

# Diverging Voices, Converging Policies: The Visegrad States' Reactions to the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Jacek Kucharczyk and Grigorij Mesežnikov (eds.)





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HEINRICH-BÖLL-STIFTUNG

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## FOREWORD

The annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the launch of a hybrid war against Ukraine was Russia's answer to the revolution triggered by Euromaidan. The conflict continues to pose fundamental challenges for the European Union, and raises the question of whether the EU will maintain its commitment to the political and economic consolidation of those of its Eastern neighbours which aim to make sovereign choices based on the rule of law and democracy.

Although the EU has reacted to the conflict in a unified manner by imposing sanctions on Russia, statements made by certain European political leaders have undermined the public perception of European unanimity. Officials of the Visegrad countries, for instance, have been divided on certain aspects of the conflict.

In order to provide answers to the question of what narratives underlie the differing reactions of individual Visegrad countries, we asked our partner organisations to systematically analyse how these countries have dealt with the conflict in the light of historical experience, and with respect to public opinion, economic relations, energy- and foreign policy.

We would like to express our gratitude to the publication's editors and authors for their efforts and commitment. We hope that its findings will stimulate further critical and constructive debate on the perspectives and positions of the Visegrad Group and its role within the EU.

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Prague and Warsaw, December 2015



## INTRODUCTION

# The Visegrad countries have a stake in the success of a pro-European Ukraine

JACEK KUCHARCZYK – GRIGORIJ MESEŽNIKOV

The present publication is a modest attempt to analyse the diverse impacts of the Russian-Ukrainian military and political conflict on the V4 countries – on their domestic political developments, foreign policies, economies and energy policies. The conflict, which broke out in spring 2014 and affected international relations and the security environment in Europe and beyond, has several dimensions, both domestic and international.

The first dimension is domestic, intra-Ukrainian, mainly related to the country's social transformation, democratisation and internal reforms. After the USSR collapsed and Ukraine declared independence, the country embraced a post-Soviet oligarchic model of transition from socialism to capitalism – a model that undermined its socio-economic and human potential. Today, under the weight of dramatic events and the appalling consequences of external aggression, Ukraine has opted for a different, liberal-democratic model of transformation, with the prospect of participation in the project of European integration.

Almost ten years after the false dawn of the Orange Revolution, the events of 2013–2015 have been a breakthrough for the process of systemic political and socio-economic change, for the character and destiny of the independent Ukrainian state, its position in international relations and its participation in European integration processes. At the same time, these events have also affected the lives of ordinary Ukrainians in unprecedented ways.

Former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union in November 2013 sparked mass protests among the Ukrainian public in Kyiv and other cities, which the Ukrainians themselves called the "Revolution of Dignity". State power, represented by Ukraine's openly pro-Russian head of state, initially responded with brutal violence against the participants of protest rallies, and later (in January 2014) by adopting repressive laws which de facto changed the nature of the political regime from democratic to authoritarian. Ukraine's citizens refused to accept such a dictate.

Another important dimension of the conflict concerns bilateral Russian-Ukrainian relations. The conflict seems to have radically changed not only the relations between the two countries, but first and foremost the relations between two nations with longstanding experience of mutual interaction and coexistence, as well as many linguistic and cultural affinities. The rapid pace of events in Ukraine has brought to light the diametrically opposing views and attitudes of political elites and substantial segments of the two countries' populations concerning their future coexistence.

The culmination of the violent clashes in Kyiv, accompanied by the shooting and killing of pro-democratic and pro-European protesters by members of special police units at the end of February

2014, resulted in President Yanukovich's decision to flee the country, subsequent Russian military aggression in Crimea, the annexation of part of Ukraine's sovereign territory, and the launch of a separatist rebellion in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions inspired and supported by the Russian Federation.

When looking at the outcome of the power struggle in Kyiv in February 2014, as well as the events unfolding currently, it must be concluded that the main motivation for Russia's aggression against Ukraine was the Kremlin's disagreement with Ukraine's shift towards the West. Implementation of the democratic reforms that would lead to the entrenchment of a liberal-democratic regime of the Western type in Ukraine and Ukraine's progress on the path of European integration (from the initial signing of the Association Agreement to the gradual accession process with the prospect of full EU membership) were perceived by Russia's leadership as a threat to its own power inside the country as well as to its geopolitical plans envisaging Ukraine as part of a Russia-inspired inter-state grouping, in which Russia would play the role of hegemon and the former Soviet republics would be relegated to the position of satellite states.

Another key dimension of the conflict around Ukraine is the response of the democratic West, particularly its reaction to Ukraine's strategic decision to join Euro-Atlantic integration projects.

It was obvious from the start that developments around Ukraine following the victorious anti-oligarchic and anti-corruption revolution (i.e. Russia's annexation of Crimea, a separatist rebellion and invasion by Russian troops in Eastern Ukraine) came as a surprise to the European Union and its member states. Indeed, European politicians seemed not to have reckoned with Russia's forced "re-unification" of Ukraine's southern peninsula, or with the possibility that the Kremlin would not be satisfied with this annexation and would go further.

It was evident that Russia's actions in Ukraine had plunged the West into a state of shock. Despite having no particular illusions about the Russian leadership's willingness to make "non-standard" decisions in foreign policy and international relations, the West could not imagine that in 21st-century Europe a country would be ready at the whim of its supreme leader to break all the rules and principles which underlie the entire modern system of international security and stability. Faced with the new reality, the West finally realised that it was not sufficient to simply make declarations of condemnation; it understood that the answer should be clear and coherent, and above all tangible, with respect to both the aggressor and the victim.

After a Malaysian civil airliner was shot down over Eastern Ukraine in July 2014, the EU imposed stringent economic sanctions on Russia and personal sanctions on a number of Russian elites. It was obvious that from that moment onward relations between Russia and the EU would be completely different qualitatively.

In the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the democratic West eventually took the position of supporting Ukraine's independence, territorial integrity and continuing democratisation and reforms. The dramatic events had served as a catalyst for intensifying communication between the EU and Ukraine with respect to the Association Agreement, and as a result this document was signed and subsequently ratified by Ukraine's parliament.

The nature and scope of the challenges that Ukraine is facing are incomparable to those of the challenges confronting the Central European countries after the fall of their communist regimes and amid the transformation process at the end of the 1980s. Ukraine today is exposed to diverse threats – from overall political destabilisation due to persistent separatist activities, to the ever-present possibility of an overt military invasion by Russia, to the occupation of a large part of Ukrainian territory, to de facto (or even formal, in some circumstances) loss of national sovereignty. No Central European country that embarked on a societal transformation after 1989 was faced with such overwhelming challenges.

It is therefore of utmost importance that in conditions of continuing struggle for the survival of the nation state, Ukraine successfully conducted democratic presidential and parliamentary elections, and ratified the Association Agreement with the EU. The norms and values on which the EU is built were also the main driving force and dominant motivation for Ukrainian civil society when it demanded a pro-European choice – both in internal reforms as well as in foreign policy.

In coping with difficult challenges, Ukraine will have to use mainly its own internal potential. It will have to employ various solutions to maximise the efficiency of its political, economic and civil capacities. Obviously, strong Western support for Ukraine's survival and development as an independent, united, democratic and stable country can play an important role in the success of the whole reform process.

For individual countries and politicians, attitudes towards Russia and its policies vis-à-vis Ukraine are a litmus test of respect for freedom and democracy. Does any country whose government disregards the values of freedom and democracy have the right to prevent another country from making the effort to join groupings of states built on these values? Does such a country have the right to define how other countries should proceed with respect to people who would like to share their destiny with them? For Western democracies, the answer should be clear, and this applies with particular urgency to the democracies of Central Europe, which have their own recent memories of domestic authoritarianism and foreign domination.

