from a sovereign state into Russia's south-western Territorial District. A Russian territorial district prefect, this is who he is. (Cited in BBC Monitoring, 2010b)

Viktor Baloha, a former head of the presidential secretariat warned that the agreement was risky:

> It is sad to say but agreements like this resemble an act of political capitulation of independent Ukrainian state….The Russian Black Sea Fleet base is in fact an ideological headquarters aimed at stirring separatist movements in Crimea and strengthening anti-state sentiments in the south-eastern region. (BBC Monitoring, 2010c)

The leader of the Freedom Party, Oleh Tiahnybok, was also strongly critical:

> The presidential clique will shout that the treasonous agreements signed by Yanukovych will bring our country stability, economic benefits and peace with Russia. In truth, Ukraine will receive chaos, plunder and war. Because Russia will not stop until it returns Ukraine to its yoke. (BBC Monitoring, 2010c)

[250] Interview, Borys Tarasyuk, 2017.

Ratification of the Kharkiv Pact took place in the context of protests, with turbulence, fistfights, smoke bombs and eggs thrown in parliament. These statements illustrate the political divisions within Ukraine's political elite. The opposition's reaction to the agreement was also a response to Yanukovych's close relationship with Putin. The Russian language law fueled tensions and Tymoshenko declared from prison that the law was "a crime against Ukraine, the nation, its history and the people" (Amos, 2012).

Thus, the government and the opposition disagreed on many important political issues, including foreign affairs. The political camps were also backed by different parts of Ukraine. However, Yanukovych and his allies had not yet made up their minds about Ukraine's political and economic relations with the EU and Russia, to which we now turn.

The EU and Russia: competing integration offers

Until this point, Russia's criticism of the West had mostly focused on NATO enlargement and disagreements over multiple issues with the United States (Stent 2014). Russia's approach to the EU had been different. Certainly, the Kremlin responded negatively when the EU criticized Russia during the Second Chechen War and when the EU supported the demonstrators during the Orange Revolution. Overall, however, Russian-EU relations had been constructive, especially during Putin's first term. Speaking in Berlin in June 2008, Medvedev envisioned a broad conception of Europe. The Russian-Georgian war followed a few months later, and in 2009 Medvedev echoed neo-colonial rhetoric, declaring that Russia had a privileged sphere of interest, referring to the former Soviet region (Tsygankov, 2022).

In 2009, the EU launched the Eastern Partnership (EaP), a Polish-Swedish initiative offered to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The EU wanted to strengthen political and economic cooperation, and to enhance the mobility of citizens. The level of engagement depended primarily on the level of interest and progress demonstrated by the partner states. EU membership however was not on the table, due to enlargement fatigue in several key member states (Der Spiegel, 2014). Ukraine had started negotiations in 2007, but in 2009 negotiations on an EU association agreement became linked to the EaP.[251]

In 2010, Russia responded with its own integration alternative, the Customs Union (CU), which at first included Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. The plan was to create a Common Economic Space that would become the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) in 2015. Additional members could be added during this process. The EEU had its own Eurasian Economic Commission, inspired

[251] Interview, EU diplomat, 2016. Ukrainian politicians were negative about the process being linked with those of other EaP countries. They felt that this devalued the importance of Ukraine and potentially slowed down the integration process.

by the EU, and Putin (2011) said he was open to cooperation between the EEU and the EU. Cooperation would, however, be negotiated by the EEU as a whole – not by any single member state. In other words, given the structure of the EEU and Russia's size, EU integration for an individual EEU member would have to be approved by Moscow.

Yanukovych's dilemma: EU, Russia or both?

Although Viktor Yanukovych accepted many of Russia's red lines, he did not, at least initially, change the previous government's ambition for European integration, especially in terms of economic cooperation. Yanukovych wanted an economic partnership with both the EU and Russia. In an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* published in early 2010, he declared:

> Ukraine should make use of its geopolitical advantages and become a bridge between Russia and the West. Developing a good relationship with the West and bridging the gap to Russia will help Ukraine. We should not be forced to make the false choice between the benefits of the East and those of the West. As president I will endeavor to build a bridge between both, not a one-way street in either direction. We are a nation with a European identity, but we have historic cultural and economic ties to Russia as well. The re-establishment of relations with the Russian Federation is consistent with our European ambitions. We will rebuild relations with Moscow as a strategic economic partner. There is no reason that good relations with all of our neighbors cannot be achieved (Yanukovych, 2010).

Two of Yanukovych's first guests after his inauguration were Catherine Ashton, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Stefan Füle, the EU's Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighborhood Policy. In a meeting at the Mariinskyi Palace, the official residence of the Ukrainian president, Ashton and Füle reportedly presented a matrix to Yanukovych. The matrix showed Yanukovych's possible choices for how Ukraine could secure European integration. According to journalists at *Der Spiegel*:

> The "matrix" listed in detail what it would mean for Yanukovych if he engaged himself with the EU. To the left were the conditions he had to fulfill, including things like EU standards or the demands of the International Monetary Fund. On the right, the money was listed that Ukraine would receive if it went down this path toward the West. Yanukovych was primarily interested in the right-hand column. (Der Spiegel, 2014)[252]

Senior Yanukovych allies cautioned against too close cooperation with the EU. In a closed meeting in late 2009, Mykola Azarov, who within months

[252] According to *Der Spiegel*, Stefan Füle told Yanukovych, "We have never done this before for anybody".

would become Ukraine's prime minister, reportedly told US diplomats, "Economic reform in Ukraine should come from within and need not be driven by harmonization with the EU". At the same meeting, Vice Prime Minister Borys Kolesnykov argued,

> The EU will never fully open its markets to Ukraine or admit Ukraine as a member….[PoR] favors closer relations with the EU, but only on a reciprocal basis….Ukraine can work on practical issues, such as the Free Trade Area and Visa liberalization, but not hold out hope for membership. (US_EMB, 2009)

Yanukovych's first trip abroad as president was to Brussels. During his first months, EU diplomats were cautiously optimistic. The government and parliament were in sync, and Yanukovych seemed to be able to get things done. The chaotic years after the Orange Revolution appeared to be over, as an EU diplomat noted, "The impression was that there would be more order and discipline; many ministers [in Azarov's first government] had previous government experience and the government presented a promising reform program".[253]

Initially, the Ukrainian government made progress. Yanukovych appointed his close ally from Donetsk, Andriy Klyuyev, to lead the EU Association Agreement negotiations. The negotiations were completed by October 2011, and a draft for the DCFTA was negotiated by July 2012 (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015). Already in the summer of 2010, however, EU officials started to doubt whether Yanukovych's interest in the EU went beyond economic gains. The arrest of Tymoshenko and her affiliates was the most important sign but other issues also mattered. Attacks on independent media outlets and democratic backsliding were already evident in 2010.

In a meeting with the Ukrainian president in 2011, Stefan Füle reportedly said that Yanukovych was walking on thin ice if he planned to put his main political rival in jail: "Mr President, don't do it" (Der Spiegel, 2014). US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Catherine Ashton followed up. In writing, they urged the Ukrainian government to drop the Tymoshenko case, which in their view was a case of selective justice (Pifer, 2017, p. 294). The Ukrainian authorities imprisoned Tymoshenko regardless. To make matters worse, she developed health problems, partly due to conditions in the Kharkiv prison (Olchawa, 2017). The Tymoshenko case and the general trend of democratic backsliding affected the EU-Ukraine relationship in a negative way. The EU postponed signing the Association Agreement and instead presented a list of political conditions that had to be fulfilled before the agreement could be signed.[254] As an EU diplomat working in Kyiv at the time explained:

[253] Interview, EU diplomat, 2016.
[254] EU's conditions were not new but became more explicit. EU officials also demonstrated their disappointment with Ukraine's democratic backsliding.

> So, the Ukrainian government wanted the agreement more than we [the EU] did, they kept pushing us to sign it and we resisted. They wanted to sign it fast. Already then, we doubted if he [Yanukovych] and his administration really understood what European integration was about. Our assessment was that when the agreement was signed, Yanukovych would already have achieved what he wanted, and would not implement any reforms. He would have the agreement in his hand and use it to win the 2015 presidential election. So any reforms would have to be done before [the EU] signed the agreement.[255]

The EU's demand for Tymoshenko's release was connected to a broader criticism of selective justice and weak rule of law in Ukraine. In light of this criticism, EU officials convinced Yanukovych to cancel a planned visit to Brussels and US officials postponed plans for a meeting between Yanukovych and Obama (Pifer, 2017).

In the spring of 2012, Prime Minister Azarov headed to Brussels, ignoring President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy's request that Azarov not to travel. In Brussels, Azarov tried to convince EU representatives that Tymoshenko was a criminal. Martin Schultz, president of the European Parliament, lost his patience and told the prime minister "Enough was enough" (Olchawa, 2017, p. 38). Moreover, EU leaders boycotted the Euro 2012 soccer tournament that Ukraine hosted together with Poland. The Ukraine-EU relationship did not get any better after the irregularities in the 2012 parliamentary election. The second Azarov government claimed that it was continuing to work on European integration but at the same time it "dismantled the infrastructure for European integration" (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 56). The government reduced the capacity to achieve important legal approximation with the EU acquis and diluted the powers of the Bureau for European Integration. Moreover, the Ukrainian Parliament passed EU-related laws that corresponded with oligarchal interests close to the president but otherwise postponed enacting important laws.

Yanukovych's strategy vis-à-vis the EU

How to make sense of the Ukrainian government's apparent interest in signing EU agreements while simultaneously demonstrating little interest in reform or acting in line with the EU's declared values and criteria? First, Yanukovych operated in a multicenter arena and needed to increase support beyond his core voters. Even with an unfair advantage, the PoR had difficulties winning the 2012 parliamentary election. Opinion polls showed that Yanukovych was increasingly unpopular, partly due to allegations of corruption and the weak economy. Polls showed that even people in Ukraine's east and south were skeptical, and Yanukovych risked losing a presidential run-off against UDAR leader Vitali Klitschko (Kudelia, 2014). Ukraine's foreign minister in 2010–2012, who worked closely with Yanukovych, offers the following account: "I

[255] Interview, EU diplomat, 2016.

believe Yanukovych thought that being pro-West and pro-European Union would help him be re-elected for the second term. That he would form a wide coalition on that platform, and then again, we worked on that premise".[256]

Ukraine's political arena, with its different macro-regions and regional borderlands, was also connected to foreign policy choices. Surveys repeatedly showed that if a single choice had to be made, people in Ukraine's west and center preferred a partnership with the EU, and in Ukraine's east and south preferred the Russian-led Customs Union (see Table 10.1). Thus, from the perspective of political survival, Yanukovych would benefit from keeping multiple options open to get support from both sides.

Table 10.1. If a referendum on whether to join the European Union or the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan took place next Sunday, which union should Ukraine join? 13–23 September 2013 (KIIS, 2013).

	Ukraine as a whole	**West**	**Central**	**South**	**East**
I would vote for joining the EU	40.5	72.7	44.8	26.4	18.0
I would vote for joining the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan	35.0	13.4	24.9	46.4	57.3
I would not take part in referendum	10.0	3.7	13.0	11.3	11.0
I don't know	13.4	8.0	16.2	15.2	13.0
I refuse to answer	1.1	2.2	1.0	0.7	0.7

What about Yanukovych's strategy for getting the EU on board? Yanukovych and his head of the presidential administration, Serhiy Lyovochkin, relied on a plan prepared by a long-term ally, the US consultant Paul Manafort. Memos later showed that Manafort's plan was to lobby EU and US politicians to persuade them to accept Yanukovych.[257] The EU would sign the Association Agreement, and Yanukovych could then ignore demands to release Tymoshenko and skip the reforms most costly for Yanukovych's inner circle. According to a Manafort memo, the goal was:

> To aggressively promote Ukraine's compliance with (western) demands and make the case that Ukraine is committed to building a democratic society. [Manafort's intention was] to assemble a small group of high-level European

[256] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017.

[257] The documents were released in the context of Manafort's work as a campaign chairman for Donald Trump. Two US federal courts sentenced Manafort to prison time for tax and banking fraud.

> highly influencial [sic] champions and politically credible friends who can act informally and without any visible relationship to the Government of Ukraine… the participants are significant European leaders who are viewed as objective regarding Ukraine. (Dreyfuss, 2018)

The circle of friends, the so-called Habsburg group, included Romano Prodi, Alfred Gusenbauer and Aleksander Kwasniewski.[258] Another Manafort memo sent to Yanukovych in February 2013, entitled "Back-channel diplomacy", described how these efforts would help Ukraine to "finalize the [EU association] agreement" (Kovensky, 2018). Yanukovych's strategy seemed to have been to portray himself as a pro-European leader who would sign economic agreements with the EU. At the same time, he would do the absolute minimum to meet the EU's conditions. This would make it possible for him to gain more votes in Ukraine's west and center.

Meanwhile, so as not to lose core supporters in eastern Ukraine, Yanukovych wanted close relations with Russia, including an economic partnership. As discussed above, he accepted many of Moscow's red lines, such as a stronger status for the Russian language, a continued Russian military base in Crimea and no NATO membership. Yanukovych and his allies' foreign policy was not motivated by values promoted by the EU, such as democracy, or by a European identity. Rather, the government took an instrumental approach to the EU. Yanukovych prioritized political survival and personal economic rewards. However, this was a risky strategy that failed as domestic and external pressures increased.

Russia raises the stakes

The Kremlin's decision to launch the Customs Union in 2010 indicated a shift in how it approached economic partnerships in its neighborhood. Russia initially raised few objections to the EU's EaP, but soon this changed.[259] Putin and his affiliates started to draw a distinct line between inside and outside the EEU. In an article in *Izvestija*, Putin (2011) presented a grand vision of a Eurasian Union that resembled an alternative to the EU for countries in the former Soviet space.[260] In 2005, Putin had signaled to Ukraine and other states that it could integrate and adapt to both EU and Russian legislation, but he now proposed two separate blocs (Charap & Colton, 2017, p. 103). Russian officials signaled to Ukraine and other countries that they could not pick and choose from an economic menu. The Russian leadership wanted Ukraine to break with its past vacillating behavior between Russia and the EU.

[258] Prodi had been prime minister of Italy and president of the European Commission, Gusenbauer is a former chancellor of Austria and Kwasniewski is a former president of Poland.
[259] Initially, Russian officials' main criticism reflected EU's decision to include Belarus in the EaP.
[260] Putin's vision apparently worried Kazakhstan's then President Nursultan Nazarbayev to the extent that Nazarbayev penned his own *Izvestija* article in which he reminded Putin that Kazakhstan had only agreed to form the Eurasian Economic Union.

Russia intensified its pressures on Ukraine and proposed increased cooperation on the steel industry, chemicals, aviation, nuclear enterprises and shipbuilding (Sherr, 2010). At a press conference at their seventh meeting at the presidential level only months after Yanukovych's inauguration, the Ukrainian president seemed exhausted and said, "We cannot go on working like this", to which Russia's Medvedev replied, "But we have to" (Golos, 2010).

Only five days after the Ukrainian government signed the Kharkiv Pact, Putin put a new draft on the table. The draft implied Russia would de facto take control of Ukraine's national gas company, *Naftohaz*. The company's importance to Yanukovych's inner circle led the Ukrainian government to turn down the proposal and become more cautious of Russia's advances. A Ukrainian analyst noted:

> It was [the] first big lesson for him that the Russians were not as generous as Yanukovych expected, and the list of wishes from the Russian Federation was not just long, but endless… they wanted to have full control… [of] the defense industry in Dnipropetrovsk... industries in Kharkiv, Mykolaiv, and they always wanted to get pipelines, again it was always a presidential business, and none of the presidents wanted to give it up to Russia.[261]

Contrary to Yanukovych's expectations, his pragmatic approach resulted in additional demands from Moscow. Yanukovych made clear that Ukraine would not join the Customs Union, since it would counter the goal of signing the EU Association Agreement. Instead, the Ukrainian government proposed a 3+1 agreement with the CU members. Russian officials responded that close economic cooperation without CU membership was not on the agenda. Ukraine then signed a less ambitious CIS free trade agreement (FTA) in 2011 (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015). A CIS FTA eliminates tariffs among its members, but each member has significant autonomy on trade relations with external parties. A CU, on the other hand, requires all members to set similar tariffs for external parties, which leads each member to surrender more autonomy and control over its trade policy.

With the CIS FTA in place and with Russia as a new WTO member in 2012, Ukraine had fewer economic incentives to join the CU. The CIS FTA however included last-minute formulations inserted by the Kremlin that were vague enough to be useful to Russia to pressure Ukraine if deemed necessary (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 76). Russia thus continued to use a mix of carrots and sticks to persuade Ukraine not to sign the EU agreements. Yanukovych remained flexible and open-minded in terms of economic cooperation – free trade agreements with both Russia and the EU seemed to be within reach for Ukraine.

[261] Interview, Oleksiy Melnyk, 2017.

Yanukovych's difficult choices: a new critical juncture

As shown above, the Ukrainian government was facing both domestic and external pressure at the start of 2013. The following sections analyze how increased domestic and external pressures pushed Yanukovych and his allies to make difficult choices. As discussed in the theoretical chapter, leaders can choose accommodation or domination when handling domestic cleavages during critical juncture moments. Moreover, these processes are not predetermined but contingent, and depend on decisions by political leaders, here primarily actors in Ukraine, Russia and, to a lesser extent, EU officials. As shown below, both Ukrainian and Russian leaders acted differently than in previous decades, which triggered a reactive sequence of dramatic proportions that ultimately resulted in a stable pro-West foreign policy in Ukraine (discussed in Chapter 11).

While the strongest pressure on Yanukovych came from Russia, EU officials also put pressure on him. In response to Ukraine's democratic backsliding, the EU appointed former Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski and Pat Cox, the former president of the European Parliament, as mediators between Yanukovych, Tymoshenko and the EU.[262] In December 2012, the EU presented its "Council conclusions on Ukraine" (EU, 2012). The EU criticized Ukraine's 2012 parliamentary election and reiterated its concerns about selective justice. The report also underlined the EU's interest in signing an Association Agreement with Ukraine if its conditions were met.

Importantly, the EU set a tentative deadline for the Association Agreement of the biannual Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November 2013. The deadline was necessary for bureaucratic reasons, but also inadvertently "set a deadline for Ukraine to make a choice between Russia and the EU" (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 198). Both senior EU and Russian officials made clear that Ukraine had to make a choice. At the EU-Ukraine Summit in February 2013, for example, José Manuel Barroso, president of the European Commission, declared: "One country cannot at the same time be a member of a customs union and be in a deep common free-trade area with the European Union, this is not possible" (Moscow Times, 2013).[263] He also reiterated the EU's demands that Ukraine had to make rapid reforms for the agreement to be signed in November.

Ahead of the summit, EU Commissioner Stefan Füle handed over an unofficial document to the Ukrainian government (the Füle list) containing additional and more precise demands (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 59). The

[262] The Cox-Kwasniewski mission visited Ukraine 27 times over 18 months. The mission's work is portrayed in detail in "Mission Ukraine" (Olchawa, 2017). As noted above, journalists linked Kwasniewski to Yanukovych but the former Polish president has denied such links.