For more than a decade, the V4 countries have constituted an integral part of a united European and transatlantic community. These states have always manifested the inclusive attitude of an "open door" to the aspirations of countries in Eastern Europe, particularly those participating in the EU's Eastern Partnership programme (EaP). Ukraine is the largest country in the EaP and one that has immediate borders with the Visegrad region. It has developed remarkable economic, political and cultural relations with the V4 states. Ukraine's democratic political elite and civil society actors have made clear their hopes for support and concrete assistance from the Central European democracies. In the V4 countries, the events in Ukraine were met with strong interest, but no less interesting are the positions that these countries have taken in the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The use of the plural form "positions" here instead of the singular "position" is no accident: despite the fact that the V4 represents a relatively compact regional grouping which has traditionally been committed to speaking with one voice, this time they have failed to do so – including key politicians at the highest levels of power, including heads of state and government.

At the same time, one should note that as EU member states the V4 countries all endorsed the common EU position with regard to the sanctions imposed on Russia. They have fully complied with them and at the official level have supported Ukraine, its territorial integrity, and its right to defend itself against aggression. But there have been some important differences as well.

Since the beginning of the conflict, Poland has openly criticised the Russian leadership's aggressive policy and has advocated maintaining or even strengthening the sanctions against Russia. It has also shown more sympathy for the policies of the Ukrainian government, which is operating in the difficult conditions of external aggression. In addition, Poland has pressed for strengthening NATO's defence capabilities in the Central and Eastern European region.

Unlike Poland, the other three V4 countries – Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic – have not been particularly active in shaping the EU position with regard to Russia. Moreover, from time to time, certain high-level representatives of these countries have made statements that call into question their commitment to a single European position.

In this publication, the authors – Polish, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian experts – analyse the factors that have influenced the stances of the V4 countries vis-à-vis the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as well as the positions of individual Central European politicians. They trace the domestic political discourse, examine the formation of foreign policy towards Russia and Ukraine, and assess the conflict's impact on the individual V4 countries' economies and energy policies.

Whatever peculiarities one may discern in the V4 leaders' positions as a result of a thorough analysis, it is fair to say that in the end, despite all the differences, the V4 group has remained within the orbit of the EU's common policies on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. This is an undeniable reality, regardless of all the (often bizarre and incredible) statements made by certain Visegrad politicians. Ukraine should take this into account when building further relations with its immediate western neighbours.

Due to external aggression, Ukraine finds itself in a difficult situation, where even the worst scenarios cannot be ruled out. Nevertheless, a combination of several internal and external factors – the

holding of free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections, a radical change in the ruling elite, strengthened reformist forces, elevated public confidence in the need for reforms, increased activity on the part of civil society actors, the signing and ratification of the Association Agreement with the EU, strong international support, and the readiness of international organisations to assist Ukraine in its reform efforts – creates a favourable political situation for that part of Ukrainian society that is willing to develop and implement the necessary internal reforms, as well as for those foreign actors who would like to help – whether through direct support, advice or knowledge transfer. V4 countries can be instrumental here without any doubt.

Indeed, a favourable factor is the steady public support in Ukraine for the country's orientation towards closer cooperation with the EU, as the victories of pro-European democratic political forces in the presidential and parliamentary elections have clearly confirmed. Thanks to this, the "European way" as the overall direction of social development and as a foreign policy priority is garnering the necessary social and political legitimacy, and thus the country's official pro-European policy is acquiring a strong and imperative mandate. The V4 countries have a stake in the success of Ukraine's pro-European orientation and should do their best to advance it.

# CZECH REPUBLIC

# Domestic political context since 1989: Russia as a dividing element in Czech society

PETR KRATOCHVÍL – VĚRA ŘIHÁČKOVÁ

## 1. Introduction

Relations between the former Czechoslovakia, later the Czech Republic, and Russia have historically been very complex with several competing discourses present in the domestic debates. Direct exposure to Russian/Soviet influence, however, came only after the Second World War. The invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968 was a watershed moment when Russia/the Soviet Union replaced Germany as the country's single greatest national security threat. After 1989, when a new consensus on foreign policy priorities was formulated, it revolved around a "return to Europe" discourse, with accession to the North Atlantic Treaty perceived as the security guarantee of the country's independence. The Czech interpretation of the Russian Federation's role changed to that of an external "other", and a mere symbol of a violent past. Since the birth of the Czech Republic in 1993, two main narratives about Russia have been present in the Czech public sphere: Russia as a partner and Russia as a market. Naturally, the two narratives arrive at very different conclusions regarding the orientation of Czech foreign policy towards Russia. Ever since the Georgian War of 2008 and much more forcefully in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis, security concerns about the repercussions of events in Eastern Europe have been gaining the upper hand. At the same time, the resistance of pro-Kremlin forces in the Czech Republic has intensified, which has resulted in a strong polarisation of political elites, the media and public opinion.

This chapter is divided in six parts. First, it explores the historical ties between Russia and the Czech lands prior to and after 1989. Second, it presents a brief overview of ties between the Czech Republic and Ukraine, in particular the sizeable Ukrainian minority in the country. Third, it discusses the two basic political narratives of Russia: Russia as a threat and Russia as a partner. From this, fourth, a typology of fundamental political attitudes towards Russia is developed, which is then applied to the Czech case. Fifth, the chapter explores the changes in Czech public opinion regarding Russia, which is also related to the sixth part, on Russian propaganda in the Czech Republic.

## 2. The historical legacy: Pan-Slavism vs. Soviet domination

Relations between Czechs and Russia have historically been very complex, but the relationship evolved very distinctly from that of the ties between Russia and the Czech Republic's north-eastern neighbours (such as Poland and the three Baltic countries) since there had been little direct historical contact between the two peoples prior to the second half of the 20th century. The first consistent narrative regarding Russia emerged in the period of the Czech national awakening (the second half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century). In this period, the Czech language and Czech culture underwent a revival which aimed at making the Czech language both formally and informally equal



to the dominant German. A coalition of the smaller Slavic nations in the Austrian (and later Austro-Hungarian) Empire led to greater emphasis on Slavic unity and brotherhood, which gradually spilled over even to Slavic nations outside the bounds of the Empire, both in the south and in the east. Russia, as the strongest predominantly Slavic state, changed into a strongly romanticised “Slavic oak”, a natural ally against oppression by the German-speaking peoples of Austria and Germany (Kratochvíl, Kuchyňková, 2009).

While this notion was never transformed into substantive political relations with Russia, and real knowledge about Russia and its domestic politics remained limited, the overall perception of Russia as a natural ally of the Czechs did take root. Paradoxically, this superficial yet very positive view of Russia survived thanks to the distance of the Czech lands from the Russian Empire’s zone of influence. Unlike the Baltic countries, Finland and Poland, Bohemia and Moravia were never part of tsarist Russia with its censorship and suppression of opposition movements, and thus Russia was still seen in a very positive light after the end of the First World War, when independent Czechoslovakia was born.

The era of the so-called First Republic (1918–1938) was the first period when Russia and Czech/Czechoslovak attitudes towards Russia were contested politically. Many influential right-wing politicians (such as Karel Kramář) were radically opposed to the Bolshevik revolution and from the very beginning argued in favour of Western intervention in Russia that would destroy the new regime.<sup>1</sup> Czechoslovakia also became a place where many Russian émigrés found a new home and their views of Soviet Russia echoed this right-wing critique (Chinyaeva, 1995). On the other hand, left-wing political leaders saw Russia as a beacon of hope, replicating the old narrative of the period of national awakening that for Czechs, Russia was the example to follow. The mainstream, however, interpreted the Czechoslovak position as that of a bridge which itself was firmly anchored in the West but which, due to its cultural heritage as well as its geographic location, could play the role of a mediator between the West and the East, no matter what regime was in power in Russia at a particular moment.