[263] The summit was originally scheduled to take place in December 2012 but, because of the frosty relationship, it was postponed for the first time since the annual EU-Ukraine summits started 15 years before (Olchawa, 2017).

Tymoshenko case remained the most important obstacle. Leonid Kozhara who became Ukraine's foreign minister in 2012, gives the following account:

> So unfortunately, it happened that Ukraine created a political problem in our relationship with the EU, and in 2011 Yanukovych put Yulia Tymoshenko in prison. Yanukovych was not the best friend of many European leaders, and unfortunately, that case with Yulia Tymoshenko distracted many leaders like Chancellor [Angela] Merkel, for example, [Dalia Grybauskaite], the President of Lithuania….since then, it was almost impossible for us to talk to the European Commission. When I came, for example, to Stockholm, when I came to Brussels, to London, to other European capitals saying that we are about to sign this free trade agreement and association at large, the point was in many European capitals: Leonid, okay, release Yulia Tymoshenko first, this is the main obstacle now to sign this agreement.[264]

In response, Yanukovych pardoned Tymoshenko's ally, Yuriy Lutsenko, in April 2013. EU officials reacted with caution and described it as a "nice gesture" and "a first step" but nothing more. A former Yanukovych aide predicted it was a way for the president to buy time and "deliver the bare minimum" (The Economist, 2013). A month later, Ukraine signed a memorandum that made Ukraine an observer at the Eurasian Economic Commission and the future Russia-led EEC. Yanukovych assured EU leaders that the memorandum did not contradict Ukraine's European choice. Thus, in terms of the economy, Yanukovych continued to balance between the EU and Russia.

In the summer of 2013, Russian officials changed their strategy vis-à-vis Ukraine (Der Spiegel, 2014; Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015). Putin traveled to Kyiv to present a "civilizational" argument in support of the EEC and talked about Ukrainian and Russian brotherly ties. A few days later, Russia imposed a variety of economic measures against Ukraine, in a warning to Yanukovych of what could happen if he chose the EU over Russia. Senior Russian officials increasingly relied on implicit or explicit threats. For example, they declared that signing agreements with the EU would be "suicidal" for Ukraine. If Ukraine went down that path, Russia would take significant "protective measures" against Ukraine. Russian officials presented dark economic figures to Ukraine that differed significantly from the forecasts of European organizations (Der Spiegel, 2014). Russia also put pressure on other countries interested in signing an association agreement with the EU. In early September after a meeting between the Russian and Armenian presidents in Moscow, Armenia declined the EU's offer and joined the EEC.

At first, Russia's new strategy on Ukraine seemed to backfire. In early September, Yanukovych arranged a party meeting in Kyiv. According to party

[264] Interview, Leonid Kozhara, 2018.

members present at that meeting, the president's message was: "We will pursue integration with Europe" (Piper, 2013).[265] He reportedly spoke for several hours, criticizing Russia for not accepting Ukraine as an equal partner and for trying to force him to act according to Moscow's rules. Many party members with business interests linked to Russia protested but Yanukovych insisted. Over the next couple of days, PoR leaders officially declared that laws would be passed in parliament to meet the EU's requirements. On 18 September, the government agreed on a final draft of the EUAA (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015, p. 81). However, the crucial Tymoshenko case and an important law to transform the prosecution office remained unsettled. EU representatives Kwasniewski and Cox worked on solutions to the problem. They proposed a pardon for Tymoshenko or that she should travel to Germany for treatment but keep her official status as a prisoner. In other words, Yanukovych had options to resolve the Tymoshenko case and get the EUAA if that had been his main priority, but he postponed further discussions. In the end, the opposition in the Ukrainian Parliament even agreed to vote for the PoR's draft to resolve the issue (Olchawa, 2017), but then PoR parliamentarians refused to vote in support of their own draft.

Ukraine's economy was an additional problem for Yanukovych. The aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis played a role but Yanukovych's ambition to concentrate power and enrich his family and regional allies had a negative effect on the economy. The government, however, was unwilling to conduct the necessary but painful economic reforms. In negotiations with the EU, Ukrainian government officials suddenly started to highlight the burden on Ukraine's economy if they signed an agreement with the EU. Russian officials repeated that Ukraine would face massive economic consequences if Kyiv chose the EU over the EEC (Gardner, 2013).

Ukrainian officials were also negotiating with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). To get economic support from the IMF, Ukraine would have to increase subsidized gas prices by 40 percent and devalue the Ukrainian hryvnia (Der Spiegel, 2014). To compensate for the loss of trade with Russia if Ukraine chose the EU, Ukrainian officials asked for economic compensation from the EU. Yanukovych estimated that Ukraine would need $160 billion over three years, a sum the EU considered unrealistic. EU leaders felt the Ukrainian government was asking for a bribe rather than legitimate economic support (Wilson, 2014). Gryshchenko, by then vice prime minister, underlines the difficult economic situation Yanukovych had put himself in:

> But then the economy, clearly what he [Yanukovych] was doing in the economy was not the best thing. So the crisis was really coming, and I think that he started to look for where he could [get] support [for] the economy up until the moment of reelection, and the opportunities for that, as it appeared, started to

[265] Interview, Oleksiy Melnyk, 2017. Melnyk did not take part in the meeting but his sources confirm this description.

> shrink. After that, again, it was not evident from the very beginning, it still continued, the same [EU] policy, but the emphasis started to shift to 'where to get funds, where to get funds'. And I think that in the end, the only place that he could get anything substantial from was Russia, and that is why he did not sign it [the EU agreement].[266]

Like several Ukrainian leaders before him, Yanukovych assumed that he could handle difficulties with Russia through informal negotiations. Russian officials, including Medvedev and advisor Sergey Glazyev, were highly active. Russia's closest Ukrainian ally, Viktor Medvedchuk (see Chapter 6), organized anti-EU campaigns in Ukraine.[267] In September 2013, Vladislav Surkov – a Russian Ukraine-hawk, and one of Putin's closest allies at the time – was put charge of Ukrainian affairs. Surkov started to arrange meetings with key officials in the Ukrainian government (Scherba, 2021, p. 36). In the summer of 2013, Yanukovych held meetings with Putin in Kyiv and Sochi.

In October and November, Yanukovych and Putin held at least two long meetings. After each meeting, both EU officials and PoR members noted a shift in Yanukovych's manner. He no longer looked confident (Der Spiegel, 2014). Exactly what happened during these meetings is still not known. Experts assume Putin leveled threats against Yanukovych and his family but that Russia also offered economic benefits and subsidies if Ukraine abandoned the EU track.[268] Prime Minister Azarov later said, "[t]he Russian government made it clear to us that signing an [EU] agreement means it would be impossible to discuss trade and economic relations [with Russia]" (Grytsenko & Traynor, 2013).

Yanukovych was under significant pressure but he could have released Tymoshenko and signed the EU Association Agreement. Alternatively, he could, as suggested by his foreign minister, have communicated earlier to Brussels that Ukraine needed additional time.[269]

On November 21, Prime Minister Azarov shocked many Ukrainians and EU officials. He announced that Ukraine would not sign the Association Agreement in Vilnius and would put negotiations with the EU on hold. Instead, Ukraine would renew dialogue on the economy and trade with Russia. The Azarov group from Donetsk had been a long-time critic of the agreement so the choice of Azarov as messenger made sense (Scherba, 2021).[270] The Ukrainian government justified the decision citing reasons of national security

[266] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017.
[267] Glazyev, for example, visited Yanukovych three times in October and even handed over a Russian translation of the EU Association Agreement draft to the Ukrainian president to make sure the latter really understood the content (Der Spiegel, 2014).
[268] Interview, Oleksiy Melnyk, 2017.
[269] Interview, Leonid Kozhara, 2018.
[270] Confusion initially arose since Yanukovych held a press conference in Vienna together with his Austrian counterpart about Ukraine's European choice at the same time as Azarov's announcement. It soon became clear, however, that Azarov's announcement was the official position, shared by Yanukovych.

and the economic costs of signing the agreement (Dragneva & Wolczuk, 2015). According to Kozhara, EU officials presented ideas on how to resolve the Tymoshenko case:

> But it was too late because Ukraine started to experience big, big problems in trade with Russia, and when it came to the signature [with the EU] we informed our partners beforehand – maybe not in a month but in a week – and it was by the way a mistake by Yanukovych, we should have done it earlier, that we are not ready. But unfortunately… Yanukovych maybe did not understand that the consequences of that move [might] be unpredictable, but the losses to Ukraine's economy would simply be very big for Ukraine.[271]

Furthermore, Yanukovych criticized the EU for not helping Ukraine, calling the EU's economic compensation humiliating: "We don't have to be humiliated like this. We are a serious country. A European one. The EU didn't give us any concrete help" (Grytsenko & Traynor, 2013). Azarov and other government officials expressed similar views. Reportedly, Yanukovych's sudden U-turn surprised not only key EU officials, but also people in Yanukovych's party and the government (Scherba, 2021).

EU leaders expressed disappointment with the Ukrainian decision but also criticized the Russian government for its use of threats and blackmail. Notwithstanding the Ukrainian position, Yanukovych led a delegation to Vilnius. According to diplomats at the meeting, intense behind-the-scenes negotiations took place, in the hope that Ukraine and the EU could at least sign something, even a provisional agreement (Olchawa, 2017). Yanukovych, however, showed little willingness to compromise and returned to Kyiv without any agreement signed.

Almost a month later, on December 18, 2013, Yanukovych traveled to Moscow to agree a $15 billion loan aid package from Russia and a large discount on Russian gas. Azarov described it as a "historic agreement….on exceptionally beneficial conditions for crediting Ukraine's economy". Putin hailed the strategic partnership: "The time has come to take energetic steps not only to return to the levels of recent years but to go further" (Cited in Walker, 2013b). Yanukovych had at this point not formally signed up to the EEU. However, having suspended the EU agreements and signed several agreements with Russia, most Ukrainians realized Yanukovych had turned to Moscow. At this point, Ukraine's foreign policy orientation was more pro-Russian than it had been since Ukraine gained independence in 1991.

[271] Interview, Leonid Kozhara, 2018.

The Euromaidan, Russia's response and the collapse of Ukraine's multicenter arena

On 21 November 2013 – immediately after the Ukrainian government announced its decision not to sign the EU agreements – demonstrations started in central Kyiv. Protesters, many of them students, turned up with Ukrainian and EU flags, expressing disappointment in Yanukovych's broken promises to sign EU agreements that had been years in the making. Three days later, an estimated 100,000 people showed up to protest. The mass demonstrations became known as the Euromaidan, or the Revolution of Dignity (Wilson, 2014; Wynnyckyj, 2019).

The Yanukovych government's decision to use violence

Following the idea of counterfactuals during critical junctures, we must look at realistically available alternatives. Just as with choosing between the EU and Russia, Yanukovych and his allies had several available options for how to handle the demonstrations. In line with the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 2, leaders can choose domination or accommodation when handling domestic cleavages. Here, the government could have waited, hoping the protests would fade away, it could have engaged in serious negotiations to accommodate some of the demands expressed by the activists or it could even have tried to restart negotiations with the EU. However, the government and the police went down another path, trying to dominate the scene. On the evening of November 29, protesters remained in the *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (Independence Square) in central Kyiv. A decision was made by the authorities to use the Berkut (riot police) to clear the square later that night (Wynnyckyj, 2019). The Berkut used violent means, including batons, tear gas and stun grenades, to disperse the protesters, leaving dozens injured.

The use of force by the police against peaceful and mostly young protesters was unprecedented in contemporary Ukraine and triggered a massive response. After the Berkut's actions, "a paradigm shift occurred" (Wynnyckyj, 2019, p. 93). The next day, at least 300,000 people were out on the streets of Kyiv. The number of demonstrators increased over the next weeks and months, although exact numbers are difficult to estimate. Demonstrators led by Freedom Party activists and opposition journalist Tetiana Chornovol took control of the City Hall. Activists also seized the Trade Union building on the edge of Maidan, which later became the headquarters for the demonstrations. The Sunday ended with hundreds of injured protesters, journalists and police officers (Walker, 2013a). The authorities in Lviv in western Ukraine announced a general strike in response to the government's approach.

The protests that had started as a reaction to postponed EU agreements soon transformed into a broader criticism of Yanukovych and his Donetsk allies' concentration of power, corruption and use of violence. According to a survey in December 2013, 54 percent of the protesters were motivated by "the failure

to join Europe" and 70 percent by "the police beatings on November 30".[272] Clearly, the use of violence had been a miscalculation. Protesters started to call for the resignation of Yanukovych and his government. The demonstrations were grassroots initiatives and not controlled by the political opposition. Leaders of the three main opposition parties, Arseniy Yatsenyuk (Fatherland), Vitaliy Klitschko (UDAR) and Oleh Tiahnyok (*Svoboda*), were highly active but did not initially call for the president's resignation. Oleksandr Turchynov from the Fatherland became the headquarters commander of the demonstrations (Wynnyckyj, 2019).[273]

The Ukrainian government's deal with Moscow in mid-December fueled the demonstrations. Protest levels decreased during New Year and the Orthodox Christmas holiday but the camp on Maidan remained in place. The media speculated how long the protests would continue in the freezing winter. If Yanukovych had avoided further provocations, waited out the protests and used accommodation at this point, he might have survived as president. In mid-January 2014, however, Yanukovych again stirred up emotions when he signed a bill into law that his allies had rushed through parliament prohibiting the unauthorized installation of tents and stages. Violation of public order could result in 15 years in prison, and NGOs funded from abroad would be labeled "foreign agents", in a model used in Russia. Moreover, the minister of the interior made ill-disguised threats aimed at the protesters. The political opposition criticized what they called dictatorship laws and received backing from the EU and the US. The Yanukovych government and Russian officials, in turn, criticized western leaders for meddling in Ukraine's internal affairs (The Guardian, 2014).

On January 21–22, 2014, two protesters were shot dead by the police. Another activist died from a fall in a struggle with the riot police. Journalists portrayed the scenes in Kyiv as a battle zone. The police fired live ammunition and rubber bullets, and harassed demonstrators. In response, some protestors threw rocks and Molotov cocktails at the police. According to media reports, 100 civilians and 40 police officers were taken to hospital for treatment (Grytsenko & Walker, 2014). President Yanukovych now called for a peaceful solution. He met with the political opposition, who asked the president to announce snap elections. Prime Minister Azarov took a more confrontational position and blamed the violence on "criminals" among the demonstrators. Reports circulated that so-called *titushki* and special forces were harassing and even kidnapping injured protesters from the hospitals (Wilson, 2014).

[272] Numbers cited in Way (2015, p. 82).

[273] The organization of the Maidan included responsibility for media relations, security, medical treatment as well as food, water and logistics. Barricades were constructed around the Maidan. Like during the Orange Revolution a decade before, demonstrators set up a large stage on the Maidan on which politicians and activists could address the audience. The church set up a prayer tent and an IT tent was erected to secure internet access. During the three months of protests, no shortages of food and supplies were reported.

Modern Ukraine had not previously experienced this level of violence in the context of demonstrations. Just like during Georgia's transition to independence, violence hardened the attitude of the demonstrators and the possibility of finding a compromise decreased. Increased levels of police violence strengthened the influence of small minorities of protesters who were ready to use force, including extreme nationalists such as the Right Sector (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 213).[274] On January 28, 2014, Prime Minister Azarov resigned in a concession to the opposition. His hardline approach had become a burden for the government. The Ukrainian government also annulled the much-criticized anti-protest laws. The government's tactic of using blunt repression followed by concessions did not stop the demonstrations. Instead, it encouraged the protesters and increased their resolve.

Regional dimensions of the Euromaidan

People all over Ukraine took part in the demonstrations against the government (Onuch & Hale, 2022) but, as in previous mass protests, regional differences played an important role in predicting support for and participation in the Euromaidan. A survey from February 2014 (see Table 10.2) showed that 80.4 percent supported the protesters in western Ukraine while only 7.5 percent did so in eastern Ukraine. In the east, 51.9 percent supported Yanukovych and 39.4 percent supported neither side. In addition, the survey showed that 80.3 percent in Ukraine's west blamed Yanukovych for the escalation between the government and the demonstrators, while 67.9 percent in the east blamed the protesters. Ukraine's center sided with the demonstrators, but less strongly than those in the west. People in the south were generally critical of Euromaidan but notably also of the government, and many supported neither side. People in Ukraine's west and center thought the Euromaidan was a response to a corrupt government or an attempt to make Ukraine more civilized in line with other European countries. People in Ukraine's east, on the other hand, believed that Euromaidan was a result of EU and US efforts to include Ukraine within its sphere of influence, or of "nationalist moods" in Ukraine.

Another survey conducted in late December 2013 by two respected Ukrainian organizations found similarly strong regional differences (Haran & Yakovlyev, 2017, p. 7). According to the survey, 90 percent in Ukraine's west and 63 percent in the center fully or mainly supported Euromaidan, while 65 percent in Ukraine's east and 71 percent in the south were against or mainly did not support Euromaidan.

[274] The leader of the Right Sector claimed he had 500 men on Maidan and could mobilize another 5000, although observers on the ground questioned these numbers.

Table 10.2. Euromaidan. Who do you support right now in the conflict in Ukraine? Answers in percentage, divided by macro-regions. 8–18 February 2014 (KIIS, 2014b).

	West	Center	South	East
On the side of authorities led by Yanukovych	2.6	10.7	32.2	**51.9**
On the side of protesters	**80.4**	**51.0**	19.6	7.5
None of the sides	12.6	32.5	**41.7**	39.4
Difficult to answer	4.3	5.8	6.6	1.2
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

Another difference was that people in Ukraine's west and center were more active, while people in the east and south tended to be more passive. When the Yanukovych government and the PoR tried to organize counterdemonstrations, the anti-maidan, many fewer supporters turned up compared to supporters of the Euromaidan. The government reportedly had to pay demonstrators to join the anti-maidan protests (Wilson, 2014).[275]

Finally, a survey in October 2014 revealed regional differences in active participation in the protests. In Ukraine's west, 62.5 percent of people declared they had participated in the anti-government protests, either on the Euromaidan in Kyiv or in other cities, or that they had helped the protesters. In contrast, 19 percent in the center, 2 percent in the east and 3 percent in the south reported they had participated in the Euromaidan or helped protesters (DIF, 2014). A further indication of regional differences was that the government gradually lost control of Ukraine's west. On January 23, for example, protesters took control of the Lviv Oblast State Administration building and established a People's Council (Kudelia, 2018). Supporters of Euromaidan in Ukraine's east and south by contrast reportedly faced repression from the authorities.

These regional differences in support and participation probably reflected the strong sense of Ukrainian identity in western Ukraine, which had its roots in historical conditions (see Chapter 4). Yanukovych's decisions to accommodate Russian demands had already provoked many in Ukraine's west and center in 2010. The decision not to sign the EU agreements and instead turn to

[275] To some extent, low participation could of course reflect the geographical distance to Kyiv, but it is not the main explanation for these differences.

Russia was seen as a serious threat to Ukraine's independence. Relatedly, the attempts by Yanukovych and his allies to concentrate political and economic power in the Donbas by authoritarian means were met with anger and an emotional response. This reaction could be seen all over the country, but especially in Ukraine's west. In eastern Ukraine, people were generally more skeptical of the Euromaidan and did not consider Russia to be a threat. Even though people in the east criticized high-level corruption, many – especially in the Donbas – saw Yanukovych as their representative.

Mass violence and Yanukovych's escape to Russia

Negotiations between the government and the opposition continued in mid-February 2014 but made little progress. Among other things, Yanukovych did not want to return to the 2004 Constitution or call early elections. Many protesters felt they could trust neither the president nor the political opposition. Previous violence and a continuing tense environment in downtown Kyiv also contributed to the uncertainty. On 18 February, approximately 20,000 demonstrators marched to the parliament to put pressure on the political establishment to change the constitution. Things soon turned violent when a smaller group of protesters clashed with government security forces and the PoR headquarters was set on fire (Wilson, 2014).[276] Violent clashes continued throughout the afternoon, and a number of casualties reported. Government security forces used live ammunition, rubber bullets and tear gas, and there were reports of some protesters carrying firearms. In late afternoon, the interior ministry and the SBU announced they would restore order, "by all means envisaged by law" (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 218). An attack on the protesters on the Maidan by the police and security forces began the same evening. The police advanced but the demonstrators defended important sections of the Maidan. By the end of the day, the media reported that 26 people had died and hundreds had been injured, mostly protestors but also government security forces (Traynor & Salem, 2014).

The foreign ministers of Germany, Poland and France, who had arrived in Kyiv to facilitate negotiations, condemned the violence. Russian officials blamed "extremist" forces among the protesters. Several PoR representatives started to criticize the use of violence. The mayor of Kyiv resigned and even Yanukovych's loyal financial backer, Rinat Akhmetov, criticized the use of violence against the protesters (Walker, 2014).

The situation in Kyiv escalated further on 20 February. In the morning, protesters tried to regain control of the parts of Maidan they had lost two days earlier. The interior minister had signed a decree giving the police the right to use live ammunition. When protesters tried to advance through police lines, the Ukrainian authorities opened fire. Suddenly, snipers started to fire at the

[276] Official reports later claimed that the HQ fire was a provocative measure by the Ukrainian intelligence agency, SBU (Wilson, 2014).

protesters and videos displayed shocking images of unarmed people shot by sniper fire. In the context of the violence in the previous weeks, self-defense forces were present on the Maidan to protect the demonstrators, and they reportedly responded with force. The chaos during the day and massive disinformation afterward make it difficult to find out exactly who fired from the roofs. Some have suggested a "third force" was present in Kyiv, such as Russian FSB agents, while other hypotheses have also been suggested (D'Anieri, 2019b; Wilson, 2014). Approximately 70 protesters were killed that day, over 500 were injured and members of the security forces were killed as well. At the time, it was the bloodiest day in modern independent Ukraine. A UN report has concluded that 108 protesters and 13 law enforcement officers died on or around the Independence Square in Kyiv in January and February 2014 (OHCHR, 2016).

On the night of February 20–21, Yanukovych and three Ukrainian opposition leaders negotiated a deal brokered by the foreign ministers of France, Germany and Poland, who were all signatories. A Russian representative who was present refused to sign. Among other things, the agreement included a return to the 2004 Constitution, and a new constitution would be written later in 2014. Yanukovych would remain president of a national unity government and presidential elections would be scheduled for December 2014. Investigations would be conducted into the violence. Later that day, parliament suspended the operations against the protesters and dismissed Zakharchenko, the controversial interior minister. The authorities also released Tymoshenko. Although the Public Council of the Maidan, which represented the activists, reluctantly accepted the agreement, many among the demonstrators booed the opposition leaders for signing it (Wilson, 2014). Some even called for Yanukovych to resign or face the consequences.

At this point, the situation changed rapidly and Yanukovych took his last important decision as president. As government security forces started to withdraw from the center of Kyiv, protesters took control of government buildings, including the presidential administration, and members of the PoR and the government started to defect. As is discussed in Chapter 11, many PoR leaders fled abroad, resulting in the collapse of the Yanukovych government. Early in the morning of February 22, 2014, Yanukovych left his mansion outside Kyiv in a helicopter. He first flew to Kharkiv, later to Donetsk and then to Crimea. In the end, he turned up in Russia, claiming he was still the legitimate president of Ukraine. It is not entirely clear why Yanukovych fled. One reason could be that he had lost support and feared for his life, but there is evidence that preparations for his escape were being made even before the shootings on 20 February (Baunov et al., 2015). Meanwhile, in Kyiv, the speaker of the parliament resigned and since Yanukovych had fled the country, parliament removed him from office. All factions and 328 of the 450 parliamentarians approved the decision, which bypassed a complicated impeachment process.

In parliament's view, it had to respond to Yanukovych's departure and establish a functioning government at a time of significant crisis. Russia, however, used this to spin a narrative of a coup carried out by a "far-right" Ukrainian government. Parliament appointed Turchynov from Tymoshenko's party acting president and scheduled early presidential elections for May 2014.

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine

Russian officials quickly made clear that they did not consider Ukraine's interim government to be legitimate. On 20 February, Speaker of the Crimean Parliament Vladimir Konstantinov, on a visit to Moscow, hinted that Crimea might secede if the situation escalated. According to analysts who later studied the period in detail, Russia's final preparations to annex Crimea had started a few days earlier, before Yanukovych fled (Kofman et al., 2017). Early in the morning of February 27, armed men turned up at the Council of Ministers and the Crimean Parliament, and raised Russian flags. Local Crimean politicians held meetings during the day, and on February 28 military forces occupied airports in Sevastopol and Simferopol. The media soon labeled them "little green men" because the troops did not reveal their identity. It soon became clear that they were Russian military officers in disguise.[277] On March 1, Sergei Aksyonov, a previously marginal pro-Russian Crimean politician who had just replaced Anatoly Mogilev as prime minister of Crimea, asked Russia to intervene. On March 3, the Russian permanent representative to the UN circulated a letter in the UN Security Council, supposedly signed two days earlier by Viktor Yanukovych, which was an appeal to Russia to intervene in Crimea:

> The events on the Maidan and the illegal seizure of power in Kyiv have brought Ukraine to the brink of civil war. Chaos and anarchy reign in the country, and people's lives, safety, and human rights are under threat, particularly in the south-east and in Crimea. […] I therefore appeal to the President of Russia, V. V. Putin, to use the armed forces of the Russian Federation to restore law and order, peace and stability and to protect the people of Ukraine. (United Nations, 2014)[278]

This study has found no convincing evidence that people in Ukraine's south and east were under any significant threat from the new Ukrainian government at the time. Nonetheless, Yanukovych's statement served as a pretext for Russia to annex Crimea and Russian officials declared "their right" to use armed forces in other parts of Ukraine (D'Anieri, 2019b, p. 227). The Russian military took control of the peninsula at rapid speed, which surprised the Ukrainians. Declassified meeting notes from Ukraine's Security Council from the period reveal that fear of further Russian escalation and a concern that the West would

[277] Putin initially refuted the claim that the little green men were Russian military forces, but later confirmed that they were.

[278] Yanukovych later confirmed he had signed the letter, although he regretted in hindsight that he had signed it – he had acted "on his emotions" (Neuman, 2014).

provide little support were additional reasons for Ukraine's limited resistance (Lenton, 2022). At the same time, some people in Ukraine's military supported Russia. The head of the Ukrainian Navy, for example, who had just been appointed by the interim government, defected to Russia and swore allegiance to Crimea (BBC, 2014a). Moreover, military agreements signed earlier with Ukraine meant that Russia already had a strong military presence on the peninsula. Neither of these factors legitimized Russia's annexation of Crimea; nor did they legitimize the highly criticized referendum held on March 16, 2014, but the context made the annexation easier to accomplish.

According to the referendum, 97 percent voted for Crimea to join Russia on an 83 percent turnout. These results are unlikely to reflect genuine attitudes on the peninsula, in part because of the habit of Russian authorities to fabricate referendum results. Moreover, a poll conducted 8–18 February (see Table 10.3) showed that 41 percent of people in Crimea wanted Ukraine and Russia to unite in a single state, which is not the same as annexation. Although attitudes probably changed after the violence on Maidan and Yanukovych's departure, Russia's reported numbers from the referendum make little sense. Ukrainian law also forbids such referendums. The referendum, which was carried out without thorough preparations, had only two alternatives – increased autonomy in line with the 1992 Constitution or joining Russia. Moreover, the referendum took place in the context of Russian propaganda and military presence, and without international observers (Pifer, 2019). Even though almost no countries recognized Crimea as part of Russia, the international community did little beyond economic sanctions to prevent Russia from annexing the peninsula.

Table 10.3. How should relations between Ukraine and Russia look? 2013 and February 2014. Selected regions + Kyiv city (KIIS, 2014a).

Regions	**Ukraine and Russia must unite into a single state 2013, %**	**Ukraine and Russia must unite into a single state February 8-18 2014, %**
AR Crimea	35.9	41.0
Donetsk	29.8	33.2
Lugansk	29.4	24.1
Odesa	22.8	24.0
Dnipropetrovsk	14.7	13.8
Kharkiv	13.9	15.1
Zaporizhzhya	8.9	16.7
Vinnytsya	8.6	2.7
Kyiv (city)	3.7	5.3
Poltava	3.3	4.3
Kyiv (region)	3.0	6.4
Lviv	0.3	0.0

The new Ukrainian government in Kyiv immediately responded to Russia's annexation. On March 21, 2014, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk signed the EU association agreement (BBC, 2014b). Once again, Ukraine shifted its foreign policy when a new government came to power. However, as discussed in Chapter 11, developments in 2013–2014 resulted in a dramatic shift in Ukraine's political arena that fundamentally changed the political logic in Ukraine.

War in eastern Ukraine and the loss of Donetsk and Luhansk

In the spring of 2014, there was turmoil in key cities in Ukraine's east and south, such as Odesa and Kharkiv, but the Ukrainian government, in collaboration with regional elites, managed to avoid a takeover by Russian forces and local militia. In Donetsk and Luhansk, the situation escalated and turned into violent conflict. In part, local conditions can explain these contrasting regional developments, but a power vacuum in the Donbas and the inflow of Russian intelligence officers and "volunteers" in the two border regions of Donetsk and Luhansk were also important. Igor Girkin, a former Russian FSB agent, for example, led the occupation of Sloviansk, a city in Donetsk oblast, in April 2014 (Arel & Driscoll, 2023; Ekman, 2024; Nitsova, 2021). In August 2014, when Ukrainian armed forces, a mix of regular army and volunteer battalions, appeared to overrun the insurgents that, together with Russian forces, controlled parts of the Donbas, Russia launched a larger military intervention. After several months of intense fighting, Russian and local forces established control over parts of Luhansk and Donetsk, including the two cities with the same name. The so-called Minsk I agreement (September 2014) and the Minsk II agreement (February 2015) were signed to end the fighting. In March 2015, the UN reported 6000 fatalities in the conflict (UN News, 2015). The war continued after the signing of the Minsk II agreement, a conflict that had already killed over 13,000 people before 2022.

Conclusion: a painful formative period

This chapter has analyzed an important period in Ukraine's modern political history, starting when Yanukovych was elected president and ending with Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas in 2014. As shown, this dissertation's theoretical perspective helps to make sense of these developments. First, Yanukovych and his allies tried to concentrate political and economic power and were able to do so in an unprecedented way. Attempts at power concentration in a multicenter arena put domestic pressure on Ukraine's political system. It alienated important parts of Ukraine, especially political parties, business elites and people in Ukraine's west and center, but it also increasingly alienated others outside Yanukovych's inner circle. The authoritarian tendencies of the Ukrainian government increased the level of political

conflict and strengthened the resolve of Ukraine's opposition at the elite and mass levels. Many feared where a Ukraine dominated by Yanukovych and his allies might lead. As in previous periods, Ukraine's foreign policy shifted when a new elite group came to power, supported by core regional voters. In other words, domestic pressures and regional divides were a challenge for the Ukrainian government. The multicenter arena provided incentives for Yanukovych to support European integration and a partnership with Russia in parallel, especially as he became increasingly unpopular.

Yanukovych and his allies also experienced external pressures, and the flexible foreign policy failed to handle these. Yanukovych accepted several of Russia's red lines. Meanwhile Yanukovych and his allies tried to secure economic benefits from both the EU and Russia. The foreign policy of Yanukovych's government was clearly not motivated by a European identity or democracy and human rights, but by political survival in a multicenter arena and wealth accumulation. Yanukovych and his allies had a close relationship with Russia's leadership and seemed convinced they could handle Russian demands. In part, this confidence was linked to Ukraine's experiences during its transition to independence and during Kuchma's time as president, when Yanukovych and many of his allies had been in government, and a pragmatic approach to Russia had appeared successful. However, Putin's approach in 2013–2014 was more forceful.

In the summer of 2013, Russia raised the stakes, and the EU Vilnius Summit was approaching, which pressed Yanukovych to make a decision. The Ukrainian government made decisions in a constrained environment in a moment of crisis, but the decisions were not predetermined. Instead, there were alternatives available, and its decisions seemed improvised. At several points in time, Yanukovych could have released Tymoshenko and started working on economic reforms. This might perhaps have resulted in an EU agreement, although Russian pressure was clearly a complicating factor. Yanukovych's decision to say no to the EU's offer and turn to Russia set in motion a reactive sequence of dramatic proportions. The situation reached a tipping point and unleashed mass demonstrations against the government. The protests started after Yanukovych completely abandoned Ukraine's pro-West ambitions but soon expanded to reflect a broader dissatisfaction with regional concentration of power in the Donbas, corruption and authoritarian rule. Here again, however, Yanukovych and his allies could have avoided violence early on during Euromaidan, which could have calmed the situation. Ukraine had not experienced this level of violence since independence. As discussed in previous chapters, the Ukrainian government's choice to abstain from violence during the transition to independence, which was not the case in several other republics, and during the Orange Revolution probably contributed to Ukraine's peaceful development. The Yanukovych government broke that contract and used a strategy of domination instead of accommodation. Violence by govern-

ment-controlled police and security forces resulted in persistent mass demonstrations against the ruling elite. Just as during Georgia's transition to independence, government violence radicalized demonstrators and increased tensions in Ukraine in 2013–2014.

Similarly, Putin and his inner circle clearly had both the discretion and the available alternatives to make different decisions than to annex Crimea and send Russian troops to fight in eastern Ukraine. As discussed in Chapter 11, Putin's choices inadvertently contributed to a stabilization of Ukraine's pro-West orientation. Thus, from my theoretical perspective, the period fits the definition of a crisis triggered by external and domestic pressures. The crisis resulted in a concentrated episode of innovation and fluidity, in which contingency and choices by key decision makers played an important role. Chapter 11 explores the legacies of this formative period and answers why this episode resulted in a stable pro-West orientation in Ukraine after 2014.

11. Ukraine's stable pro-West foreign policy, 2014–2021

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference. Robert Frost

The watershed moment from late 2013 to 2014, discussed in Chapter 10, brought significant change to Ukraine. One important area of change was in Ukraine's foreign policy. After 2014, successive Ukrainian governments supported a firm pro-West orientation and overturned the relationship with Russia (see below). For the first time since independence, a strong political majority in Ukraine supported both EU and NATO membership. These goals were even included as an amendment to the Ukrainian constitution. Only a minority supported pragmatic and close ties with Russia. After over 20 years of what scholars had portrayed as a vacillating and ambiguous foreign policy (D'Anieri, 2012; Shyrokykh, 2018), Ukraine's international orientation had a clear focus. How can this development be explained?

At first glance, the answer seems obvious – as Jeffrey Mankoff (2014) put it, Vladimir Putin won Crimea and lost Ukraine. This view indicates that Ukraine's foreign policy shift occurred almost automatically when Russia annexed Crimea (for a similar view see Mcfaul, 2014). While this dissertation agrees that the Kremlin's decisions are important, a more fine-grained explanation is needed to explain why and how Ukraine's pro-West foreign policy stabilized.

Moreover, far from all scholars expected Ukraine to aim for EU and NATO membership and to take a hardline approach against Russia after 2014. Leading western scholars of international relations, especially realists, viewed Ukraine as a "buffer state" and argued that Ukraine had to accept "neutrality" and accommodate Russian interests (A. Lieven, 2021; Mearsheimer, 2014; Posen, 2016; Van Evera, 2022; Walt, 2015). Professor Graham Allison at Harvard clearly articulated this position:

> 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)

Furthermore, two of the best-known US statesmen in security and diplomacy, Henry Kissinger (2014) and Zbigniew Brzezinski, held similar views. They wanted Ukraine to act as Finland during the Cold War, having economic relations with both Russia and the EU but not becoming a member of "any military alliance viewed by Moscow as directed at itself" (Brzezinski, 2014). This argument is in line with part of the alliance literature. According to this view, small and medium-sized states tend to choose to bandwagon (accommodate) with a threatening power. After all, Ukraine did not have firm security guarantees, such as NATO's Article 5. Moreover, in response to Russia's aggressive actions, powerful states, including the United States, did not initially offer substantial lethal weapons to Ukraine (Goldberg, 2016). Under these circumstances, realist scholars assumed that Ukraine would avoid seeking EU membership, and especially NATO membership. They also expected Kyiv to accommodate some of Russia's demands. So, why did Ukraine not act according to the expectations of leading realist scholars and diplomats?

From the perspective of this dissertation, a watershed moment occurred in 2013–2014 that resulted in a legacy: Ukraine's stable pro-West orientation. Furthermore, I argue that Ukraine's pro-West orientation stabilized through two important processes. First, Ukraine's foreign policy stabilized because of shifts in Ukraine's political arena that weakened the resistance to a pro-West orientation. In the context of an increasingly turbulent political landscape in February 2014, President Yanukovych decided to flee to Russia, as did many of his close allies. As a result, the PoR – Ukraine's then largest and most powerful party – started to break apart and collapsed in the fall of 2014. Its successor parties were more divided and much weaker. Relatedly, Russia's occupation of Crimea and the most populous parts of Donetsk and Luhansk had the unintended effect that millions of Ukrainian voters in occupied areas no longer voted in Ukrainian elections. As seen in previous chapters, these voters had strongly supported either the PoR or the CPU, parties that consistently promoted close ties with Russia. The loss of their core voters weakened these parties still further. Thus, the regional dimension weakened and Ukraine moved closer to a single center arena. In turn, this reduced Ukraine's political support for accommodation or closer ties to Russia. Taken together, the balance of power in Ukraine's political arena tilted against the more "pro-Russian" forces. This was not a temporary shift as seen in previous decades, but a much more fundamental change in Ukraine's political arena.