Pro-Russian attitudes became even stronger around the Second World War. The first reason for this development was the so-called “Munich complex”, i.e. the Czechs’ deep conviction that they had been betrayed by their Western allies (France and the United Kingdom) and handed over as a sacrificial lamb to Hitler’s Germany (Slačálek, 2010). Russia/the USSR, on the other hand, was perceived as a country that was willing to come to the aid of Czechoslovakia but was prevented from doing so by the fact that the two countries did not share a common border. The apex in the positive assessment of Russia was the liberation of Czechoslovakia at the end of the Second World War, since the majority of the country’s territory was freed by soldiers of the Red Army. Interestingly, unlike the situation in certain other post-communist countries, discussions about the liberation/occupation of the country and the related debate over monuments to its Soviet liberators have never been a significant topic in the Czech Republic.

## 2.1. Breaking points

The decades that followed were, for the first time in Czech/Czechoslovak national history, a period of everyday exposure to direct Russian/Soviet influence and later (after 1968) to the military presence of the Soviet Army. It was also a time of great disillusionment and the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968 was a mortal blow to the Czech-Russian friendship. If a single point in time can be considered a watershed at which Russia/the Soviet Union replaced Germany as the country’s single greatest national security threat, it was the invasion and subsequent occupation of the country by the Warsaw Pact.

It is, therefore, hardly surprising that one of the first mottoes of the Velvet Revolution of 1989 was the call for the removal of Soviet soldiers from Czechoslovak soil and later on also the dissolution of the Warsaw Treaty. With this goal achieved on 21 June 1991, Russia has almost entirely disappeared

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1 On Kramář’s ideas, see Seton-Watson, 1937.

from the list of Czech foreign policy priorities. If Russia was mentioned in the 1990s at all in official documents, it was almost exclusively as an external “other”, as the symbolic representation of a violent past. Even in spatial terms, Václav Havel’s frequent invocation of the “return to Europe” relied on the implicit distinction between the authoritarian and backward Orient, often identified with Russia, and the Europe from which Czechoslovakia had been violently torn away but to which it “naturally” belonged (Vachudová, Snyder, 1996). The breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1993 and the subsequent rise of authoritarian tendencies in Slovakia during Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar’s second term (1994–1998) further underscored the then popular discourse on the distinction between the democratic West and the corruption-ridden East from which the Czech Republic needed to escape (Bútorá, Bútorová, 1999; Henderson, 2004). As a result, all Russia-related issues were defined in negative terms, the outstanding Russian debt to the Czech Republic being a typical example.

The Czech Republic’s consensus on the foreign policy priorities of the 1990s revolved around its accession to the North Atlantic Treaty, which was perceived as a security guarantee of the country’s independence, as well as around the prospective EU membership. The Russian attitude to these two goals differed substantially, and so did the Czech interpretation of the Russian Federation’s role. In the early 1990s, influential Czech politicians (such as President Václav Havel) believed that the new Russian leadership (Boris Yeltsin, Andrey Kozyrev and others) would see Russia’s communist past in similar terms as the Czech Republic did. Although the Czech Republic was a successor state of communist Czechoslovakia, its new political elites had distanced themselves from the communist heritage and firmly believed that they belonged to the Western community of democratic countries. Czech policy-makers were convinced that 1990s Russia would follow the same logic – while a successor state of the USSR, it too would strive to establish as close ties as possible with Western democracies. Indeed, soon after the 1989 revolution some of the new Czech leaders had called for the dissolution of both the Warsaw Treaty and NATO (“the end of bloc politics”) rather than for the unilateral dissolution of one as well as the accession of the post-communist countries to NATO.

## 2.2. Reconsidering the policy orientation

However, several events in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe led Czech politicians to reconsider their priorities. The unsuccessful 1991 coup in the late Soviet Union, the start of a series of bloody wars in Yugoslavia, and the First Chechen War were perceived as reminders of the fragility of the new European security order and of the need to obtain strong guarantees of national security. Hence, NATO membership became a much more attractive option. At first, Russia’s political leaders expressed a neutral stance towards this decision, but gradually, from the mid-1990s onwards, their objections grew in intensity. This attitude was reciprocated by the Czech Republic, as it was increasingly critical of attempts by Russian diplomacy to negotiate with the Western great powers (particularly the US) over the heads of the candidate countries, and thus unintentionally reviving the Munich complex among Czech policy-makers. The point of NATO accession by the first post-communist countries (the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland) in 1999, which was closely followed by NATO air strikes against Serbia, constituted the all-time low in relations between Russia and the newest NATO members.<sup>2</sup>

As critical as Russian diplomacy was of the Czech Republic’s NATO membership, it seemed, at least in the 1990s, that the Czech Republic’s accession to the EU would be less controversial. However, as the accession talks continued, Russia became more suspicious of the EU as well. In particular, after the first round of the Eastern enlargement and the inauguration of the European Neighbourhood Policy (in which Russia refused to participate), Russia began to see the European Union as just a softer version of the same expansionist Western tendencies and as the gradual yet continuous encroachment upon its zone of influence (Haukkala, 2008).

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2 For further developments, see Lopez-Reyes, 1999.

In bilateral terms, the first term of President Putin can surprisingly be described as a period of relatively smooth relations. The Kosovo crisis was over, the Czech Republic's NATO membership already a *fait accompli*, and its prospective EU membership did not yet seem to constitute a problem. During the past ten years, however, bilateral relations deteriorated quickly, both for internal and external reasons. The Russian wars in Georgia and Ukraine were perceived in the Czech Republic as belligerent acts on the part of Russia and, conversely, plans to establish a US military base in the Czech Republic were met with great suspicion and sometimes outright hostility from the Russian side.

### 3. Ukrainians in Czech society

The Ukrainian minority is the most numerous diaspora in the Czech Republic; according to the official statistics, there are over 120,000 Ukrainians living in the country (ČSÚ: *Cizinci v ČR...*, 2012). Representatives of the civil society organisation Forum of the Ukrainians estimates the total number at close to 155,000. The Ukrainians are clustered predominantly in the big cities: Prague, Karlovy Vary, Brno, Ostrava, and Děčín. The Ukrainian minority is officially acknowledged by the Government Council for National Minorities; two representatives of Ukrainian civil society in the Czech Republic participate in deliberations of the Council, which serves as an advisory body to the government.<sup>3</sup>

The developments that followed the failure to sign the Association Agreement with Ukraine at the Vilnius summit and the events on the Maidan naturally increased the activity of the Ukrainian minority, and the perception of the Ukrainian minority in the country has gradually changed as well. While before 2014 most of the Ukrainians were perceived by the Czechs as more or less qualified economic migrants – “zarobitčani”, after Maidan the identity of Ukrainians started to be perceived, as well as portrayed by the Czech media, in a more complex way. In relation to the position of a given medium (leaving apart propaganda tools) within the clusters identified below, references to the (lack of a) Ukrainian identity and historical determinants (“ownership” of Crimea, etc.) were presented from different angles.<sup>4</sup>

#### 3.1. A brief history of immigration

Historically, the experts identify four significant waves of Ukrainian immigration to the former Czechoslovakia and to the Czech Republic (Tesař, 2011). While the first traces of Ukrainians (people from the territory of Ukraine) on Czech territory can be traced back to the 16th or 17th century, the first significant wave of immigrants dates back to the turn of the 20th century, when Ukrainian students, soldiers and military officers from Bukovina and Galicia that had become part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were coming to the country together with seasonal workers (Zilynskyj, 2002). The first organisation of Ukrainians in the Czech lands was registered in 1902, followed by Prosvita, an organisation of Ukrainian workers established in Ostrava in 1912 (Tesař, 2011). The Ukrainian minority comprised both workers and intellectuals. The second wave of immigration followed the First World War, and in most cases was politically motivated after the defeat by Poland in 1919 and the annexation of Eastern Ukraine by Russia in 1920. In inter-war Czechoslovakia, the Ukrainian minority flourished and cultivated its language and culture with the support of the Czechoslovak state (Tesař, 2011; Zilynskyj, Kočík, 2001). Some of the immigrants were also Ukrainians from Carpathian Ruthenia, which

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<sup>3</sup> There are also funds for projects implemented by NGOs run by the Ukrainians residing in the Czech Republic.

<sup>4</sup> At the beginning of the Maidan events, the Czech media were rather slow to deploy correspondents on the ground, with the exception of public service broadcaster Czech TV (ČT) which was the first to provide live reporting directly from the Maidan, delivered by Josef Pazderka (Pazderka, 2014). The “reporting” from Ukraine thus relied heavily on secondary sources and the internet, thus enlarging the space for propaganda relating to Maidan and, later on, to the conflict in Donbas and the occupation of Crimea.

was part of Czechoslovakia from 1919 until the Second World War, whose “immigration” was mostly driven by economic opportunities in the heartland of Czechoslovakia.

The third wave is identified with the period between the Second World War and 1989. Conditions during this period were worse for the Ukrainians than before the war, however, as the socialist regime did not allow for Ukrainian schools or for the cultivation of the minority group’s culture or identity. For example, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was banned from 1950 until 1968 (Tesař, 2011). After 1989, a new wave of Ukrainian immigration was driven mainly by economic factors and facilitated, as in the case of the previous waves, by their linguistic, cultural and geographic proximity. Ukrainian cultural identity and community in the country have been reconstructed through quite a vibrant civil society,<sup>5</sup> the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, which operates in the Cathedral of St. Clement in Prague and elsewhere in the country, and cultural icons.<sup>6</sup> In terms of political life, Ukrainians established their national section of Civic Forum (Občanské fórum) in 1989 right after the Velvet Revolution (Tesař, 2011), although political activity on the part of Ukrainians as a group has been virtually non-existent in the Czech Republic since 1989.

For the social construction of Ukraine within the current Czech mind-set, another issue plays an important role. This is the ethnic Czech minority in Ukraine, whose roots date back to the second half of the 19th century. Due to a severe economic crisis in the Czech lands at that time and a lack of available agricultural land, a group of Czech families immigrated to the Volhynia region in Ukraine; almost 200 Czech villages were subsequently founded there. The issue of the “repatriation” of these Czechs back to the Czech Republic after the outbreak of war in Eastern Ukraine was vividly debated in the media and society during the course of 2014, and was played as a foreign policy card against the government by President Miloš Zeman.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.2. Community activism

The Ukrainian community in the Czech Republic has been very active since Maidan, organising public events including regular monthly Prague Maidan gatherings (<https://www.facebook.com/prague-maidanblog>) where donations for Ukraine have been collected in various forms – cash, clothing, equipment for internally displaced persons, and on an ongoing basis via other tools such as mobile donating, transparent accounts and standing collection campaigns. Various civil society organisations (e.g. Ukrainian Initiative in the Czech Republic) are also trying to raise public support for the Ukrainian cause via new social media, petitions and public actions (<http://www.proukrajinu.cz/>). The regular community publications have also reflected current developments, with special issues on Maidan events (*Ukrajinský žurnál*, <http://ukrzurnal.eu/cze.archive.html>) and regularly covering the conflict in the East. Public appearances by representatives of the community, however, are rather infrequent in the mainstream Czech media.

The Czech civil society sector has been active as well, delivering immediate support and supplies at the outset of Maidan. Organisations like People in Need and Charita ČR provided a rapid response and resources, and were present during the clashes in Kyiv. People in Need opened a field hospital that treated over 100 patients injured during the violent clashes at the beginning of 2014.<sup>8</sup> Concerts by Czech musicians and bands were also organised on the Maidan by People in Need in December 2013 (*Do Kyjeva přiletěly...*, 2013). Several petitions in support of Ukraine were organised by various

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5 This was accomplished by establishing civil society organisations, publication activity (like Ukgazeta.cz, etc.), theatre and volunteer work with the support of Czech institutions via various grants (Ministry of Culture, Office of Government).

6 An example is the presence of national poet Taras Shevchenko in Prague, where he published his uncensored collection of poems titled *Kobzar*.

7 The government is composed of Social Democrats (ČSSD), the ANO party and Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL); it entered office at the end of January 2014.

8 This support was facilitated thanks to donations via the People in Need Club of Friends, without the involvement of official state budgetary resources.

organisations and individuals.<sup>9</sup> In May 2014, over 60 Czech cities and municipalities put up the Ukrainian flag in a symbolic gesture of support for Ukraine (*Česká města vyvěsí...*, 2014).

## 4. Two narratives about Russia

Ever since the birth of the Czech Republic in 1993, two main narratives about Russia have been present in the Czech public sphere (Kratochvíl, Kuchyňková, 2009). The first, and historically the more influential, is the narrative of Russia as a partner. Building on the old images of Russia as a brotherly Slavic nation and a country with vast resources and huge economic potential, this narrative discards security aspects of the relationship and focuses instead on the view of Russia as a market. Although the EU is the key area of economic activities for the Czech Republic, and the vast majority of Czech foreign trade takes place inside the single market, this narrative argues that the country should diversify its economic ties beyond the EU, looking in particular to emerging markets and to the countries with which Czech companies enjoyed strong ties during the communist era such as the post-Soviet states, Vietnam, and the countries of the former Yugoslavia.

The other narrative underscores the instability and authoritarianism which emanate from Russia, and the negative attitude of Russian policy-makers towards the West, in particular the ever-present hostility towards NATO. Russia is consequently seen as a rival and a potential enemy. As important as economic ties with Russia are, relations with the country must be assessed primarily through the prism of security. Indeed, the Czech Republic's economic dependence on Russia and reliance on imports of Russian gas and oil are a liability which increases Russia's leverage over the Czech Republic's political decisions.

The two narratives arrive at very different conclusions regarding the orientation of Czech foreign policy towards Russia. For the former narrative, an increased Russian presence in the Czech economy (for instance, the once-discussed sale of Czech Airlines into Russian hands, Russian investments in the country's energy infrastructure, etc.) is to be welcomed, while for the latter such moves would only further increase the Czech Republic's vulnerability. The two narratives see the strengthening of the Czech Republic's security ties with NATO differently as well: for the first, such a move would be seen by Russia as a provocation, and would necessarily lead to retaliatory measures; for the second, the intensification of security cooperation with Western partners is imperative given the expansionist tendencies of Russian foreign policy.

In spite of all their differences, however, the two camps share more than they would admit. For example, both tend to equate Russia and Eastern Europe. Also in Czech official documents, it is always Russia that is given the utmost attention, while the other post-Soviet countries are not mentioned at all, or only in the context of broader EU policies. In other words, the preferred policies of both camps consist of strongly Europeanised relationships with the partner countries involved in the Eastern Partnership, and a less Europeanised bilateral relationship with Russia.