Second, violent experiences during the Euromaidan and Russia's occupation of parts of Ukraine in 2014 were a painful and traumatic formative experience that profoundly shifted the way many Ukrainians viewed Russia. As a result, Ukraine's predominant foreign policy narrative changed. Ukrainian decision makers increasingly framed the storylines in existential terms and left little room for the previously popular pragmatic approach to Russia. Taken together, the shift in Ukraine's political arena weakened the more "pro-Rus-

sian" parties.[279] Ukraine's traumatic formative experience, which led a majority of Ukrainians to support EU and NATO membership, contributed to a stable pro-West orientation. Below I provide evidence for this explanation and develop the argument in more detail.

Changes in Ukraine's political arena

The collapse of the Party of Regions

As a result of the developments discussed in Chapter 10, Ukraine's political arena shifted its character. The first shift in Ukraine's political arena was that the core leadership of the Party of Regions fled the country. President Viktor Yanukovych left Ukraine in February 2014 and ended up in Russia (see Chapter 10). He later settled down in a house outside Moscow on land belonging to the Russian government (Ukrinform, 2020). Many others in leading positions within the PoR followed his example. Among them were Prime Minister Mykola Azarov, Defense ministers Pavlo Lebedev and Dmytro Salamatin, First Deputy Prime Minister Serhiy Arbuzov, 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.[280] According to media sources, the above-mentioned have been living in Russia or Russian-controlled territory since 2014. Several came under investigation by the Ukrainian authorities and were charged with and sentenced for high treason, including Yanukovych. Yanukovych, Lebedev and Salamatin were also under investigation for "criminal actions" in the context of Russia's annexation of Crimea (Interfax Ukraine, 2020). Such charges strengthened the motivation for these individuals to stay in Russia.

The PoR remained a political party for some time after Yanukovych fled. However, it was a highly hierarchical party controlled by Yanukovych and his allies at the top, and soon fragmented. Deputies from Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa co-opted by Yanukovych's government defected, and PoR-politicians in Crimea joined local or Russian parties (Kuzio, 2015). A further sign of fragmentation was that the PoR could not unite behind a single candidate

[279] As discussed elsewhere, the term "pro-Russian parties" used in this context does not equate with support for separatism or for Ukraine joining Russia.

[280] Azarov reportedly first fled to Austria and then to Russia. There are media reports that Pavlo Lebedev was present in Moscow during Russia's formal inclusion of Crimea into Russia. Zakharchenko claimed in 2015 to have a Russian citizenship. There are media reports that he has a foundation in Crimea and openly supported the self-proclaimed republics in Donbas. There are media reports that Yakumenko settled down in Crimea after his escape from Ukraine (Ukrinform, 2020).

in the May 2014 presidential election. Instead, several PoR politicians ran as "independents". The official candidate, Mykhailo Dobkin, received just 3 percent of the vote.

The Opposition Bloc and the Opposition Platform – For Life

In September 2014, a month ahead of parliamentary elections, former PoR leaders still in Ukraine formed the Opposition Bloc.[281] The Opposition Bloc included two groups, reportedly supported by oligarchs Rinat Akhmetov and Dmytro Firtash (Ogushi, 2020). Well-known politicians from Yanukovych's government, such as Yuriy Boyko, Borys Kolesnikov and Serhiy Lyovochkin, also joined the Opposition Bloc. Viktor Medvedchuk, considered by many "Putin's man in Ukraine", also backed the party. Leaders of the Opposition Bloc owned television channels and used them for political purposes. In the snap parliamentary election in October 2014, the Opposition Bloc received 9.43 percent of the votes and 29 seats in parliament, which increased to 43 seats when independent candidates joined the party. This can be compared with the 175–186 seats the PoR had had received in the three previous elections.

The absence of the senior leadership from Donetsk contributed to fragmentation and weakness. As Ogushi notes, "Without a strong regional clan base with access to executive power, such as Donetsk in the case of the Party of Regions, the Opposition Bloc became vulnerable to external pressure" (Ogushi, 2020, p. 1655). Another sign of fragmentation came in late 2018 when the Opposition Bloc split into two parties, the Opposition Platform – For Life (led by Medvedchuk and Boyko) and the Opposition Bloc – Party for Peace and Development (led by Oleksandr Vilkul and Yevhen Murayev) (Lennon, 2019). Although the Opposition Platform received 13 percent of the votes in the 2019 parliamentary elections and the Opposition Bloc 3 percent, these figures are low compared to the PoR. Fragmentation following the exile of Yanukovych and his allies (especially Donbas people) played a role in these results. To assess the shifts in the balance of power in Ukraine's political arena, we must also consider the effect of Russian occupation and territorial change.

The impact of territorial change on Ukraine's political arena

A (probably) unintended consequence of Russia's occupation of Crimea and the most populous parts of Donetsk and Luhansk was that millions of the PoR and the CPU's core supporters no longer voted in Ukrainian elections. As explored in previous chapters, Donbas had been the home base for parties that preferred a foreign policy more closely aligned with Russia. Donetsk City was a stronghold for the Communist Party in the 1990s, and for Yanukovych and

[281] Technically, the Opposition Bloc was created in 2010 but only became active in September 2014.

the PoR in the 2000s. In the 2004 and 2010 presidential elections, between 89 and 93.5 percent in Donetsk and Luhansk voted for Yanukovych. A strong majority of voters in Crimea also supported these parties and a foreign policy more closely aligned with Russia.[282]

Paul D'Anieri has compared the 2010 and 2019 presidential elections. His calculations of the areas outside Ukrainian control because of Russian occupation show a loss of 3.5 million Ukrainian voters in 2019, compared to the results in 2010. In other words, Russian occupation de facto excluded millions of voters from voting in the Ukrainian elections of 2014 and 2019. A strong majority of those voters had previously voted for parties that had advocated close and pragmatic relations with Russia. For example, the population in the occupied parts of Ukraine constituted 16 percent of the total voters in the 2010 presidential elections, and 87 percent of those voters supported Yanukovych in that election (D'Anieri, 2019a, 2022). The number of voters outside Ukrainian control at that time roughly corresponded with the number of voters in Galicia in western Ukraine in the same election.[283] If Crimea and parts of the Donbas had been outside Ukraine in 2010, Yulia Tymoshenko would have won the 2010 election with 55 percent of the vote against Yanukovych's 45 percent, compared to the actual result of 49 percent for Yanukovych and Tymoshenko's 45 percent. There are no indications that internally displaced persons (IDPs) would challenge this territorial effect.[284]

Moreover, the successors to the PoR continued to receive support in parts of Ukraine's east, even after Russia's aggression. In the 2019 parliamentary elections, the Opposition Platform came in first in Ukrainian-controlled parts of Luhansk and Donetsk (Lennon, 2019). Thus, it is likely that without the occupation, which left millions of its core supporters outside Ukraine, these parties would have maintained a quite strong and loyal base in eastern Ukraine after 2014. Leaders of the Opposition Bloc/Platform, such as Boyko, Medvedchuk and Vilkul, continued to support pragmatic policies vis-à-vis Russia after 2014, and regularly met with Putin and other senior Russian officials. Vilkul claimed that neutrality was the best model for Ukraine and warned that EU and NATO membership would be "a path of war… a path of eternal chaos" (BBC Monitoring, 2019). Medvedchuk claimed that "Ukraine has become a colony of the West" (Euromaidan Press, 2016). He wanted "to restore" Ukraine's political and economic sovereignty and said that ties with

[282] Minorities such as the Crimean Tatars probably voted for other parties. As has been discussed in this dissertation, supporting close ties with Russia does not mean that the average Crimean voter supported separatism before or after Russia annexed the peninsula in 2014.
[283] Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil *oblasts*.
[284] First, as D'Anieri points out, it is generally difficult for IDPs to vote. Second, it is likely that people most critical of Russia, such as the Crimean Tatars, left Crimea and moved to Ukrainian controlled territories, and that those in support of Russia's policies to a higher extent remained in the Russian controlled areas or moved to Russia. Such migration patterns would only weaken the support for "pro-Russian" parties in Ukraine-controlled territory even more. Obviously, this discussion refers to the situation before the full-scale invasion in 2022.

Russia were a key priority for restoring peace and strengthening Ukraine's energy sector and economy (BBC Monitoring, 2018). Borys Kolesnikov, another representative, suggested that Ukraine should put EU integration on hold for at least 10 years (BBC Monitoring Ukraine & Baltics, 2016). In other words, even after 2014 there were still political forces in Ukraine that supported accommodation with Russia and were skeptical of NATO and EU membership. Thus, a counterfactual with a more coherent Opposition Bloc, and millions of its core voters still inside Ukraine, could have resulted in a relatively strong Ukrainian party that favored close ties with Russia and opposed NATO and EU membership. Russia's occupation of Ukrainian territories thus weakened the more pro-Russian forces in Ukraine.

Economic weakening

A final aspect of territorial change was the economic decline in the Donbas. As discussed in the theory chapter, economic resources are an important component in a regional political center remaining influential. After 2014, most of the heavy industry and mining in the Donbas were located in areas outside Ukrainian-controlled territory. Donbas' overall economic importance had weakened over time, but the industries in Donetsk and Luhansk played a role in strengthening the economic base of the PoR. One organization noted that the PoR "became increasingly intertwined with the ranks of industrial bosses in Donbas" in the early 2000s (International Crisis Group, 2020b, p. 3).

As a result of the Russian occupation in 2014, most of Rinat Akhmetov's (Ukraine's richest oligarch) industrial empire and the Industrial Union of Donbas, one of Ukraine's biggest companies, were located outside Ukrainian-controlled territory. A trade arrangement between Kyiv and the non-Ukrainian controlled entities retained vital industrial ties until January 2017. After that, Donbas volunteer battalions linked to the pro-European party Self Reliance (*Samopomich*) set up an embargo that blocked much of the trade with these areas. The authorities of Russia-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk reportedly took control of heavy industry and mining in these areas (International Crisis Group, 2020b). During the first part of the war (2014–2021), significant industries and infrastructure such as railroads close to the combat zone had already been damaged or made non-operational. The war also affected the economy of Ukrainian-controlled Donbas. In 2018, industrial production in government-controlled Donbas had fallen to 15–20 percent of 2013 levels.

It is difficult to estimate the exact economic loss for the successor parties to the PoR as informal economic agreements and smuggling are a reality in the conflict zones. Nonetheless, the fact that heavy industry was concentrated in territories that from 2014 were outside Ukrainian control, as well as the damage to vital infrastructure support the argument that previous successful arrangements between regional political and business elites in the Donbas were significantly weakened. This was in part a result of territorial change, but also because of the destruction during the conflict that began in 2014.

Support for "Russia pragmatism" before and after 2014

Tables 11.1 and 11.2 compare support in the Ukrainian parliamentary and presidential elections before and after Ukraine's watershed moment in 2013–2014. The tables show support for parties and candidates that preferred closer ties with Russia. These parties and candidates wanted closer political and economic ties with Russia and were against NATO membership. They were, in general, critical of EU membership although, as seen in Chapter 10, leading figures of the PoR wanted economic relations with the EU and Russia until Yanukovych said no to the EU in November 2013.

In three consecutive elections (2006, 2007 and 2012) the Party of Regions became the largest party in parliament. Together with the CPU and the Lytvyn Bloc, this coalition received 36–44 percent of the vote and could at times form a majority in parliament. In October 2014, after the Euromaidan and Russia's occupation of territory, the successor to PoR, the Opposition Bloc, received 9.43 percent of the vote and the CPU did not get into parliament. The CPU would only have needed 176,000 more votes to cross the 5 percent threshold in 2014. It is possible that the party could have fared better if people in the occupied territories had voted (D'Anieri, 2019a). The Party of Regions' transformation into the Opposition Bloc a month before the 2014 elections might have negatively affected their results, but in 2019, when the political landscape stabilized, the result was only marginally better. Taken together, the two rival successors to the Opposition Bloc received 16 percent of the votes or 49 seats.

Table 11.2 shows the results of Ukraine's presidential elections in 2004–2019 for the leading candidate(s) who supported a foreign policy closer to Russia. Viktor Yanukovych received strong support in 2004 – even in the rerun when it was clear he had tried to steal the election – and won in 2010. In contrast, in 2014 and 2019 none of Yanukovych's successors came even close to winning. With votes from the territories outside Ukrainian control, it is possible that Yuriy Boyko might have reached the second round in 2019, although he would probably have lost to Volodymyr Zelensky. Unlike in all elections since 1994, none of the top two presidential candidates in 2014 and 2019 supported a foreign policy that promoted closer ties with Russia.

In sum, the exile of many within the PoR leadership, the fragmentation of its successor parties, the loss of millions of core voters and the economic decline in the Donbas weakened the Ukrainian parties that preferred closer ties with Russia after 2014. The result was a significant regional shift in the balance of power in Ukrainian politics.

Table 11.1. Results of parliamentary elections in Ukraine, 2006–2019. Parties that supported closer ties with Russia and were against NATO and/or the EU. The results do not include independent MPs. *Refers to Opposition Bloc – Party for Peace and Development in 2019 (CECU, 2023).

	2006		2007		2012		2014		2019	
Party	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats	%	Seats
Party of Regions	32	186	34	175	30	185				
Com-munist Party	3.5	21	5	27	13	32				
Lytvyn Bloc			4	20	-	2				
Opposi-tion Bloc*							9.5	29	3	6
Opposi-tion Platform									13	43
Total	35.5	207	43	222	43	219	9.5	29	16	49

Table 11.2. Results of Presidential Elections in Ukraine, 2004–2019. Result for candidate(s) that support closer ties with Russia and were against NATO and/or EU. Second-round results where applicable. *Because of fragmentation from 2014, support for the most important candidates has been added together (CECU, 2023).

Candidate	2004	2010	2014	2019
Viktor Yanukovych	44.2% (second round)	49.95% (second round, winner)		
Mykhailo Dobkin/Petro Symonenko /Vadim Rabinovich*			6.79% (first round)	
Yuriy Boyko/Oleksandr Vilkul*				15.82% (first round)
Result	44.2%	49.95%	6.79%	15.82%

Ukraine's multicenter political arena shifted drastically away from the Donbas in 2014. This weakened the influence of political forces and voters in Donbas and Crimea that supported accommodation with Russia. From this point

Ukraine moved closer to a single center arena. While Ukraine's west still mattered to some extent – leading the way for Ukraine's pro-West orientation – the regions played a much less important role after 2014.

Ukraine's ruling coalitions, 2014–2021

Thus far, I have discussed the weakening of the PoR and its successor parties. Their weakening moved Ukraine's political arena closer to a single center than a multicenter political arena. While the regional dimension in Ukrainian politics did not completely disappear after 2014, it did not play as important a role compared to previous periods. Below I present a brief overview of the political landscape in 2014–2021.

President Poroshenko

In 2014, Arseniy Yatsenyuk became prime minister, backed by a strong parliamentary majority. In May 2014, Petro Poroshenko, who had supported Euromaidan, won the presidential election with 54.7 percent of the vote in the first round. The result stood out in at least two ways. For the first time since 1991, only one round was needed to declare a winner. Furthermore, no candidate in support of closer ties to Russia was successful in the election. Poroshenko's main challengers, Yulia Tymoshenko (12.8 %), Oleh Lyashko (8.3 %) and Anatoliy Hrytsenko (5.5 %), all held pro-West positions (CECU, 2023).

In July 2014, the Yatsenyuk government fell apart after UDAR and *Svoboda* withdrew from the coalition, and Poroshenko announced early parliamentary elections for October. In these elections, Yatsenyuk's People's Front (22.1 %) and the Petro Poroshenko Bloc (21.8 %) were successful. Together with three other parties, they formed a pro-West ruling coalition that united over two-thirds of parliament (Freedom House, 2022).[285] Overall, the elections were free and fair but with a low turnout in parts of Ukraine's east and south – partly due to the ongoing conflict.

The government remained stable for over a year, even though the Radical Party left in September 2015 after disagreements related to the Minsk agreements (see below). After increased pressure, Yatsenyuk resigned as prime minister in April 2016 but the dynamics of Ukrainian politics were very different compared to previous decades. This time no strong regionally based party, such as the PoR pushing closer ties with Russia, blocked the government's work as happened after the Orange Revolution. Furthermore, Poroshenko and a new coalition passed the so-called decommunization laws in

[285] It is worth noting that nationalist parties such as Svoboda and the Right Sector performed poorly in these elections. The coalition included three other parties: Self-Reliance, the Radical Party and Tymoshenko's Fatherland Party.

2015, banning Communist and Nazi symbols and "public denial of the criminal nature of the Communist totalitarian regime 1917–1991" (Hyde, 2015). As a result, the Ukrainian authorities banned the CPU, which weakened the "pro-Russian" forces in Ukraine still further. After Yatsenyuk's resignation, Volodymyr Groysman, an ally of Poroshenko, formed a new government. The ruling coalition narrowed to two political parties: the Petro Poroshenko Bloc and the People's Front. In terms of international orientation, both were pro-West parties. Although the coalition was more dependent on individual members in parliament than the previous coalition, it remained in power until 2019.

President Zelensky

In 2019, Ukraine called both presidential and parliamentary elections. At the time, President Poroshenko and his coalition were criticized for not delivering on their promises, for example, when it came to anti-corruption reforms. Poroshenko campaigned on the slogan "army, language, faith", which appealed especially to people in Ukraine's west. It turned out that Poroshenko received strong support only in this part of Ukraine. Volodymyr Zelensky, a comedian and media personality with no previous political experience, emerged as Poroshenko's main rival. For many, his success came as a surprise – when this author visited Ukraine only six months before the elections few experts predicted Zelensky's victory.

Some portrayed Zelensky as a candidate from the east – he was from Kryvyj Rih in southwestern Dnipropetrovsk oblast and a native Russian speaker. However, Zelensky, born in 1978, belonged to another generation of leaders without known established links to regional elites in the Donbas (Onuch & Hale, 2022).

Zelensky's rhetoric was anti-establishment; he wanted a strong Ukrainian economy and promised to get rid of corruption. Another difference from previous Ukrainian leaders with origins in the southeast was that he did not campaign on closer relations with Russia (Mankoff & Gabidullina, 2019). One of his main promises was peace in eastern Ukraine without surrendering to Russian demands. Zelensky's image as a political outsider and role as a popular actor probably strengthened his popularity.

Zelensky performed strongly in the first round. Poroshenko came second and won in Lviv. Boyko from the Opposition Platform won his home base in Donbas. In the second round, Zelensky outperformed Poroshenko and won with 73 percent of the vote, a record high in Ukraine's modern history. Perhaps most remarkable was that Zelensky won in all regions except for a few *oblasts* in Ukraine's west.

The east-west divide and regional polarization that had dominated Ukrainian politics until 2014 seemed to have faded in importance. Zelensky immediately dissolved parliament and scheduled elections for July 2019. Zelensky's party, the Servant of the People (*Sluha narodu*), won a landslide victory

with 43 percent of the votes and 254 seats – a single-party majority. The Opposition Platform – For Life came second with 13 percent of the vote and 43 seats (CECU, 2023).

For the first time in Ukraine's history, the president's party had a single-party parliamentary majority. However, Zelensky's first years were not without problems. Already by March 2020, Zelensky was blaming the government for ineffectiveness. The prime minister resigned and a new government took form, with Denys Smyhal as prime minister. Zelensky remained in power but continued to be criticized for the constant reshuffling of the government, increased concentration of the security and law-enforcement agencies under the control of the executive (especially the National Security and Defense Council) and sanctions on individual Ukrainian citizens, media and business owners (Freedom House, 2022).