### 4.1. A typology of attitudes towards Russia in the Czech Republic

As indicated above, the two traditional narratives regarding Russian-Czech relations are those of seeing Russia as a market or as a rival. The periods of dominance of one or the other narrative have alternated quite regularly, mainly according to the interpretation of the strongest party in the government. The balance has started to shift in recent years, however. Ever since the Georgian War of 2008 and much more forcefully in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis, security concerns about the repercussions

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<sup>9</sup> For example, the public appeal "If we don't help Ukraine today, no one will help us tomorrow", convening certain figures of the hawks' camp. Available at <http://klubod.cz/souhrnna-zprava-o-vyzve-nepomuzeme-li-ukrajine-zitra-nikdo-nepomuze-nam/>, accessed on June 10 2015.

of events in Eastern Europe have been gaining the upper hand. At the same time, however, the resistance of pro-Kremlin forces in the Czech Republic has intensified as well, which has resulted in strong polarisation among political elites, in the media, as well as in public opinion, with a majority being rather critical of the Russian role in Ukraine and a very vocal minority defending the Kremlin’s policies.

Approaches to Russia and the Ukrainian conflict today can be divided into four clusters (see Table 1).

**Table 1. Typology of approaches to the Russia-Ukraine conflict**

	<b>Hawks</b>	<b>Multilateralists</b>	<b>Pragmatists</b>	<b>Friends of Russia</b>
<b>Russia seen as</b>	Enemy	Rival	Market	Potential ally
<b>EU sanctions</b>	Good	Necessary	Unfortunate, but necessary	Harmful
<b>The EU is doing</b>	Not enough	Well	Well	Badly
<b>Military aid to Ukraine</b>	Yes	No	No	No
<b>Party examples</b>	TOP09, ODS	KDU-ČSL, Part of ČSSD	Part of ČSSD, ANO	KSČM, Dawn
<b>Czech institutions</b>		MFA, MoD	PM Office, MoF, labour unions	The Office of the President
<b>Czech media</b>	Right-wing media such as Lidové noviny, Respekt	Media mainstream (MfD, Hospodářské noviny, public Czech TV)	Právo	Radical left and right media (such as Haló noviny)
<b>Personalities</b>	Former FM Schwarzenberg	FM Zorálek	PM Sobotka, Minister Babiš	President Zeman

**4.1.1. The Hawks**

The first of these groups, “the hawks”, is comprised of those who argue that radical action needs to be taken in order to stop Russia’s expansionist tendencies. And while EU sanctions are a step in the right direction, they are certainly not sufficient, and more needs to be done to protect Ukraine from Russian aggression. The measures the hawks typically propose range from direct military aid in the form of weapon systems deliveries to training soldiers and even sending soldiers or military advisors to Ukraine. As there has always been a strong connection between Czech hawks and conservative American policy-makers, they often stress that reliance on the EU is short-sighted and that closer cooperation among NATO member states is needed to frustrate the Kremlin’s policies. To speak more concretely, it is the right-wing parties such as TOP09 and the ODS which are the most vocal advocates of this approach. The influential policy-makers who belong to this camp include former Minister of Defence and Ambassador to Russia Luboš Dobrovský, TOP09 Chairman Karel Schwarzenberg and Senator Jaromír Štětina (who is one of three Czech politicians who has appeared on a Russian sanction list of persons prohibited entry into Russia). Although the hawkish position is a minority in the Czech political spectrum, the hawks have many supporters in the national public sphere. Several influential media outlets (such as *Lidové noviny* and *Respekt*) are among the most radical anti-Kremlin voices in the country. Also, several Czech non-governmental organisations, including the very influential People in Need, belong to this coalition.

**4.1.2. The Multilateralists**

The multilateralists have become very visible over the last two years. They rely heavily on the compliance of Czech foreign policy actions with the overall course of EU policy. As the current government’s key priority is to return the country to the mainstream of the EU, including the final acceptance of the

Fiscal Compact and renewed discussions about the introduction of the common currency, the multilateralist approach to the Ukrainian crisis strongly resonates with this overall tendency. For the multilateralists, the main argument starts from the claim that the Czech Republic alone wields only negligible influence on the EU's Eastern neighbours and for this reason the only viable approach to the conflict is close coordination among EU member countries. Additionally, the multilateralists often stress the influence of the transnational alliance of pro-Kremlin extremist parties (which includes, among others, the National Front in France, Jobbik in Hungary, and the Dawn party in the Czech Republic). As the Kremlin takes active steps to ensure support for its policies across the EU, EU member states must respond in a unified manner. The multilateralist position is clearly dominant at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with Minister Lubomír Zaorálek being the country's most visible representative of this position. Interestingly, while Minister Zaorálek's position is endorsed by the media (*Mladá fronta Dnes*, *Hospodářské noviny*, public Czech TV and Czech Radio), he has been under attack within his own party, with many Social Democrats being critical of his strong support for Ukraine.

#### 4.1.3. *The Pragmatists*

The defenders of the 1990s narrative of Russia as a market have, following the Ukrainian crisis, split into two camps – the pragmatists and the “friends of Russia”. The pragmatists, who are arguably as well-represented in the Czech public as the multilateralists, claim that although Russia is at fault for the Ukrainian crisis, corruption-ridden Ukrainian politics as well as rising nationalism in Ukraine are also to blame for the current situation. Hence, while the sanctions are among the very few tools the European Union has at its disposal, the logic behind the sanctions (to harm the Russian economy, leading to less support for the Kremlin's current policies) is fundamentally flawed, and the long-term consequences of these sanctions will be rather harmful. Instead of playing the game of great-power politics, the Czech Republic should focus on its own interests, i.e. on mitigating damage as far as its own economic ties with Russia are concerned. In practical terms, the advocates of this solution grudgingly agree with the sanctions, but they always express concerns over the economic fallout as well as the need to reassess the sanctions regime as soon as possible. As this view of the crisis is very widespread in the strongest two of the three coalition parties (ČSSD and ANO), the pragmatist view has become the hallmark of the current government. Both party chairmen (Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka of ČSSD and Finance Minister Andrej Babiš of ANO) are very vocal about their reservations regarding the sanctions, and both like to express their concerns about the damage done to Czech businesses. The position of the pragmatist group is rather surprising: first, very few major mass media outlets share this view, with the bulk of the newspapers backing either the hawkish or the multilateralist views. Second, not even public opinion seems to be in favour of this approach (see the discussion of opinion polls below). Third, as recent economic data show, Czech exports to Russia as a share of the country's overall exports are very low: in 2014, exports to Russia constituted only 1.9% of all exports (*Rusko: obchodní a...*, 2015). The circa 8% decrease recorded in 2014 thus translates into an insignificant 0.15% decrease in overall exports.

#### 4.1.4. *The Friends of Russia*

The smallest of the four groups is the “friends of Russia”, a non-transparent coalition of influential political and economic players with murky connections to Russia. The “friends of Russia” largely repeat the official Russian interpretation of events in Ukraine, namely that the country's current rulers are a corrupt fascist junta who want to destroy the fragile domestic balance in Ukraine. Russia's involvement in the conflict is only indirect; no Russian soldiers have been sent to Ukrainian territory and Russia's diplomatic pressure is merely a consequence of its concern for the oppressed Russian-speaking minority in Eastern Ukraine. EU sanctions are not only ineffective, but they directly contradict European interests, and their imposition is the result of anti-Russian pressure from the United States. The way forward for the EU is to acknowledge the annexation of Crimea and to terminate the sanctions regime. The most visible representative of this group is undoubtedly President Miloš Zeman. Although his motivations for supporting the Kremlin remain largely under-investigated, certain con-

nections are clear. There has been much speculation about the never-published financial side of his election campaign. His advisor Martin Nejedlý represents Lukoil Aviation Company in the Czech Republic and also allegedly serves as a mediator between the president and top Russian policy-makers. Another loyal long-term ally of President Putin is the Communist Party<sup>10</sup> (KSČM), whose members have strong economic ties to Russia and which shares the Kremlin's anti-US attitudes.<sup>11</sup> The "friends of Russia" also include several xenophobic, extremist or conservative groups whose motivations differ depending on which aspect of Russia's policies is attractive to them. For some, renewed Russian nationalism and implicit distrust of transnational integration (such as the EU) holds much appeal (Jana Bobošíková's Czech Sovereignty party, conservatives around former President Václav Klaus). For others, the common lines are their critique of "Western decadence" and homophobia (the D.O.S.T. movement), and yet others look to Russia as a centre of resistance against US hegemony (radical left intellectuals and journalists such as Martin Hekrdla).

## 5. Czech public opinion on Russia

As far as public opinion is concerned, two trends have been clearly visible in the last two years. First, the indifference of the population regarding developments in the post-Soviet space has gradually given way to more and more attention to the region. Second, the number of people who perceive Russia as a threat to national security has dramatically increased. In autumn 2013, about one-third of Czech citizens saw Russia as a threat. A year later, the figure had almost doubled to 66% (*STEM: Obavy z Ruska...*, 2014). Interestingly, while differences exist depending on respondents' political orientation (with left-leaning voters less concerned than their right-wing counterparts), even on the left a majority perceive Russia in negative terms (58% on the left, 64% in the middle, and 74% on the right). The last comprehensive opinion poll regarding attitudes to sanctions was carried out in September 2014 (*STEM: Obavy z Ruska...*, 2014), where only 48% of respondents declared they had some knowledge about the contents of the sanctions. 39% were against the sanctions, and 41% were in favour. The only political party whose voters were clearly against the sanctions were the Communists, with increased support for sanctions when moving from the left to the right of the political spectrum. The most striking finding was the contrast between the high level of concern regarding Russia and the overwhelming perception of its aggressive intentions on the one hand, and the unwillingness on the part of about half of the population to support the imposition of sanctions on the other.

### 5.1. Trumpets of pro-Russian propaganda

Russian propaganda is present in the country mainly via internet outlets and websites with obscure funding and ownership structures and anonymous staff, and via the public debate which contains elements presented by Moscow and its followers. Furthermore, there are active agents of this propaganda within Czech political parties – namely KSČM and other groups belonging to the "friends of Russia". However, there are also several politicians of the senior coalition party, the ČSSD, who promote information copied from the server Aeronet.cz, which was identified by the daily *Echo24.cz* as a propagandist tool after investigating its structure and funding. The ČSSD caucus that has close relations to President Miloš Zeman and which attempted to stage a coup against Party Chairman Bohuslav Sobotka after his electoral victory in October 2013, is led by Michal Hašek, Governor of the South Moravian Region. Together with Senator Zdeněk Škromach (ČSSD), the two politicians have repeat-

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**10** As one official interviewed for this paper noted, paradoxically, the Czech communists have not come to the realisation yet that there are no communists in Moscow anymore.

**11** For more details on this, see the regular foreign policy analyses produced by the Institute of International Relations in Prague, e.g. Kořán, M. et al.: *Czech Foreign Policy in 2013: Analysis*. IIR, Prague, 2015.



edly copy-pasted texts from Aeronet.cz into their Facebook profiles, drawing the attention of followers to the propagandist content.

Naturally, the number of propagandist websites has been gradually increasing since Maidan (*Ruská propaganda...*, 2015), as Russia considers the country fertile ground given the political cleavages over Ukraine and Russia with public opinion changing only gradually. In addition to the Czech version of the portal Sputnik (<http://cz.sputniknews.com/>), which is part of the Sputnik – formerly the “Voice of Russia” – news and multimedia agency funded and managed from Russia, there are mainly pro-Russian websites “reporting” on Ukraine that are also anti-US and anti-NATO. Furthermore, there are websites promoting conspiracy theories and websites promoting alternative and esoteric lifestyles that include news on Ukraine within a larger system of presented worldviews, as well as websites aiming at specific target groups (religious people, for example), providing a specific angle on the issue (attack on a monastery by Ukrainian troops, etc.). Out of the list of Russian-propaganda friendly websites provided by *Echo24.cz* on the basis of an investigation by Slovak activist Juraj Smatana (*42 českých a slovenských...*, 2015) in February 2015, there are currently 15 active websites in the Czech language working for this purpose.<sup>12</sup> The list is not exhaustive, however. The website Protiproud, for example, run by Petr Hájek, a former adviser to President Václav Klaus, which also publishes Russian-propaganda inspired articles on Ukraine, is not on this list. Besides the websites, there are also online petitions supporting the Russian position;<sup>13</sup> their impact is rather limited, however, and outside the focus of the major mainstream media.

## 6. Conclusions

No later than during the inter-war period, Russia became a divisive factor in Czechoslovak/Czech domestic politics and its public discourse. With the birth of the Czech Republic in 1993, two main narratives about Russia guided Czech foreign policy: Russia as a partner and market, discarding the security challenges posed by the country; and Russia as a rival or potential enemy, emphasizing the security aspects of the relationship. Since the outbreak of the Ukrainian conflict, the second narrative has been gaining the upper hand. At the same time, resistance by a very vocal pro-Kremlin minority in the Czech Republic has intensified, resulting in the strong polarisation of political elites, the media and public opinion.

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**12** The list includes [www.zvedavec.org](http://www.zvedavec.org); [www.ac24.cz](http://www.ac24.cz); [www.osud.cz](http://www.osud.cz); [www.czechfreepress.cz](http://www.czechfreepress.cz); <http://freeglobe.parlamentnilisty.cz>; [www.freepub.cz](http://www.freepub.cz); <http://vkpatriarhat.org.ua/cz/>; <http://svobodnenoviny.eu>; <http://afinabul.blog.cz/>; [www.ze-sveta.cz](http://www.ze-sveta.cz); <http://nwoo.org>; [www.vlastnihlavou.cz](http://www.vlastnihlavou.cz); [www.bezpolitickekorektnosti.cz](http://www.bezpolitickekorektnosti.cz); <http://pravdive.eu/index.php>; [www.aeronet.cz](http://www.aeronet.cz).

**13** For example, a petition titled “In support of the Russian Federation, against fascism in Ukraine, and for the right of self-determination of Crimea via referendum”, [http://www.petice24.com/na\\_podporu\\_ruske\\_federace\\_a\\_prava\\_na\\_sebeureni\\_narod\\_referendem](http://www.petice24.com/na_podporu_ruske_federace_a_prava_na_sebeureni_narod_referendem) (accessed 15 May 2015)

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# Foreign policy and external security: The diverging trajectories of domestic actors vis-à-vis the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

VĚRA ŘIHÁČKOVÁ

## 1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on Czech foreign policy in relation to the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. The period covered roughly corresponds with the new ruling coalition government, which entered office after the last general elections (October 2013). Czech foreign policy towards the rest of the EU's eastern neighbourhood has been proactive during the course of the last decade. Since the country joined the European Union in 2004, the need to find a foreign policy niche together with its own transformation experience sprinkled with Václav Havel's ethos resulted in defining a foreign policy with significant resources dedicated to the democratic transformation of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries (as well as that of the Western Balkans). The Czech Republic co-initiated the idea of the Eastern Partnership under its 2009 EU Council Presidency and was a proponent of the policy within a group of like-minded EU countries. The Czechs have also supported cooperation between Ukraine (as well as other Eastern Partnership members) and NATO, but membership aspirations have been a divisive issue. Ukraine has always been a priority country for the Czech Republic, considered a pivotal state in the Eastern Partnership area whose fate would to great extent determine the development of the rest of the EU's eastern neighbourhood.