Ukrainian politics remained vibrant under both Poroshenko and Zelensky, although the regional dimension faded. However, a major difference compared to before 2014 was that a strong majority of Ukraine's parties supported a firm pro-West orientation and did not support pragmatic relations with Russia. As discussed above, this was in part a result of fragmentation among the political forces linked to Donbas and Crimea. In part, it was also a result of Ukraine's painful formative experience in 2014.

Ukraine's traumatic experience with Russia

In 1991, Ukraine, unlike Georgia, experienced what appeared to be a civilized divorce from Russia (D'Anieri, 2019b). This does not mean that Ukrainian-Russian relations were without problems or that the transition to independence was easy (as discussed in Chapter 4). Nonetheless, Ukraine managed to achieve a peaceful transition to independence and resolve its difficulties with Russia through top-level diplomacy and by signing bilateral and international agreements. In this dissertation, I have argued that the formative experience with Russia shaped a legacy of how many Ukrainian politicians perceived and managed the relationship with Russia until 2014. Only in 2014 did Ukraine fully experience a traumatic moment with Russia, something Georgia experienced during its transition to independence and its aftermath.[286] For many Ukrainians, although certainly not for all, Russia's actions in 2014 came as a shock. As a prominent Ukrainian expert on security told this author in 2017, Ukrainian politicians and experts had perceived Russia as a threat before 2014, but not a military threat of this kind:

[286] This does not mean to downplay earlier traumatic experiences in Ukraine's history such as the Holodomor or the sacrifices in the context of World War II. Yet, as has been demonstrated, before 2014 Ukrainian (and Russian) leaders often politicized historical experiences, and many of these historical events had not united Ukrainians.

> What was unexpected, [w]as this kind of scenario that took place [in 2014], and our calculation was like friendly nations, two friendly nations with numerous links, people to people, economic ties and so on, [the] Russian government would never do anything stupid like this. Because people in Ukraine would obviously not accept this antagonistic kind of relationship. Russia, I mean our calculations were, Russia would never risk breaking up economic relations, especially relations in [the] defense sphere. So we made our calculations and our perceptions from the very logical argument, and even now I still believe that what Russia has done so far is illogical, is damaging Russia's national interest. They created 40 million, I mean they changed the friendly nation [of] Ukraine to an enemy.[287]

That Russia's behavior in 2014 came as a shock is evident also among senior Ukrainian politicians with decades of experience negotiating with Russian leaders:

> It is only after 2014 when we, many of us … have understood what is real Russia, not Russia which is about priorities of international law, but this very concrete Russia which violates all these norms. We Ukrainians have seen how brutally Russia violated [the] UN Charter, OSCE documents, the Budapest Memorandum, dozens of Ukrainian-Russian agreements.[288]

> Nobody expected, nobody foresaw that in the 21st century a country that has taken upon itself all these obligations, had signed all these treaties, ratified them, would act in this manner, and it was I believe a surprise now obviously to Ukraine, but also to our major European and American partners.[289]

> First, my impression is that the Ukrainian people, felt it very, very dangerous and insulting, the behavior of Russia [in 2014]. Nobody expected the war which Russia unleashed against Ukraine. The Revolution of Dignity proved to the majority of [the Ukrainian] population that Russia is an enemy…only Putin helped the majority of Ukrainians to define what is their future in terms of security.[290]

A Ukrainian expert, who for a long time had criticized the pragmatic approach to Russia, had the following reflections,

> So, this was an illusion of pragmatism. There was a feeling that if Ukraine goes […] in a balanced, moderate way vis-à-vis Russia, finally Russia accepts [Ukraine's] sovereign choice, its territorial integrity, and that only balance is needed in order to avoid any significant problems. So that was a wrong perception, and the overall strategy was built on this wrong perception. My major, I would say, conclusion after that, from the very beginning, the mistake was made, when Ukraine thought that Russia accepted its sovereignty. It did not.

[287] Interview, Oleksiy Melnyk, 2017.
[288] Interview, Volodymyr Ohryzko, 2017.
[289] Interview, Kostyantyn Gryshchenko, 2017.
[290] Interview, Borys Tarasyuk, 2017.

> So at this moment, we may see that those who at that time said that this pragmatism is wrong, we should not believe Russia, they were correct. But at that time, nobody believed that it [was] correct.[291]

He developed this train of thought on why many Ukrainians did not see Russia as a threat before 2014:

> I think that previously short-term thinking was prevailing for years, for decades, and people just did not care. It was more comfortable and more profitable in the short term to have deals with Russia….and that is why I think that people just [ignored], again, this illusion that Russia will not cross the red line….This was a perception [that] Russia is quite willing to reinstall its influence, but basic issues [have] been already solved, territorial integrity, sovereignty. So that was a perception and that is why there was no feeling of existential threat [in Ukraine] at that time.

The expert even penned an article after the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, warning that Ukraine could be next. Many responded that the article was exaggerating, and was alarmist or even paranoid. For example, many in Ukraine believed it was not in Russia's interest to annex Crimea:

> Because that was clear, if they [the Russians] just violate their obligations, annexing Crimea, finally they will lose Ukraine. So, but I would say the prevailing opinion was that it is not in Russian interests because [it is] in Russian interest to have Crimea as a part of Ukraine, and to have a huge influence over [the] whole [of] Ukraine through Crimea, through a pro-Russian population in the east, whatever, so that was a belief, okay? That is the Russian strategy, and they will not change it.[292]

The understanding what followed on from Ukraine's peaceful transition to independence helps to explain why many Ukrainians did not expect Russia's behavior in 2014, and why Ukraine's army at first was ill-prepared to meet this challenge. The point here is not to blame Ukrainians for failing to predict these developments. In hindsight, it often seems easy to explain dramatic events, but they are often difficult to predict. Instead, the point is that dominant understandings of Russia in Ukraine were based on formative experiences during Ukraine's transition to independence and its immediate aftermath. Moreover, to be fair, Russia's behavior in 2014 surprised most experts in the West too. The watershed moment in 2013–2014 dramatically shifted the perception of Russia among many Ukrainians from a strategic partner to an enemy.

[291] Interview, Oleksandr Sushko, 2018.
[292] Interview, Oleksandr Sushko, 2018.

Euromaidan and Russia's invasion as a formative experience

In the words of the Ukrainian scholar, Mychailo Wynnyckyj, the Euromaidan (or the Revolution of Dignity) and Russia's 2014 invasion generated:

> [A] feeling of belonging to a distinctly national community [in Ukraine] (p. 326)….Independence square in Kyiv became a focal point for spontaneous organization (barricades, first aid services, supply of food and firewood); when called upon to defend the country, many from this volunteer movement refocused from supplying protesters to supplying the front while others enlisted for military service. (Wynnyckyj, 2019, p. 311)

From his perspective, this formative experience in 2013–2014 was a process of national liberation. The people who died in the context of the Euromaidan became mythical heroes, manifest as the "Heavenly Hundred" next to Independence Square. Scholars have traced a clear strengthening of Ukrainian identity and support for Ukraine's independence after the Euromaidan and Russia's invasion in 2014 (Haran & Yakovlyev, 2017). Many who participated in the Euromaidan went into politics, continued to work in civil society, or became soldiers or volunteers in the war that began in 2014.

In an interview with this author, President Yushchenko reflected on what happened during the transition to independence, but also on the changes that had taken place in Ukraine:

> And I was always thinking that if we [had taken] those needed decisive steps back at the beginning of the 1990s, things that the Poles, the Czech Republic and other socialist countries did, things would have been different for us. But we had a different reality in front of us and we dealt with it differently. So I think what was very important is that over these ten years [after the Orange Revolution], Ukraine as a nation has become much more integrated. We have become a more consolidated nation over these last ten years.[293]

In response to Russia's action and instability in parts of eastern Ukraine, the Ukrainian government launched an "anti-terrorist operation" in April 2014 (C. Miller, 2018).[294] In the late summer of 2014, when the operation appeared to have been quite successful, Russia scaled-up both its advanced military support in the Donbas and its provision of additional military boots on the ground (Kofman et al., 2017). Russia's 2014 invasion caused a lot of suffering but also helped to establish a common cause among Ukrainians. Due to the weakness of the regular army in 2014, Ukrainian volunteer battalions played an important role in defending Ukraine, especially in the first critical year. Many

[293] Interview, Viktor Yushchenko, 2018.
[294] Interestingly the ATO remained formally active until 2018.

of Ukraine's military fighters became almost mythical heroes, such as the "cyborgs" who for a long time tried to defend the Donetsk Airport (Wynnyckyj, 2019).

Civil volunteers, especially women, played an important role in collecting and supplying material to the frontline. When this author arrived in Ukraine in 2015, his first encounter was with civil volunteers at *Kyiv-Pasazhyrskyi* (the main railway station) who were collecting money for medical help for wounded Ukrainian soldiers. In Dnipropetrovsk,[295] Ihor Kolomoyskyi, one of Ukraine's wealthiest oligarchs, funded several battalions to defend the region from Russian provocations and became Governor for a while. In other words, Ukrainians from very different backgrounds united to protect the country's independence.

The Minsk Agreements

After Russia's decision to escalate the war in August 2014, the Ukrainian military faced difficulties continuing its summer counteroffensive. In September 2014, this resulted in a ceasefire, the so-called Minsk Agreement, which soon broke down. Another agreement, Minsk II, was signed on 12 February 2015 under increased military pressure from Russia. The international negotiations were held in the context of intense military fighting in the eastern Ukrainian town of Debaltseve, a battle that led to a humiliating defeat for Ukrainian troops (Luhn & Grytsenko, 2015). One problem with the Minsk Agreements, beyond the substantial issues of sequencing and implementation, was that Russia imposed the agreements on Ukraine. For Ukrainians, it was not only a "bad deal", but also humiliating and part of the traumatic experience. Hence, Russia repeated the approach used against Georgia in 1993, which was a humiliating defeat for Georgia's president, Eduard Shevardnadze, who had to make concessions to Russia under pressure – a humiliation Shevardnadze later spoke about many times. Such an approach and the content of the agreement itself made it almost impossible for any Ukrainian leader to find compromise with Russia. The section below analyzes Ukraine's foreign policy from 2014 until 2021.

Ukraine's foreign policy 2014-2021

After the watershed moment of 2013–2014, Ukraine's president and prime minister, and a majority in parliament supported a pro-West orientation. In March 2014, Prime Minister Yatsenyuk traveled to Brussels to sign the political section of the EU Association Agreement. The visit had both political and symbolic value – just days after Russia's annexation of Crimea. Yatsenyuk declared that the conflict with Russia had shifted from "a political to a military

[295] With its capital renamed Dnipro.

phase" (Myers & Barry, 2014). In June 2014, the new president, Petro Poroshenko, signed the economic parts of the EU agreement, the DCFTA. The Ukrainian Parliament ratified this in September, supported by all 355 deputies present at the session (D'Anieri, 2019b). The full Association Agreement entered into force in September 2017.[296] In the same year, a visa-free agreement entered into force that allowed Ukrainians to visit EU member states visa-free for 90 days. President Poroshenko submitted a draft law in December 2014 to overturn Ukraine's non-bloc status. Parliament supported the law by an overwhelming 303 votes to 8. In 2019, President Poroshenko and a strong majority in the Ukrainian Parliament (334 MPs in favor and 35 against) approved an amendment to the Constitution of Ukraine (2019) that declared membership of the EU and NATO to be strategic goals for Ukraine. In a speech, Poroshenko (2019) stated that EU and NATO membership for Ukraine was his "strategic mission". President Volodymyr Zelensky did not alter Ukraine's overall pro-West orientation. At a briefing in Brussels in 2019, Zelensky said, "The strategic course of Ukraine to achieve full-fledged membership of the EU and NATO, which is secured in the constitution of Ukraine, remains unchanged. This is the priority of our foreign policy" (Zelensky, 2019). Thus, the election of a new president did not result in a shift in Ukraine's foreign policy orientation.

Moreover, Ukraine changed its earlier approach of treating Russia as a strategic partner. In January 2015, for example, a strong majority in the Ukrainian Parliament labeled Russia "an aggressor state" (Ukrayinska Pravda, 2015). In 2018, Ukraine's president and parliament decided not to extend the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Agreement. As discussed in Chapter 4, the agreement had been central to resolving difficult issues with Moscow after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Moreover, trade ties between Ukraine and Russia dropped significantly after 2014. In 2012, approximately 25 percent of Ukraine's exports went to Russia and the EU respectively. By 2018, Russia's share had declined to 7.7 percent while the EU's share had increased to 42.6 percent. The EU's share in imports was 31 percent in 2012 and 41 percent in 2018 (Dabrowski et al., 2020). Ukrainian-Russian defense industry cooperation also declined significantly.[297] In 2015, Ukraine stopped importing gas directly from Russia, as noted by a Ukrainian diplomat who specializes in energy:

> [O]n gas we realized that he [Putin] will just choke us, he will not stop at anything. If he could cut the gas he would, so that is why we are not buying Rus-

[296] The economic agreements partly entered into force in 2016. A referendum in the Netherlands delayed the EU's full ratification of the Association Agreement.
[297] Interview, Oleksiy Melnyk, 2017.

> sian gas, we buy gas from Slovakia, Hungary and Poland. That is a huge advantage, that we were able to get agreement with Europeans to reverse gas flow from Europe.[298]

Several factors probably contributed to declining trade between the two parties. It is unlikely, however, that Ukraine's decreased economic dependency on Russia best explains Ukraine's firm pro-West orientation after 2014. Instead, Ukraine's reduced dependence on the Russian economy primarily followed *as a result of* Ukraine's decision to separate itself from Russia after the traumatic experiences of 2013–2014. This resembles Georgia's strategic choice in the late 1990s to limit its energy and economic dependency on Russia after its negative experiences with Moscow in the first half of the 1990s, although it was dependent on Russia at the outset.

After 2014, Ukraine also changed its relationship with Russia in spheres traditionally not associated with foreign policy. For example, the Orthodox Church in Ukraine became "autocephalous" from the Moscow Patriarchate Church, an important decision that experts linked to Ukraine's increased political independence from Russia (Liik et al., 2019). Moreover, to block Russian propaganda in Ukraine, Poroshenko banned Russian social media platforms, and his successor, Zelensky, banned several Ukrainian media platforms linked to pro-Russian politicians (RFE/RL, 2021). In May 2021, the Ukrainian authorities charged "Putin's man in Ukraine", Viktor Medvedchuk, with treason and he was placed under house arrest. Finally, the decommunization laws adopted in 2015 resulted in the renaming of streets and cities, the removal of many Soviet-era symbols and monuments, and similar measures intended to prevent a Russia-Soviet narrative remaining influential in Ukraine (Shevel, 2016). These indicators strengthen the argument that Ukraine distanced itself from Russia in multiple spheres after 2014 and beyond. Below, I discuss how a new dominant foreign policy narrative underpinned Ukraine's international orientation.

Ukraine's European choice, survival of the nation, and escaping Russia

The traumatic period of 2013–2014 contributed to a changed narrative that underpinned Ukraine's foreign policy. Before 2014, Ukrainian politicians who supported a pro-West orientation often presented democracy and economic prosperity arguments in defense of such a policy. These arguments were used after 2014 as well, but politicians increasingly linked Ukraine's European choice with independence and survival. Ukrainians considered the European path a "civilizational choice" that separated it from its colonial past.

[298] Interview, Sergiy Korsunsky, 2017. In fact, much of the gas still came from Russia, but Ukraine bought it from EU member states, which limited Ukraine's dependence on Russia and the corrupt practices associated with dealing with Moscow. Moreover, Russia's gas-transit route to Europe via Ukraine remained and continued to be a contentious issue in Ukrainian-Russian relations.

For example, in a meeting with the EU's foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, President Poroshenko noted, "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" (cited in BBC Monitoring, 2014). Similarly, Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk argued that by signing the EU Association Agreement, "[w]e are fixing the 350-year-old mistake: Ukraine is Europe". He underlined the sacrifices made on Euromaidan and in the conflict against Russia. "It is a shame", he said, "that this agreement is sealed with blood. But that was the choice. That was the price of independence" (cited in MacFarquhar, 2014).

Ukraine's emerging mainstream narrative also associated Ukraine's European choice with an exit from "imperial Russia". The visa-free regime signed with the EU, Poroshenko argued, 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" (cited in RFE/RL, 2017). In 2019, Zelensky said that Ukraine inside the EU would mean "the death of the Russian imperial project" (cited in Financial Times, 2019). Thus, this was a broader Ukrainian understanding and not just advocated by a particular administration.

Another recurring theme after 2014 was that Ukraine was defending not only itself, but also European values and the European continent from Putin's aggressive ambitions. In Poroshenko's view, "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" (cited in Herszenhorn, 2015). Yuriy Lutsenko, a leading figure in the Poroshenko bloc, said that Ukrainians "are not just defending the Donbas. Putin does not need the Donbas, or even Ukraine. He needs Europe" (cited in BBC Monitoring, 2015). Arguments that European integration represented a fundamental component of Ukraine's survival and a civilizational choice had existed before 2014, but they had been a minority understanding (White & Feklyunina, 2014). In 2014, it became part of Ukraine's dominant foreign policy narrative.

The Zelensky administration confirmed Ukraine's pro-West strategic course, including membership of the EU and NATO. Deputy Prime Minister Dmytro Kuleba (foreign minister from 2020) declared that Ukraine would reject any proposal short of membership (BBC Monitoring, 2019). Zelensky signed a document "On the Strategy of Ukraine's Foreign Policy" prepared by Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, which confirmed Ukraine's westward orientation (BBC Monitoring, 2021). In Zelensky's view, the EU was not only Ukraine's main trading partner but "our key partner in restoring sovereignty and territorial integrity" (cited in BBC Monitoring, 2020). Thus, both the Poroshenko and the Zelensky administrations linked EU membership to Ukraine's survival and declared European integration irreversible.

NATO as a guarantor for Ukraine's security

As seen in previous chapters, NATO membership had been a contested issue in Ukraine before 2014. Political parties debated whether the goal of NATO membership would bring security to Ukraine or other solutions were preferable. Moreover, the majority of the population had been skeptical or unenthusiastic about the idea of NATO membership (see below). After 2014, Ukrainian politicians increasingly perceived NATO membership as both vital for Ukraine's security and urgent.

Ukraine's predominant narrative after 2014 articulated NATO as a "guarantor of peace and security" and a protector against Russian imperialism. In contrast, a hedging strategy (a multi-vector policy or non-bloc status), popular in Ukraine before 2014, and proposed by prominent realist scholars even after 2014, was now seen by a majority of Ukrainian politicians as a "deadly trap". As Poroshenko stated 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 (cited in BBC Monitoring, 2014).