## 2. Czech foreign policy after the last general elections

The period after the last general elections (October 2013) with a ruling coalition of Social Democrats (ČSSD), the ANO party and Christian Democrats (KDU-ČSL) has brought about several distinctive features in the area of foreign policy. First, the inevitable turf wars with President Miloš Zeman took place after the government came into office (January 2014). The clear divergence between the government's foreign policy line and the initiatives of the Office of the President persist. To some extent, President Zeman is building on the legacy of his predecessor, Václav Klaus, who enjoyed taking extreme positions on European integration, relations with Russia and climate change.

Second, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs led by Lubomír Zaorálek (ČSSD) has been aiming at a policy reset under the motto "returning to the EU mainstream". Although the start of the new administration was characterised by substantive ambiguity vis-à-vis the EU Eastern Partners and EU policies on Russia, these positions have gradually come into alignment with the EU mainstream and the "Group of friends of EaP" in the EU.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> A major issue related to the policy adjustment has been the clash with Czech civil society and media over Václav Havel's legacy in the area of democracy promotion and transition support.

Third, the political constellation of the government and significant developments within the coalition parties have not allowed for a bold foreign policy line. The senior coalition party, the ČSSD, is primarily responsible for foreign policy, but suffers from internal cleavages over Russia and Ukraine, thus offering and incoherent voice to its coalition partners and the public. The junior coalition member, the ANO party, which lost to the ČSSD by only a 2% margin in the general elections, has seemed indifferent towards foreign policy issues. Its chairman, Andrej Babiš, who serves as deputy prime minister and finance minister, initially considered foreign policy a secondary portfolio. The party used to have a very limited pool of foreign policy experts, but this began to change after the elections to the European Parliament in May 2014, when ANO delegated the task of preparing and running the election campaign to former Czech European Commissioner Pavel Telička. By exposing the party to Europeanisation in the European Parliament via membership in the liberal-centrist ALDE group, and with Telička taking over as the party's foreign policy chief after the last ANO party conference in March 2015, the party's positions have stabilised and aligned to a great extent with those of the ALDE group.<sup>15</sup> It is likely that the ANO party will keep raising its profile on foreign policy issues. Pavel Telička has already announced that ANO will ask for the post of deputy foreign minister for an ANO nominee in order to act as a bridge between the party's ideas and the execution of the country's foreign policy.<sup>16</sup> The third coalition member, KDU-ČSL, has played a stabilising role in the government from the outset, balancing out the ambiguous positions of the ČSSD and often the lack of a position on the part of the ANO party.

Fourth, despite the ambiguity of the foreign policy line on Ukraine and Russia, the Czech Republic has provided substantive financial and material assistance to Ukraine by various means since the beginning of the Maidan protests.

### 2.1. Ukraine as a foreign policy priority

Ukraine is considered a priority country in foreign policy documents both explicitly and implicitly: explicitly in specific strategies like the Export Strategy (*MPO: Exportní strategie ČR...*, 2015)<sup>17</sup> and the Transition Promotion Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*MZV: Program transformační...*, 2014); implicitly, Ukraine is mentioned within the group of Eastern Partnership countries in the new Security Strategy (*ÚVČR: Bezpečnostní strategie...*, 2015) and in the upcoming reviewed Foreign Policy Strategy (*MZV: Koncepce zahraniční...*, 2015, p. 10) which reads: "... the Czech Republic continues to support the EU Eastern Partnership; the policy has to better reflect the expectations of the partner countries and the EU has to adopt a differentiated approach. In relation to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia... the focus is on implementation of the Association Agreements (AA) and internal reforms. The Czech Republic will, in relation to the results, provide additional benefits, including economic ones, to those countries complying with the necessary reforms... in the long term, the Czech Republic supports the European choice of these countries."

The wording reflects the position adopted by the Czech Republic during negotiations on the EU-EaP Riga summit declaration, where the Czechs were pushing for a rather ambitious paragraph on the European future of (selected) EaP countries. To a significant extent, the 2015 Security Strategy reflects the lessons learned from the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and from the occupation of Crimea. The assessment concludes that there is a low probability of a full-scale confrontation with Russia, but acknowledges a significant decrease in security and stability on the EU's eastern borders. According to the document, a direct threat posed by Russia to one or more EU or NATO member states cannot be

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15 Despite originally divergent views, the ANO ministers were, for example, unanimously against President Miloš Zeman's participation in the military parade in Moscow on 9 May. See (Klaus je extrémní, 2015). Another explanation for enhancing the party's profile in foreign policy might be an effort to appeal to liberal urban voters.

16 It is not likely that the party will succeed, however, as there is a non-political deputy minister for ANO at the ministry, Martin Tlapa, who is responsible for economic diplomacy. Also, the fact the new law on public administration is coming into force is a significant obstacle, as the positions of public officials [in August 2015] are "being cemented" (source: interview with a public official).

17 Russia is also defined as a priority country in the strategy.

excluded either in traditional military terms or by means of hybrid warfare. A complex set of factors is identified as the cause of the rising ambitions of certain players (i.e. Russia) in the international arena (ÚVČR: *Bezpečnostní strategie...*, 2015, p. 8): "...one-sided attempts to build a sphere of influence through a combination of political, economic and military pressure, including the activities of intelligence services in cyberspace and elsewhere, can be regarded as threats. A gradual erosion of political and legal obligations related to the European security architecture is closely connected to these tendencies."

## 2.2. Changes in the Czech foreign policy paradigm?

During the course of the 2013 Vilnius summit, where President Yanukovich refused to sign the EU-Ukraine AA/DCFTA, as well as during the Maidan protests, the Czech Republic was governed by the interim government of Prime Minister Jiří Rusnok, which had been hand-picked by President Miloš Zeman.<sup>18</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was in the hands of professional diplomat Jan Kohout and kept a rather low profile ahead of the Vilnius summit, although belonging to a group of like-minded EU countries supporting a further expansion of the EaP policy. The Maidan events unfolded during the course of the change of governments, a process further influenced by President Zeman, who deliberately attempted to split the winner of the elections, the ČSSD, by assisting in an attempt to overthrow party leader and future Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka.

With the new government in office, the foreign policy line was defined by Minister Lubomír Zaorálek (ČSSD) and First Deputy Foreign Minister Petr Drulák. Both men co-signed an article published on 10 January 2014 in the daily *Právo* (Drulák, Zaorálek, 2014), in which they suggested that Czech foreign policy should "wake up after a period of winter sleep", and argued that no substantial foreign policy interests had been pursued since the country's accession to the EU. Furthermore, in their view, the country had given up on active involvement in shaping international relations in the past, mainly through its membership in the EU, UN and NATO. Over the ten years of its EU membership, the country had not been able to become accustomed to living in the new family of Western democracies. Ukraine, the Eastern Partnership and Russia were not explicitly mentioned in their appeal for enhanced engagement and for trying to "do things differently",<sup>19</sup> but the suggested policy reorientation had implicit consequences for the Czech positions on related issues.