Prime Minister Yatsenyuk viewed NATO as "the only vehicle" to protect the country since Putin wanted to "eliminate" Ukraine (RFE/RL, 2014b). He also argued that Ukraine should join 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 Lyashko argued that the result of Ukraine's parliamentary election in 2014 offered "a unique opportunity for the first time to get a Ukrainian parliament that would lead Ukraine to Europe and towards NATO" (RFE/RL, 2014c). Influential Ukrainian politicians called the decision to include the goal of NATO (and EU) membership as an amendment to the Ukrainian constitution a historic, irreversible and strategic choice (BBC Monitoring, 2017). Other key figures in Ukrainian politics promoted similar views. In 2014, for example, opposition leader Yulia Tymoshenko argued that NATO membership was a Ukrainian priority. Ahead of the 2019 presidential election, large billboards in Kyiv pictured Tymoshenko with NATO-friendly messages.[299]

NATO membership was a key goal for President Zelensky too, although he initially said that Ukrainians not in support of NATO first had to be "in-

[299] This author observed these billboards during a longer visit to Kyiv in the fall of 2018.

formed" about the advantages of membership, followed by a referendum (Talant, 2019). However, when early attempts to achieve peace with Russia failed, Zelensky's administration started to portray NATO membership as an urgent priority rather than a long-term goal. Early in 2021, Zelensky declared a NATO Membership Action Plan to be Ukraine's "immediate goal". He had a clear vision for what it could bring: "NATO is the only way to end the war in Donbas. Ukraine's MAP will be a real signal for Russia" (cited in Olearchyk & Foy, 2021). Thus, by 2021 Zelensky – initially labeled a "Russia-dove" by his opponents – was articulating a similar position on NATO as the Poroshenko administration.

Moreover, Zelensky reiterated Poroshenko's position that Ukraine deserved to be a member as it was defending sacred 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 underlined that Ukrainians were dying in the Donbas "for all the principles preached and upheld by NATO and EU leaders" (Zelensky, 2021b). The head of Ukraine's Office of the President, Andriy Yermak, likewise stated in 2021, "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 theme in Ukraine's dominant foreign policy narrative after 2014 was that agreements with Russia related to Ukraine's territorial integrity, such as the Budapest Memorandum and the Russian–Ukrainian Friendship Treaty, had failed. Ukrainian leaders stated that written agreements and pragmatic relations with Moscow had been unsuccessful – and in a sense useless – in guaranteeing Ukraine's sovereignty. Ukraine's Foreign Minister, Kuleba, for example, criticized Ukraine's earlier 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" (cited in BBC Monitoring, 2019). Moreover, Kuleba strongly opposed Russian demands for Ukrainian neutrality as a condition for ending the conflict in eastern Ukraine: "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 it articulated an urgency to speed up the process. A majority within the foreign policy

elite discredited Ukraine's previously popular strategy of pragmatic, close ties with Russia and neutrality instead of NATO membership. Although the Opposition Bloc/Platform still promoted the latter view, it became a minority position in Ukraine after 2014. Hence, the dominant foreign policy elite in Ukraine discredited the path realist scholars suggested that Ukraine take. As argued in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, my theory expects elites in states who have experienced a traumatic formative period to have an "existential" understanding of international politics. These understandings often discard pragmatism and compromise with an external "radically different other". We could observe a similar development in the aftermath of Georgia's formative period as well, both when Shevardnadze was president in the late 1990s and during Saakashvili's time in office in the 2000s.

Russia as an imperial radical other

A third important theme in Ukraine's foreign policy narrative since 2014 is the view of Russia as a radical other. As discussed in the theoretical framework, 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. Before 2014, politicians such as President Yanukovych argued that Ukraine should have pragmatic ties with Moscow and be a bridge between Russia and the West (see Chapter 11). President Leonid Kuchma also maintained quite close ties with Moscow in his delicate balancing act (see Chapter 7). Even outspoken pro-West politicians such as President Viktor Yushchenko called Russia "a strategic partner" (see Chapter 9). Moreover, before Euromaidan and the annexation of Crimea, the Ukrainian population generally held positive attitudes toward Russia and the Russian leadership (see below).

From 2014 onward, however, Ukraine's predominant foreign policy narrative identified Russia as a radically different other with imperial ambitions. In 2015, Ukraine approved documents such as the National Security Strategy of Ukraine and a Military Doctrine of Ukraine. According to a group of Ukrainian analysts: "These documents radically changed the perception of Russia from a strategic partner to a[n] aggressor state, recognized a long-term character of the Russian threat and the need for Ukraine to move towards joining NATO and the EU as the basis for security" (Ukrainian Prism, 2015, p. 13).

As mentioned above, Ukraine's strategic course toward the West was portrayed as a civilizational choice away from Russian imperial control. Ukraine's pro-West orientation was anchored and understood as a way to leave its colonial past behind. In Poroshenko's words, "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" (cited in Ronzheimer, 2018). At the Munich Security Conference in 2017, Poroshenko said that Putin "hates Ukraine" and "sees no place for Ukraine on the political map of Europe" (cited in Gutterman,

2017). Prime Minister Yatsenyuk called Putin "a new Russian emperor" who opposed the West and was on a mission to "collect lands". Furthermore, he claimed that the Kremlin had constructed a (nonphysical) wall that amplified 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 [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 a radical imperial other can be found in Tymoshenko's rhetoric. In 2014, she declared, "[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!" (cited in Erich Follath & 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 declaring Russia "an aggressor state" and the administrations in occupied Donetsk and Luhansk to be "terrorist organizations" (RFE/RL, 2015). The Ukrainian Parliament reiterated this understanding in a law adopted in 2018.

Relatedly, Ukrainian politicians articulated that no brotherly relationship existed between the two countries. In response to Putin's declarations along these lines, President Zelensky stated that the relationship "most certainly cannot be called 'brotherly'. After the annexation of Crimea and aggression in 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" (cited in Peel & Olearchyk, 2019). Zelensky made a related response to Putin's 2021 essay, which depicted 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 the civilizational choice of EU and NATO integration in order to leave the "Russian world" behind. Ukrainians would no longer accept living in what they considered a colonial relationship with Russia, the former imperial master. At the beginning, Zelensky's administration had a softer rhetoric vis-à-vis the Russian leadership, probably in an attempt to achieve peace. When negotiations stalled, however, Zelensky's team used similar arguments and presented the same red lines as Poroshenko (Kuleba, 2021). All the territory lost since 2014, including Crimea, had to be returned to Ukraine; Russia had to fulfill the Ukrainian understanding of the Minsk Agreements; and Ukraine

would achieve peace through strength – with a strong army, close cooperation with the United States and the European Union, and membership of NATO.

Public opinion from 2014: change in foreign policy attitudes

Finally, this chapter discusses Ukrainian foreign policy attitudes after the watershed moment of 2013–2014, based on surveys conducted by respected Ukrainian organizations. As discussed above, public opinion matters because it can constrain the foreign policy options leaders might consider. Figure 11.1 shows respondents' answers to which direction Ukraine should take in terms of political and economic partnership – the European Union or the Russia-led Customs Union (CU).[300]

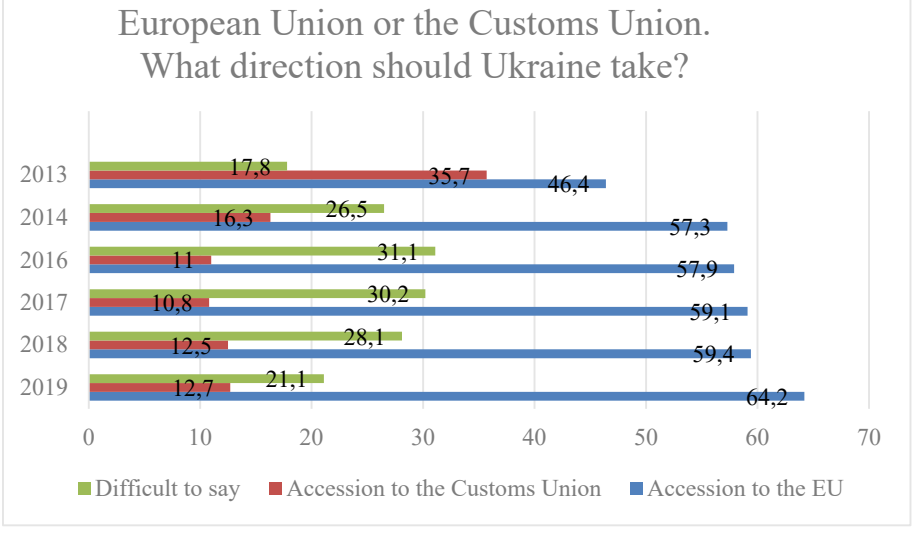

Figure 11.1. What direction should Ukraine take? The EU or the Customs Union, Year and support in % (DIF, 2020).

In late 2013, before the culmination of the Euromaidan and Russia's annexation of Crimea, a strong minority supported joining the CU, although support for the EU was higher. In 2014, support for CU had dropped from 35.7 to 16.3 percent and continued to decline somewhat in the following years. Support for the EU stabilized between 55 and 60 percent and reached over 60 percent in 2019. What is perhaps most notable is the reduced support for the CU in Ukraine's east and south. According to a survey by KIIS in February 2014, 73 percent in the east and 60 percent in the south supported joining the CU. In December 2014, only 35 percent in the east and 30 percent in the south (that is, in areas under Ukrainian control) supported accession to the CU. This drop occurred in the context of Russian media campaigns that tried to frame Russia

[300] The question is a bit ambiguous since respondents could interpret the EU alternative both in terms of membership and in terms of EU association agreement.

as a "protector" of Russian speakers in Ukraine's east and south. For a short time, Putin even promoted the idea of "Novorossiya" (New Russia) as a historical Russian land in Ukraine's east and south. Russian leaders apparently expected a massive regional revolt against Kyiv, but this did not happen (Pifer, 2021). In Ukraine's west and center, support for the CU fell from 10 and 24 percent to 3 and 7 percent respectively in the same period (KIIS, 2015).

Nonetheless, it is important to underline that many in Ukraine's east and south remained doubtful or skeptical about future EU membership. In 2019, a majority in Ukraine's west and center supported the EU, but support was lower in Ukraine's east (21 percent) and south (29 percent). In Ukraine's south, 23 percent preferred the CU, while 33 percent wanted to join neither organization. In Ukraine's east, 27 percent preferred the CU and 33 percent wanted to join neither the EU nor the CU (KIIS, 2019).[301] However, territorial loss meant that Ukraine's east and south had a smaller share of Ukraine's total de facto population than before 2014.

Figure 11.2 shows which alternative Ukrainians believed would best guarantee Ukraine's security. In 2012, non-bloc status (42.1 percent) was the most popular alternative, followed by a military alliance with Russia and other CIS countries (26.2 percent). Only 13 percent considered NATO membership the best alternative. In December 2014, by contrast, respondents considered NATO the best alternative (46.4 percent), followed by non-bloc status (20.9 percent) and an alliance with Russia and the CIS (10.1 percent). Ukrainian support for NATO membership varied somewhat between 2014 and 2021, depending on the organization and timing of the survey. Nonetheless, an overwhelming majority of these polls after 2014 showed that NATO was the most popular alternative for how Ukraine could achieve security. At the same time, regional differences were still present. For example, in surveys made in Ukraine's east (Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts) in 2016–2017, 37 percent preferred non-bloc status, 13–15 percent preferred a military alliance with Russia and around 30 percent supported NATO (Haran & Yakovlyev, 2017). In Ukrainian-controlled Donbas, around 35 percent supported non-bloc status, 15 percent a military alliance with Russia and 20–25 percent NATO. Although this study cannot do a detailed analysis of these figures, the surveys indicate that the territorial loss effect mattered for foreign policy attitudes in Ukraine. If Crimea and occupied Donbas had remained inside Ukraine (even after a conflict with Russia over these territories), support for NATO among the total Ukrainian population would probably have been lower.

[301] In 2020, support for the EU had increased somewhat but over 50 percent in Ukraine's east and south still preferred either joining the CU or joining neither the EU nor the CU.

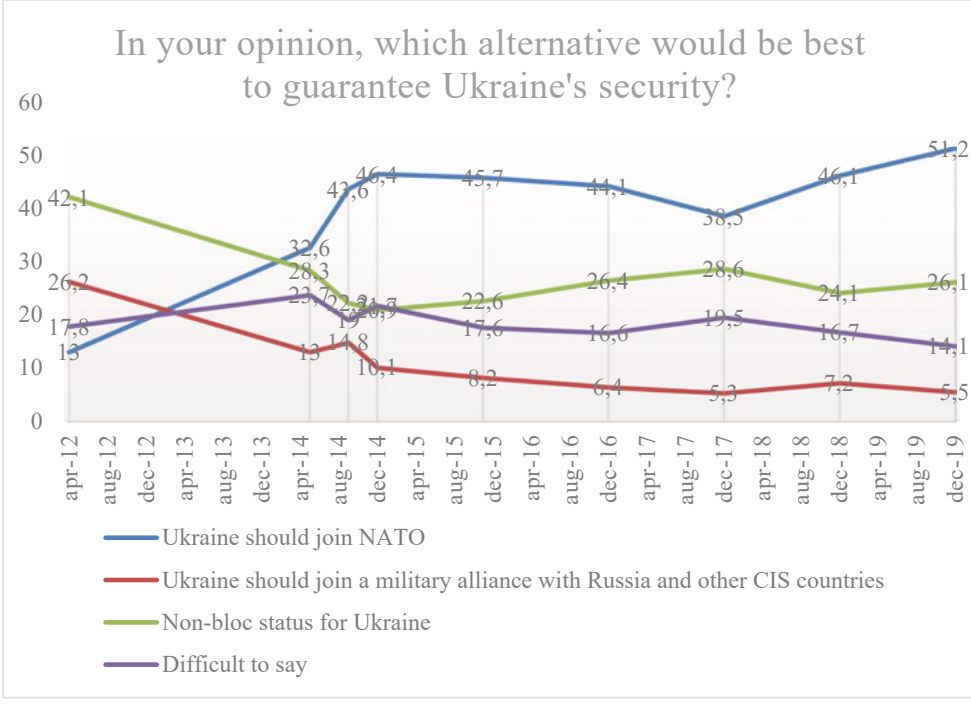

Figure 11.2. In your opinion, which alternative would be best to guarantee Ukraine's security? (DIF, 2019; Haran & Yakovlyev, 2017, pp. 123–124).

In a survey published by KIIS in December 2021, a few months before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, 67 percent of Ukrainians supported Ukraine's accession to the EU while 21.5 percent opposed it, and 59 percent supported Ukraine's accession to NATO while 28 percent were against it (KIIS, 2021b).[302]

Another dimension of Ukrainians' significant attitude shift after 2014 is approval of Russia's leadership (Gallup, 2019). In 2008, a majority (56 percent) of Ukrainians approved of Russia's leadership. In 2013, 43 percent approved while 31 percent did not. From 2014, a rapid shift took place in how Ukrainians viewed the Russian leadership—approximately 80 percent now disapproved while well below 10 percent approved.

Finally, Ukrainian attitudes vis-à-vis Russia in general declined after 2014. Before 2014, between 80 and 90 percent of Ukrainians had very or mostly good feelings about Russia. In December 2014, in contrast, only 34 percent of Ukrainians had very or mostly good feelings about Russia. The positive feelings increased in 2019 to about 50 percent, possibly because of the less intense military conflict and increased hope for peace at the time. In 2020, the positive attitudes fell again to around 40 percent (KIIS, 2021a). Such numbers could

[302] 9.4 percent were uncertain and 1.9 would not participate.

of course be considered quite high. However, it is important to keep in mind that the drop compared to before 2014 was dramatic and that many Ukrainians before 2022 probably associated Russia's Ukraine policy primarily with the Russian leadership and not with the broader Russian population.

Conclusion

Ukraine's pro-West foreign policy orientation stabilized after 2014. How can this shift be explained, given Ukraine's vacillation in foreign affairs for over two decades after independence? Chapters 10 and 11 have presented a fine-grained explanation of why and how Ukraine's pro-West orientation stabilized in 2014. The argument is in line with the dissertation's theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 2. External and domestic pressures resulted in a crisis and the choices made during this critical juncture had long-term consequences. The formative period produced legacies that stabilized Ukraine's pro-West orientation and cut ties with Russia.

The stabilization of a pro-West orientation was in part a result of a dramatic shift within Ukraine's political arena. The new formative period resulted in the collapse of the PoR. Moreover, the Russian occupation resulted in the loss of millions of core voters in Crimea and parts of the Donbas who had often supported more "pro-Russia" parties. In other words, the regional balance of power shifted against the part of Ukraine that had most strongly supported closer ties with Russia. Ukraine's political arena was in part still regionally diverse but without Donbas and Crimea, Ukraine came closer to a single center political arena than before 2014, and resistance to Ukraine's pro-West foreign policy decreased dramatically.

In this context, the collapse of the PoR and Russia's occupation of Ukrainian territory mattered. Let us imagine a counterfactual in which the Kremlin after the Euromaidan had abstained from occupying Crimea and parts of the Donbas in 2014. In that case, it is quite likely that a powerful Ukrainian political opposition to the pro-West orientation – backed by voters in the east and south –would have eventually re-emerged in Ukraine, just as it had in the past. Paradoxically, the Kremlin's actions in 2014 permanently weakened the parties in Ukraine that had supported closer ties with Russia and strengthened the pro-West foreign policy Moscow wanted to avoid. Thus, territorial change mattered for the stability of Ukraine's pro-West foreign policy after 2014.

The traumatic formative experience also stabilized and strengthened Ukraine's pro-West orientation. Political actors who already supported EU and NATO membership, or had been ambivalent, became much more determined to pursue a pro-West orientation after the traumatic and violent formative experience of 2014. Over time, most mainstream politicians stopped promoting a Russia-pragmatic policy, either because they did not consider such a policy legitimate, or because they feared being politically sidelined.

If we think of a counterfactual in which Russia's leadership had not occupied Crimea and parts of Donbas and instead 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. Russian violence and the occupation of Ukrainian territory firmly established Russia as a radically different other and strengthened the motivation for a majority of Ukrainian elites and society to take drastic steps to cut Ukraine's relationship with Russia. The significant increase in support for NATO membership is noteworthy and cannot be explained only by a loss of parts of the southeastern electorate.

To sum up, the shift in Ukraine's political arena weakened the opposition to Ukraine's pro-West orientation, while Ukraine's traumatic formative experience in 2013–2014 strengthened the motivation for the same foreign policy. Taken together, these factors produced a stable Ukrainian pro-West orientation after 2014.

12. Conclusions

This dissertation has explored the broader problem of how countries build external relations after imperial collapse. More specifically, the study has developed a theory to explain the foreign policies of Georgia and Ukraine up until 2021 – two countries that, after lengthy periods within empires, gained independence in the context of the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. In this concluding chapter, I discuss the dissertation's main findings, assess my theory in comparison with alternative explanations and outline my research contributions. After that, I take a step back to discuss the dissertation's broader implications and avenues for future research. Finally, I reflect on Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Revisiting the argument

In the introduction, this dissertation outlined three questions: Why has Georgia pursued a stable pro-West foreign policy for approximately 25 years? Why did Ukraine's foreign policy waver between the West and Russia for over 20 years? and What made a majority of Ukrainians unite around a firm pro-West foreign policy orientation in 2014?

This dissertation has underlined the importance of formative periods, especially the transition to independence, and how these short influential episodes generate contrasting durable legacies that shape a country's foreign policy. The central argument has been that these critical junctures generate durable legacies that are important for foreign policy trajectories. As presented in the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, the first is linked to the type of political arena that takes shape after independence – a single center or a multicenter political arena. The second concerns whether the formative period was painful or peaceful, and the role of the former imperial metropole in this process.

Chapter 4 explored important antecedent historical conditions. As might be expected from observing processes of decolonization in Africa, the Middle East and East Asia, policies and processes from the imperial era are important background conditions. Russian and Soviet imperial policies, such as the annexation of territories with diverse historical backgrounds, the Soviet Union's quasi-federal territorial system and the intense Russification of some regions

within the USSR, clearly had an impact on the Soviet republics. The Soviet nationalities policy also contributed to national awareness, which was visible in multiple periods in the USSR and most vibrant in the late 1980s. As a result, by 1989 Georgia and Ukraine were diverse entities with national movements, regional challenges and complicated relationships with Moscow. However, the two countries experienced different transitions to independence. Georgia's transition to independence was highly painful, which ended in violent conflicts and lost territories, and Russia playing a negative role. Ukraine, on the other hand, managed to navigate the transition to independence peacefully. Russia certainly put pressure on Ukraine and the stakes were high but, in part due to the accommodation of Ukraine's leadership, the transition to independence and its aftermath ended peacefully.

The outcomes of these transitional periods were not predestined in 1989. As discussed in Chapter 4, if we think in counterfactual terms, leaders and their allies in Georgia and Ukraine made critical choices at several points in time that, if chosen otherwise, could have taken their respective countries in different directions. These actors had to handle domestic and external pressures but the specific outcomes were not predetermined. Thus, theoretical expectations are that antecedent conditions, choices by leaders and contingencies matter during these critical junctures. A common objection to counterfactual arguments is that we cannot know for sure. However, without stretching the argument too far, we can demonstrate that leaders and their close allies had other plausible options, and that alternative outcomes are possible to imagine. Moreover, this dissertation has also presented a contrasting comparison between how leaders in Georgia and Ukraine acted during the transitions to independence and the differences between Ukraine's transition to independence and what this dissertation identified as a second formative period in 2013–2014. This approach strengthens the argument that other plausible paths were possible during the critical junctures.

Different political arenas and contrasting formative experiences

The subsequent chapters explored the legacies of these formative periods. As is argued in the theoretical framework, the structure of the political arena primarily influences the ability of a state to adopt a coherent foreign policy. Countries with multiple political centers that compete for power are more likely to experience political conflicts, polarization and gridlock. In other words, the theory expects strong political resistance to government initiatives and difficulties finding a consensus. Especially when political centers have contrasting connections to the former imperial metropole, questions related to the country's geopolitical orientation become part of the broader struggle for political power. The challenge is generally more severe if influential regions share a border with the former imperial hegemon. The theory predicts a greater possibility of reaching a foreign policy consensus in single center arenas.

The second legacy concerns the quality of the formative period: whether it was painful or peaceful and the role of the former imperial metropole in this process. The theory assumes that a painful formative period with hostile involvement from the imperial metropole, in this case Russia, would generate traumatic memories and lessons. Foreign policy elites then draw on these experiences and lessons when deciding on the country's foreign policy. Countries with painful and traumatic formative experiences are likely to turn away from the former imperial metropole. A violent formative experience casts a long shadow on what types of national interests and problems a country identifies as important. This experience also provides guidelines for identifying allies that can help to resolve problems. In contrast, the theory expects a peaceful formative experience and less antagonistic involvement by the imperial metropole to result in a more pragmatic relationship with that former metropole.

The case studies provide evidence for the legacies proposed in Chapter 2. These legacies played a crucial role in maintaining Georgia's pro-West foreign policy from the mid-1990s until the end of this study in 2021. In Ukraine, contrasting legacies established the conditions for an incoherent and fluctuating foreign policy until 2014. Chapters 5 and 6 explored how the legacies of these different transitions started to crystalize in the mid-1990s. For the Georgian elite and society, losing its most pro-Russian border regions was painful. At the same time, Georgia moved toward a single center arena, lowering the resistance inside Georgia to pursuit of a foreign policy away from Russia. Moreover, as my interviews with key officials reveal, the Georgian leadership's highly negative experiences with Russia during the painful, traumatic transition led to a decision to move Georgia away from Russia's perceived sphere of influence. This was partly an emotional response based on feelings of humiliation and pain. Given the West's limited interest in Georgia at the time and Russia's assertive behavior, it was a risky path for Georgia to take. Another lesson for Shevardnadze and his allies from the formative period was to present a stronger case to justify why the West should help Georgia.

Ukraine, by contrast, did not lose territory during its transition and incorporated multiple political centers into its political arena. Dnipropetrovsk and Donbas in eastern Ukraine, two crucial industrial regional centers in the USSR, strongly influenced Ukrainian politics. Elites and the population in several eastern regions generally supported close and pragmatic ties with Russia, which it is important to point out is not the same as supporting a union with Russia or being against Ukrainian independence. Western Ukraine, by contrast, with its different historical experience, consistently supported the least pro-Russian candidates and political parties. The multi-center arena placed powerful structural constraints on Ukrainian leaders. The political arena did not predetermine the approach taken by individual leaders, but it did constrain their actions. For example, Ukraine's second president, Kuchma, balanced different regional elites, oligarchs and voter constituencies to gain

power and remain in office. To accomplish this, he relied in part on using foreign policy for the domestic audience and played the "Russia card" in different ways. In 1994, he advocated closer ties with Russia and got support in eastern Ukraine. In 1999, he distanced himself from the pro-Russian Ukrainian communist candidate, advocated a pro-West orientation and received strong support in western Ukraine. After multiple government scandals, Kuchma, backed by the Donbas in eastern Ukraine, started to move back closer to Russia. Kuchma supported Ukrainian independence, but at the same time he and his allies had no problem cooperating closely with Russia when it was seen as necessary for political survival. Kuchma serves as an illustration of the limitations of the multicenter political arena but also demonstrates how a political leader can navigate within it, the result being an incoherent foreign policy.

Chapters 7 and 8 analyzed the Color Revolutions, which at the time were seen as transformative, and their aftermath. As argued in this dissertation, they led to a transition in power but had less of a transformative impact on foreign policy than many assumed in 2003–2004. The different political arenas and contrasting formative experiences continued to shape Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies.

Saakashvili and his allies continued on the pro-West path Shevardnadze had initiated in Georgia. Georgia's international orientation was thus more about continuity than change, even though Saakashvili strengthened Georgia's already vibrant relationship with the United States. Georgia's single center arena contributed to low resistance to a continued pro-West policy, which was further strengthened by marginalizing the political autonomy of Ajaria in 2004. At the same time, Georgia's traumatic formative period strongly influenced Saakashvili's primary goals. Saakashvili's agenda was in important parts a reaction to Georgia's humiliating formative experience and what had not been achieved in the 1990s. He wanted to become the founding father of modern-day Georgia, to unite the country and to strengthen the state and the army. The ambition of Saakashvili and his allies was to reverse the dire outcome of the early 1990s when the Georgian state had been on the verge of collapse and domination by Russia. The leaders of the Rose Revolution identified the United States as the key partner to achieve these goals and to stand up against Russia. Saakashvili's relationship with Putin started cautiously optimistic, deviating somewhat from the dissertation's expectations outlined in Chapter 2. However, when Russia showed limited interest in supporting Saakashvili in his goals to reintegrate the two breakaway regions, the relationship turned highly emotional and antagonistic, resulting in a war in 2008. From the Georgian government's perspective, Russia's persistent influence over the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was an act of grave provocation. In this regard, Saakashvili and his allies adopted a risky but, in their view, necessary approach in attempting to curb Russian control over these territories. The chapter demonstrates how a painful and traumatic formative period can shape

the foreign policy agenda of a younger generation that, in most cases, did not occupy senior positions during the transition to independence. Thus, one finding is that traumatic and painful formative experiences can influence the thinking of future generations.

In Ukraine, the Orange coalition's attempt to promote a steadfastly pro-West agenda was hindered by the complexity of the political arena. Yushchenko had a vision of a Ukrainian nation anchored in the West. The multicenter political arena, however, made it difficult to form stable coalitions and achieve the desired progress. Yanukovych and his allies, many of whom had origins in the Donbas in eastern Ukraine, remained influential and blocked political initiatives. When Yanukovych became prime minister, his government obstructed Ukraine's NATO process, forced Ukraine's pro-West foreign minister to resign and consistently criticized Yushchenko's Russia policy. The chapter also showed how the legacy of a peaceful transition can influence the agenda. Many of Ukraine's political leaders and parties supported pragmatic ties with Russia. When Yushchenko increasingly criticized Russia's actions in Ukraine and the region more broadly, this steadfast approach was criticized by the Ukrainian opposition. From this dissertation's standpoint, the pragmatic approach can be attributed to lessons on how Ukraine had successfully handled political conflicts with Russia in the 1990s – a strategy also used by Kuchma in the early 2000s. Ultimately, the Orange Revolution led to disillusionment in Ukraine and the West, and ended with Yanukovych becoming president in 2010. The Color Revolutions did not change the underlying logic of foreign policy. This dissertation suggests that the main reason for the continued pro-West stability in Georgia and incoherent and contested foreign policies in Ukraine after the Color Revolutions is that the legacies from the formative periods remained. Georgian leaders continued to be strongly influenced by the negative developments and interactions with Russia of the early 1990s and the Orange Revolution did not change the underlying balance of power in Ukraine's multicenter arena. Moreover, Russia abstained from using violence during the Orange Revolution, unlike ten years later.

Chapters 9 to 11 analyzed Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies in the decade before Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In Georgia, Ivanishvili, a billionaire businessman with a career history in Russia, founded the Georgian Dream Party, the main ruling party after 2012. It may seem surprising that Ivanishvili, with his background, rose to a leadership position in Georgian politics. Beyond Ivanishvili's wealth, this was probably a Georgian reaction to fatigue with the political practices of Saakashvili and his allies. As shown in Chapter 9, Ivanishvili seemed interested in the planned Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union. At the same time, he had to cooperate with strongly pro-West parties that were given important positions on foreign and security affairs. In Georgia's single center arena, there was no influential Party of Regions or Communist Party to support closer ties with Russia.

Moreover, Georgia's traumatic experience made it difficult to cultivate a relationship with Russia. Even minor events and initiatives in this direction were met with protests in Georgia and openly pro-Russian politicians quickly lost their appeal. Georgians had strongly supported NATO and EU membership for decades, and many assumed that giving up on these goals would mean allowing Russia to dominate the country again.

Chapters 10 and 11 explored how external and domestic pressures resulted in a major crisis and a new formative period in Ukraine in 2013–2014. While we must acknowledge the contextual and temporal differences between Ukraine's transition to independence and the new formative period of 2013–2014, it is still relevant to compare the periods. During and after the transition to independence, Ukraine's leaders used accommodation to manage domestic differences and protest. In contrast, Yanukovych and his regional allies from the Donbas tried to dominate Ukraine's multicenter arena after 2010. Another contrast was that Ukraine had avoided violence during the transition to independence. A violent approach had also been avoided by both the Ukrainian authorities and the Russian leadership during the Orange Revolution in 2004. In 2013–2014, the Ukrainian authorities used violence against demonstrators multiple times on a scale not seen before in independent Ukraine. As we saw in Georgia in 1989, the use of violence by government-controlled forces triggered a reactive sequence of increased nationalism and tensions within the country, a turbulent situation Russia later exploited. Finally, Russia under Putin responded differently to developments in Ukraine in 2013–2014 than Yeltsin had in the 1990s. At times during the complex negotiations, Yeltsin's administration took a firm position against Ukraine. However, the Russian leadership showed a readiness to negotiate and compromise with its Ukrainian counterpart. Putin, on the other hand, took a much more forceful approach, first in the negotiations with Yanukovych in 2013 and then by annexing Crimea and using military power in eastern Ukraine. In sum, the turbulent concentrated macro-episode in 2013–2014 led Ukraine down a different path than it had done in its first decades after independence.

As shown in Chapter 11, Ukraine's stable pro-West orientation followed a critical juncture resulting from several factors. First, Ukraine's political arena shifted closer to a single center, which lowered the resistance to turning away from Russia. The Party of Regions collapsed and, because of the Russian occupation, millions of Ukrainian voters who had previously voted for Russia-pragmatic parties no longer voted in Ukrainian elections. Second, the traumatic formative experience changed the way many in Ukraine viewed Russia and the West. The traumatic experience led many Ukrainians, both within the elite and in wider society, to reconsider the relationship with Russia, which was increasingly being perceived as a radically different other. It also strengthened the motivation to seek NATO and EU membership. These developments resemble Georgia's formative experience during its transition to independence, although Georgia arguably had fewer western opportunities in the 1990s,

and Russia's military force in Ukraine in 2014 was more overt and large-scale than in Georgia in the 1990s.

Alternative explanations

The dissertation has assessed the theoretical framework against alternative explanations. Realists generally assume that states are coherent on core national security issues and that small and medium-sized states without binding security guarantees, such as NATO's Article 5, must accommodate an assertive aspiring hegemon like Russia. In the realist tradition, smaller states can be seen as buffer states, for which neutrality could be an option. This understanding was evident in 2014 when leading realist scholars expected Ukraine to accommodate Russian demands, which implied that Ukraine would at least choose neutrality and avoid seeking membership of NATO and the EU. With a similar logic, Georgia, a small country that borders Russia and has no binding western security guarantees, would be expected to accommodate Russian pressure and to give up any future membership of NATO or the EU. Despite pressure from Moscow and limited western backing, Georgia's overall foreign policy between the late 1990s and 2021 remained firmly pro-West. My theory has emphasized how traumatic formative moments shaped dominant understandings within the country, leading accommodational policies to be perceived as highly illegitimate and emotionally loaded. What realists might view as a pragmatic approach for small states to handle the tragedy of great power politics (Mearsheimer, 2003) can be seen as unthinkable in light of traumatic formative experiences. While Ukraine's foreign policy had elements of pragmatism for decades, this was often not the result of a coherent foreign policy. As shown in this dissertation, Ukraine's foreign policy before 2014 was often incoherent and shifting. This was linked to domestic disagreements within its political arena and not mainly the result of a coherent long-term strategy.

Moreover, Ukrainian politicians who advocated pragmatic relations with Russia often argued that Ukraine's agreements with Russia and earlier pragmatic high-level diplomacy had resolved past difficulties with Moscow, and to provoke Russia would be unhelpful. However, when Ukraine experienced a traumatic moment with Russia in 2014, which also shifted the dynamics inside the political arena, its foreign policy turned firmly pro-West. A realist objection could be that neoclassical realists are better equipped to explain such deviations. Neoclassical realists have incorporated intermediate leadership and domestic variables to account for puzzling behavior. Nonetheless, in the long run, they assume that external pressures in the international system function in the way structural realists have outlined. In other words, over time, small and medium-sized states without firm security guarantees have to accommodate assertive regional hegemons such as Russia.

Other scholars and politicians have assumed that Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies are driven primarily by values such as democracy and the rule

of law. In line with these assumptions, the EU and the United States have spent billions of euros and dollars on democracy promotion to integrate post-Soviet states into the West. Moreover, many have interpreted events such as the Color Revolutions through this analytical prism. This dissertation does not claim that shared norms and values such as democracy and the rule of law are irrelevant. Shared values and norms are likely to have motivated activists and some politicians to ally closer with the West, especially as Russia has turned increasingly authoritarian. At the same time, as shown in this dissertation, leaders in Georgia and Ukraine have often been criticized for breaking with democratic norms and showing limited interest in the rule of law and reform, for example, when such behavior increases the chance of remaining in power. Measures of democracy provided by several organizations classify Georgia and Ukraine as hybrid regimes. Moreover, as shown throughout my analysis, when studying political leaders and their allies, other motives have often been more important in explaining Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies. Democratic norms are one factor that underpins pro-West foreign policies, especially in the civil society. It would be a mistake, however, to argue that shared democratic norms and values such as the rule of law were the primary explanation for Georgia's and Ukraine's foreign policies from independence until 2021.

Contributions

This dissertation contributes to debates on foreign policy in countries after imperial breakdown. As argued in this dissertation, it is important to understand that many of these countries are influenced by specific factors and conditions. These include antecedent conditions from the imperial era, such as imperial policies related to territory and nationality. In line with scholars like Jeffrey Mankoff, I have elevated the importance of regions and borderlands located geographically close to the former imperial metropole. Moreover, whether formative periods are painful or peaceful tends to offer contrasting lessons for state leaders and societies – lessons that can remain relevant for decades.

As discussed in Chapter 1, scholars have found that during the Cold War, newly independent states adopted both flexible and principle-based foreign policies. Researchers of the post-Soviet region have observed both approaches. This dissertation contributes to this debate by specifying the conditions in which we can expect principle-based or more flexible and incoherent foreign policies. This study argues that countries with a multicenter political arena or that have not experienced a traumatic formative moment with the former imperial metropole are more likely to have flexible and pragmatic foreign policies. Political leaders and foreign policy elites that have gone through a traumatic formative experience with negative involvement from the former metropole tend to have more principle-based foreign policies.

Foreign policy after empire

What can we learn from this study about foreign policymaking after imperial collapse? First, in many of these states, foreign policy tends to be connected with the consolidation of the nation and the survival of the state. As explored in this dissertation, foreign affairs are often interconnected with other vital questions, such as choice of political system, the status and use of language, and interpretations of history, religion and infrastructure, as well as more traditional military matters and diplomacy. Moreover, after an imperial breakup, the former metropole and the peripheries are often intertwined, making their relations complex and difficult to disentangle. This seems especially to be the case when the metropole and the periphery are geographically close to each other. This is probably one of the reasons why questions linked to foreign policy are often highly emotional in these contexts. Most people in countries such as Georgia and Ukraine want to be sovereign, and a foreign policy independent of Russia has been a critical manifestation of this aim. An independent foreign policy has not always implied being against Russia, but it has meant having the right to decide on foreign affairs without consent from Moscow. For the Russian leadership, in contrast, an independent foreign policy for countries such as Georgia and Ukraine has been seen as questioning Russia's perceived right to a sphere of influence and, in the final analysis, what Putin and his allies consider to be at the heart of what Russia is and should be. Unsurprisingly, as explored in this dissertation, these fundamental differences have resulted in strong emotional responses connected to foreign policy decisions, in both Georgia and Ukraine, as well as in Russia.

As discussed in the introduction, powers like Russia, China, Turkey, Iran and other former metropoles such as France or the United States continue to have complex relationships with their former peripheries and in their perceived regions of influence. This connects to a broader discussion of how smaller states handle relations with the former metropole while remaining independent and consolidating their nations. Foreign policy can be one instrument to handle this challenge, for example, by building relations with other external powers. States with a history within empire in the former Soviet Union, the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere have to find their international roles and become recognized as independent actors by the international community. As seen in this study, the collective West quickly recognized the independence of countries like Georgia and Ukraine in a legal sense. However, in several countries it has taken much longer to start treating these states as separate from the interests of Russia. For all the reasons discussed above, foreign policy after empire is in many ways different from foreign policy in countries with a long history of independence. These differences are important to consider when building theories that explain foreign policymaking and international orientations in these contexts.

Advantages of shifting perspective to small and medium-sized states

In the context of the Kremlin's increasingly forceful actions, many scholars have focused on explaining the motives of Putin and his allies. Researchers have explored why Russia tries to dominate what it considers to be its near abroad. In contrast, this dissertation has analyzed the foreign policies of two of Russia's neighbors. What are the advantages of turning the perspective around and focusing on the outlook from Georgia and Ukraine, instead of placing Russia at the center of the analysis?

To start with, it is important from a normative standpoint. In many statements, Putin and his allies have repeatedly denied the existence of Ukraine and argued that it is an artificial state. Relatedly, a discussion is currently unfolding in academia that is critical of the dominant place of Russia in understanding the broader region. An ambition of this dissertation has been to contribute to the increasing number of scholarly works that put countries such as Georgia and Ukraine at the center. Such an approach enriches our understanding of international politics in the region. As we have seen throughout this study, Russia and the West play important roles in how the countries of the region develop, but it is evident that neither Russia nor the West has been in control of developments in Georgia and Ukraine. Despite many attempts and an advantage in military and economic power, Russia has not managed to control events, as illustrated by the Color Revolutions, Euromaidan and the foreign policies of Georgia and Ukraine. Russia's wars, first against Georgia in 2008 and then against Ukraine since 2014, indicate that Russia's previous attempts to control the countries have failed. Russia has not been able to subordinate Georgia or Ukraine. As shown in this dissertation, the goals and behavior of leaders and populations in these smaller countries are important to study, in part to understand what is going on in these countries, but also to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of international politics in the wider region. The more general lesson to be learned is that we need theoretically informed studies of smaller states in post-imperial environments to get a broader understanding of international politics in regions such as the former Soviet Union, the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere.

Foreign policy stability and change

In recent decades, scholars have debated the drivers of foreign policy change (Doeser, 2011; Gustavsson, 1999; Subotić, 2016; Tsygankov, 2022). In relation to these debates, my dissertation underlines the importance of not only studying foreign policy change, but also studying the factors and mechanisms that foster foreign policy continuity and stability (See Goldmann, 1988; and Nilsson, 2015 for a similar view). As shown in my study, foreign policy patterns can be sticky. For over 25 years, Georgia's overall pro-West orientation

has been surprisingly stable, given the different political leaders in power and the changes in the external environment. Foreign policy continuity cannot be treated as a "normal" default category without need for explanation. As shown in this study, Ukraine experienced what can be termed chronic foreign policy instability until 2014. Only when pressures resulted in a critical juncture in 2013–2014 did Ukraine's pattern change to a stable pro-West orientation. Future research could seek inspiration from my theoretical framework, and also explore what other potential factors and mechanisms facilitate foreign policy stability and change. When it comes to foreign policy change, this study has emphasized discontinuous change – in other words, a shorter period of innovation – that puts a country on a distinct track that is difficult to reverse. This can be contrasted with gradual foreign policy change. Scholars comparing countries over decades of independence could therefore seek to identify different types of change: discontinuous change, chronic instability and gradual foreign policy change, as well as foreign policy stabilizers.

Avenues for future research

Where should we go from here? The purpose of the framework created in this dissertation has been to answer the questions asked in Chapter 1. The framework's basic idea – that critical junctures take place against the backdrop of antecedent conditions that result in contrasting legacies that, in turn, shape different foreign policies – is general enough to be explored in other contexts as well. The legacies proposed here regarding different political arenas and formative experiences are also general enough to inspire other studies. These could be explored in different geopolitical environments and in a comparison of different regions. To be useful, scholars need to take the following into account. First, we must acknowledge that there are different types of former imperial metropoles, some of which accept the new realities while others are more revisionist. The same former metropole may even act differently depending on its relationships with different countries in the former peripheries. Overall, Russia has been a revisionist power that has not accepted the new realities after 1991, although its revisionism has taken a variety of forms in different countries. Other former metropoles may have behaved differently, which is worth exploring. Second, the cleavages that are important within the political arena may differ. Given the importance of regions and territory within the Soviet Union, this dissertation has emphasized the significance of regions in shaping different political arenas. As discussed in Chapter 2, regions and territory have been important for shaping political arenas in other parts of the world as well. However, in some countries, other cleavages, such as religion, class or ideology, may be more important. Third, the geopolitical context matters. Leaders in Georgia and Ukraine have had available alternatives when designing their foreign policies – Russia, on the one hand, and the collective

West, on the other. In other international contexts, geopolitical competition may be low or countries do not have two contrasting geopolitical projects to choose between. In other words, we can expect different dynamics depending on the geopolitical context. Scholars who want to explore the framework's usefulness beyond Georgia and Ukraine could use it as an inspiration to study other countries in the former Soviet region. In this region, we have countries that experienced conflict during the transition to independence (such as Moldova, Azerbaijan, and Armenia) and others that experienced a peaceful transition (Belarus). Other geopolitical contexts that could be interesting to study using this approach are countries in the Middle East, Africa or the former Yugoslavia. Naturally, the theory's usefulness in other contexts will have to be assessed by empirical studies.

Epilogue: Georgian and Ukrainian foreign policy in the context of Russia's 2022 war

On 24 February 2022, Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Only four days later, when Russian tanks rolled toward Kyiv, President Volodymyr Zelensky handed in Ukraine's application for EU membership. A few days later, Georgia filed its application for EU membership. After decades of discussion, these historical decisions were made in time of war. Experts predicted that Kyiv would fall to Russia within weeks but this scenario did not materialize. On the contrary, Ukraine's positions held and its army even pushed back the Russian military further than many had expected, although the war did not end. Ukraine and Georgia were included in the EU's enlargement agenda after the invasion. These membership processes are going to be difficult. However, just a few years earlier, the prospects for membership seemed unlikely due to enlargement fatigue in many EU member states. Ukraine also received substantial western military and economic support in response to the war.

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine will have long-term implications not only for Ukraine, but also for Georgia and other countries in the region. Following Russia's invasion, Ukraine confirmed its already strong pro-West orientation set out in 2014 and received candidate status for EU membership. Given the shifts in Ukraine's political arena and formative experiences in 2014, its firm pro-West orientation makes sense. It is possible that Putin realized that Russia's actions in 2013–2014 had put Ukraine on a permanent pro-West path. Although we do not know, this might have influenced Putin's decision to launch the invasion of Ukraine, as a last resort to block Ukraine's future integration into NATO and the EU. Ukraine's experiences in times of war will be a topic for future studies. It is evident, however, that Ukrainian society is undergoing a new, painful and traumatic experience in its modern political history, involving large-scale Russian warfare unseen in Europe since

World War II. Relatedly, Ukraine is unlikely to deviate from its pro-West course in the foreseeable future. As suggested by my theory, traumatic experiences tend to cast a long shadow on a country's foreign policy. To stop western integration would only be imaginable if a Ukrainian government was forced to sign an unfavorable agreement with Russia under intense pressure, for example, if western military support for Ukraine decreased significantly. Such an agreement could create obstacles to Ukraine's integration with the West. Russian-Ukrainian relations are likely to remain highly antagonistic even if the war comes to an end. As history has shown, countries that have fought fiercely against one another, such as during World War II, have, in some cases, managed to rebuild a constructive relationship. One key difference is that Germany, Italy and Japan were completely defeated in World War II. A scenario in which Russia experiences total defeat, on the other hand, seems unlikely. Even if Russia withdrew from Ukraine, it is possible that the current regime, or one with a similar worldview, would continue to rule Russia. If Russia refuses to take responsibility for the atrocities committed during the war and to compensate economically for the restoration of Ukraine, we can expect an antagonistic relationship between Ukrainians and Russians to persist for generations.

To become a member of the EU, Ukraine needs to carry out reforms, achieve economic growth and hold free and fair elections. These are complex tasks in wartime, something the Russian leadership knows very well. From this perspective, the Russian leadership has a strong incentive to continue the war to hinder the successful integration of Ukraine into the EU. In this context, the West's continued political, financial and military support is essential to ensure Ukraine's continued existence as an independent country. Western countries are likely to debate whether support should be used for new Ukrainian military offensives or primarily to defend the territories already under Ukrainian control.

After 2022, Georgia's population has continued to show strong support for EU and NATO membership and solidarity with the Ukrainian people. The 2022 war evoked memories of Georgia's own traumatic experiences with Russia. The Georgian government made a historic choice and applied for EU membership in 2022 but avoided being too critical of the Russian leadership, a continuation of the Georgian Dream government's previous approach, discussed in Chapter 9. Furthermore, the Georgian government was criticized by the EU for its lack of reforms and for its democratic shortcomings. This delayed Georgia's candidate status until the EU eventually approved it in late 2023. In 2024, the Georgian Dream government adopted a so-called foreign agents' law, quickly labeled the "Russia law" by the opposition, given its similarities with a law in Russia. Critics in the West and Georgia claim the law could be used to hinder the democratic process in Georgia. The Georgian government has formally maintained its goal of EU membership but has at the same time behaved in a way that strongly questions its real intentions. As

noted in Chapter 2, my theory is not deterministic, nor does it seek to predict the behavior of an individual leader. As argued, it is possible for leaders in single center arenas to pursue narrow foreign policy goals that go against the will of the popular majority, even though this is expected to be unusual.

Georgia's leader, Bidzina Ivanishvili – who is wealthy and has a different background to other Georgian leaders, and spent much time in Moscow in the 1990s – may go down this path. It is too early to tell at the time of writing. However, the Georgian Dream has not formally abandoned the goal of EU or NATO membership. Nor has it reopened formal diplomatic relations with Russia, which says something about the structural constraints the Georgian government apparently still recognizes. Moreover, adoption of the foreign agents' law resulted in some of the largest anti-government protests that Georgia has experienced since independence. It seems clear that the Georgian Dream prioritizes regime survival over democratic ideals, which is not surprising given the earlier discussions in this dissertation. The question, however, is how far the government is ready to go, since deviating from Georgia's pro-West path could trigger a strong reaction with unpredictable consequences.

To achieve European integration, Georgia will have to manage its difficult relationship with Russia and address two other significant challenges: improving its economy and strengthening democratic norms. As this dissertation shows, Georgia's political leaders and their allies have often used various means, including non-democratic ones, to consolidate political power. This could become an obstacle to successful integration into the EU.

NATO membership is another difficult issue, especially if Russia maintains control over parts of Georgian and Ukrainian territory. Experts who favor membership point to the example of West Germany, which joined NATO in 1955 long before the unification of Germany in 1990. However, it is uncertain whether NATO member states could reach a consensus on admitting Georgia and Ukraine as new members in the foreseeable future. If Ukraine obtained NATO membership during wartime, this could result in NATO members having to send troops to fight directly against Russian soldiers to demonstrate the credibility of Article 5. Few if any NATO members would be ready to take that risk. Again, Russia would have incentives to continue the war on some level and try to keep control of territories in the two countries. Georgia's and Ukraine's best chances of becoming NATO members would be if new leaders came to power in Russia; leaders willing to end the conflict with Ukraine and remove troops from Georgia and Ukraine. This scenario may seem unrealistic at present but cannot be ruled out within the next 10 to 20 years. At the same time, it is also possible that the conflict will continue for a long time. If the war continues, Ukraine and Georgia may have to seek second-best security options, for example, by signing multiple bilateral security cooperation agreements.

Broader changes taking place in the international system will also influence Georgia's and Ukraine's international outlooks. Notwithstanding their differences, China, Russia, India, Brazil, Turkey and Iran advocate a multipolar order with less western influence in world politics. During the war, Ukrainians have become acutely aware of these trends and intensified diplomacy to receive support not only from the West, but also from countries in Africa, Asia and South America. Russia, for its part, seeks support from China, Iran and North Korea. Moscow has also tried to revitalize long-standing partnerships from the Cold War era with countries in the Middle East and the Global South. Another example of multipolarity is Georgia's strengthened economic partnership with China in the past decade. These examples illustrate the increased complexity of diplomacy and alliance building compared to the binary choice between Russia and the West that dominated the first decades of Georgia's and Ukraine's independence. Nonetheless, we can assume that Russia and the West will remain the most important external actors for Georgia and Ukraine in the future. We can also expect foreign policy to remain as important for Georgia and Ukraine in the coming 10 to 20 years as it was in the first decades of independence.

Interviews

This section presents a list of all the respondents cited in this dissertation. All these elite interviews were conducted by the author. For a detailed discussion of elite interviews, see Chapter 3. I have added the important positions of these respondents that are relevant to this dissertation, but this should not be considered a complete list of the positions of each respondent.

Georgian respondents

Zurab Abashidze. Special Representative of the Prime Minister for Relations with Russia 2012-2024. Ambassador of Georgia to Russia 2000–2004. Tbilisi, 2019-04-24.

Giorgi Baramidze. State Minister for Euro-Atlantic Integration 2004-2012, Minister of Internal Affairs 2003-2004. Tbilisi, 2019-04-05.

Giorgi Bokeria. Secretary of the National Security Council 2010-2013. Advisor to President Mikhail Saakashvili. Chairman of European Georgia. Tbilisi, 2017-03-22.

Valeri Chechelashvili. First Deputy Foreign Minister 2005 – 2007. Minister of Finance 2005. Deputy Foreign Minister 1998 – 2000. Tbilisi, 2019-03-25.

Archil Gegeshidze. Chief Foreign Policy Advisor to President Eduard Shevardnadze, 1996-2000. Assistant to President Shevardnadze on National Security, 1994-1996. Advisor on National Security, 1992-1994. Tbilisi, 2019-03-14.

Nodar Kharshiladze. First Deputy Defense Minister 2009-2012. Tbilisi, 2017-03-11.

Batu Kutelia. Deputy Secretary of the National Security Council, 2011-2013. Ambassador to the United States, 2008-2011. First Deputy Defense Minister, 2007-2008. Deputy Defense Minister, 2006-2007. Tbilisi, 2017-02-24.

Petre Mamradze. Head of the Georgian State Chancellery, 1995-2007. Tbilisi, 2019-03-29.

Irakli Menagarishvili. Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1995-2003. Deputy Prime Minister, 1993-1995. Tbilisi, 2019-03-13.

Ghia Nodia. Professor in Political Science, Ilia State University. Tbilisi, 2019-04-18.

Vasil Sikharulidze. Minister of Defense, 2008-2009. Ambassador to the United States, 2005-2008. Tbilisi, 2019-03-22.

David Tevzadze. Minister of Defense, 1998-2004. Tbilisi, 2019-03-27.

David Usupashvili. Chairman of the Parliament, 2012-2016. Chairman of the Republican Party, 2005-2013. Tbilisi, 2019-04-22.

Shota Utiashvili. Director of Department of Information and Analysis, Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2004-2012. Tbilisi, 2017-03-20.

Nikoloz Vashakidze. First Deputy Foreign Minister, 2010-2013. Deputy Defense Minister 2009. Deputy Secretary of the National Security Council, 2000-2004. Tbilisi, 2019-04-04.

Temur Yakobashvili. Ambassador to the United States, 2010-2013. State Minister for Reintegration, 2008-2010. Washington DC, 2019-12-19.

Undisclosed

Georgian diplomat 1. Senior diplomat with working experience in the MFA for multiple governments. Tbilisi, 2017-02-06.

Georgian diplomat 2. Senior diplomat with working experience in the MFA for multiple governments. Tbilisi, 2017-03-10.

Georgian diplomat 3. Diplomat with working experience from the Geneva discussions. Tbilisi, 2017-02-21.

Ukrainian respondents

Kostyantyn Gryshchenko. Vice Prime Minister of Ukraine, 2012-2014. Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2010-2012 & 2003-2005. Ambassador to Russia, 2008-2010. Ambassador to the United States, 2000-2003. Foreign Policy Advisor to President Viktor Yanukovych. Kyiv, 2017-10-19.

Sergiy Korsunsky. Director of the Diplomatic Academy of Ukraine, 2017-2020. Senior diplomat. Kyiv, 2017-10-25.

Leonid Kozhara. Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2012-2014. Deputy Head of the Party of Regions. Foreign policy advisor to President Viktor Yanukovych, 2010-2012. Deputy Head of the Administration of the President of Ukraine, 2004-2005. Kyiv, 2018-10-23.

Oleksiy Melnyk. Expert on Foreign Relations and International Security, Razumkov Centre. First Assistant to the Minister of Defence, 2005-2008. Kyiv, 2017-09-25.

Volodymyr Ohryzko. First Deputy Secretary of the National Security Defense Council, 2009-2010. Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2007-2009. Kyiv, 2017-10-11.

Oleh Rybachuk. Chief of Staff to President Viktor Yushchenko, 2005-2006, Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine on European Integration, 2005. Head of Prime Minister's Office, 1999-2001. Advisor to President Viktor Yushchenko. Kyiv, 2018-09-25.

Borys Tarasyuk. Minister of Foreign Affairs, 1998-2000 & 2005-2007. First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 1994–1995. Ukrainian diplomat since 1975. Kyiv, 2017-11-02.

Oleksandr Sushko. Executive Director of the International Renaissance Foundation. Expert on Ukraine’s foreign policy. Kyiv, 2018-10-31.

Viktor Yushchenko. President of Ukraine, 2005-2010. Prime Minister of Ukraine, 1999-2001. Governor of the National Bank, 1993-1999. Kyiv, 2018-10-30.

Undisclosed
Ukrainian diplomat 1. Advisor to President Viktor Yushchenko. Kyiv, 2017-10-05.

Ukrainian diplomat 2. Senior diplomat with decades of experience of Ukraine's foreign affairs. Kyiv, 2018-11-02.

Other respondents

Per Eklund. Head of the European Union Delegation to Georgia. Stockholm, 2016-05-04.

Daniel Fried. US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, 2005-2009. US Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for European and Eurasian Affairs at the National Security Council, 2001-2005. Washington DC, 2020-02-03.

John Herbst. US Ambassador to Ukraine, 2003-2006. Washington DC, 2020-01-27.

Steven Pifer. US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, with responsibility for Russia and Ukraine, 2001-2004. US Ambassador to Ukraine, 1998-2000. US Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for Russia, Ukraine and Eurasia on the National Security Council, 1996-1997. Telephone interview, 2020-01-06.

Strobe Talbott. US Deputy Secretary of State 1994-2001. US Ambassador-at-Large and Special Advisor to the Secretary of State on the New Independent States, 1993-1994. Advisor to President Bill Clinton on Russia. Telephone interview, 2020-02-11.

Kenneth Yalowitz. US Ambassador to Georgia 1998-2001. US Ambassador to Belarus 1994-1997. Washington DC, 2019-12-20.

Undisclosed
EU diplomat. Worked with EU coordination in Ukraine, 2008-2013. 2016-05-03.

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