After taking office, the new leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and on several occasions also Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka (ČSSD), embarked upon an ambiguous discourse of looking for alternative paths with respect to Russia ("sanctions are not a solution"), and of reconsidering the Eastern Partnership ("EaP could have been a faulty policy"). Such statements not only fell out of the EU mainstream, the declared direction of the new foreign policy line, but also ran counter to the country's previous positions. At the "Eastern Partnership Five Years On: Time for a New Strategy?" conference, planned by preceding Czech governments and their partners in order to keep attention focused on the EaP policy between the two EU-EaP summits (Vilnius and Riga) and held in April 2014 in Prague, Minister of Foreign Affairs Zaorálek stated the following in his opening speech (MZV: *Konference "Eastern...", 2014*): "... after five years, we can see quite clearly that the project of the Eastern Partnership needs a change. We cannot use the same models and tools that were used for the CEE EU enlargement. Eastern Partnership countries are at different levels of development, pursue different goals and differ in terms of their domestic political systems. It is thus necessary to take an individual approach with regard to their internal needs and conditions."

<sup>18</sup> In resignation at the time, the interim government had entered office after the collapse of the centre-right government of Prime Minister Petr Nečas (ODS) in July 2013.

<sup>19</sup> The article also calls for a redefinition of the policy of support for democracy and human rights, and in fact served as a trigger of the public clash between the new leadership of the foreign ministry and civil society practitioners of democracy promotion.

The position of First Deputy Foreign Minister Petr Drulák, a man considered by many to be the driving force behind the reorientation of Czech foreign policy, can be deduced, for example, from an interview for French daily *l'Opinion*. In the interview, Drulák stressed the importance of Russia for the Czech Republic and the need to develop a strategic partnership with Russia in future despite current tensions. He continued that the Czech Republic, though not directly threatened by Russia, is sympathetic with Russia's neighbours, notably Ukraine, but that the solution to the crisis must be peaceful and Russia should not be humiliated. On the other hand, he added, Putin's policy had been leading Russia to a deadlock (*MZV: První náměstek...*, 2014): "... this policy might seem to be efficacious, but it is quite irrational and dangerous for the country in the long term." He also openly suggested that Ukraine should not be offered the prospect of NATO membership.

Policy practitioners suggest that the Czech policy line on Ukraine and Russia has gradually stabilised within the EU mainstream.<sup>20</sup> The country supports the Minsk agreements and prolongation of the sanctions against Russia, and takes a clear negative stance on supplying weapons (of any kind) to Ukraine. Before the EU-EaP summit in Riga, the Czech Republic was part of the informal "friends of EaP" group supporting a more ambitious approach towards the EaP partners. In preparations for the summit declaration, the Czech Republic raised the issue of European aspirations and prospects for the EaP countries. While excluding membership, emphasis was placed on what the next steps after the Association Agreements should be. A joint economic area was proposed, with a feasibility study to be conducted on the issue by the EU in the coming years. At the same time, the Czech Republic was reportedly not supportive of wording in the declaration that would be too accommodating towards Russia, diverging at the Brussels level from the original positions voiced publicly by the foreign ministry leadership at the beginning of the government's mandate.

### 2.3. Ratification of the Association Agreement with Ukraine

The ambiguity of the Czech position and complicated political constellation within the senior coalition party (ČSSD) also manifested themselves during the course of the ratification of the Association Agreement with Ukraine.<sup>21</sup> Unlike the cases of the Georgian and Moldovan Association Agreements, which were ratified by both chambers of the Parliament in April 2015, and signed by President Miloš Zeman on 9 May 2015, the ratification process for the Association Agreement with Ukraine was stalled and protracted in the Chamber of Deputies.

The text of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement was presented by the government to both chambers of the Czech Parliament on 4 September 2014. While the upper chamber, the Senate, gave its consent to the ratification already on 10 December 2014 (*Senát Parlamentu...*, 2014), the Communist Party (KSČM) managed to effectively block deliberations on the issue in the Chamber of Deputies by preventing the item from being placed on the programme of the lower chamber's sessions. On 19 May 2015 – coincidentally the same day as an official visit by Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs Pavlo Klimkin to the Czech Republic and just couple of days ahead of the EU-EaP summit in Riga – thirty KSČM deputies vetoed the item's placement on the programme of the lower chamber's May session. Czech Foreign Minister Lubomír Zaorálek was criticised for not having ensured the presence of a sufficient number of government coalition deputies in the chamber to counter the manoeuvre (*KSČM zabrzdila schvalování...*, 2015).

Despite having voiced support for the treaty, the government coalition's major problem is likely not the Communist Party but rather the ongoing divide over the issue within the ruling ČSSD. For example,

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<sup>20</sup> Source: interviews with Czech civil servants in Prague and Brussels.

<sup>21</sup> The Czech ratification process for international agreements starts with the government proposing the treaty to both chambers of Parliament (the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate), where the proposal has to go through Organisational Committees, the first reading, and relevant committees. After the first reading, the proposal can be voted on or advances to the second reading. After the consent of the Parliament, the treaty has to be signed by the president and the prime minister.

ČSSD deputy Jaroslav Foldyna stressed his concern over the AA and suggested a declaration of the Chamber of Deputies be attached. In the declaration which he circulated on social networks and later published in the media, Mr Foldyna suggests that the treaty be understood as setting the conditions for a partnership, and warns against offering the prospect of EU membership to an "... indebted country with a population of 50 million where power is still exercised by corrupt oligarchs with private armies, and which suffers from the absence of an effective economy".<sup>22</sup> Deputy Foldyna stated in the media that he would propose the declaration for approval (*Asociační dohoda narazila...*, 2015): "I am trying to reach a deal with the chair of the ČSSD group in the Chamber. Without the attached declaration, I can hardly support the Association Agreement with Ukraine, and there are others for whom the attached declaration is the only way this treaty can be voted for."<sup>23</sup>

One of the KSČM deputies, Leo Luzar, also presented a draft amendment to the Treaty, which was accepted for further deliberation on 16 June 2015. The rather general resolution contains the following paragraph (*Poslanecká sněmovna Parlamentu...*, 2015): "... the building of a democratic state and the rule of law within the scope of European standards excludes any manifestations of extreme nationalism, xenophobia and fascism, albeit in historical context. The oligarchisation of society – the emergence of governing, economic and military structures without the will or mandate of the citizens – is a cancer of democracy. A thorough investigation and punishment of those who initiated the bloody clashes on the Maidan and in Odesa is a condition for rebuilding the trust of citizens in Ukraine and abroad." Similar discourse was present during the debate on the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement during the September (2015) session of the Chamber of Deputies, where the ratification by the Parliament was finally concluded. Out of 138 present, 107 deputies voted for ratification with 29 KSČM deputies against. The declaration suggested by ČSSD deputy Foldyna was rejected by the Chamber at the same time, when only ČSSD deputies and ANO group chairman Jaroslav Faltýnek voted for the proposal (*Sněmovna schválila asociační...*, 2015).

### 3. The role of President Miloš Zeman

The role of President Miloš Zeman has been disruptive to the process of forming a Czech foreign policy stance on Ukraine and Russia since the ČSSD, ANO and KDU-ČSL government entered office. While harming the credibility of the country in the international arena, his moves, paradoxically, very likely resulted in the government shifting its foreign policy line towards the EU mainstream.

A former prime minister for the ČSSD (1998–2002), Miloš Zeman won the presidential election in January 2013 in the country's first direct popular presidential vote. His affinity for Putin's regime was no secret, as well as his election coalition with the then President Václav Klaus. After leaving public service in 2002, he spent a decade seemingly out of public life in the Czech countryside. During this period, he grew close to businessmen with strong ties to Moscow who, some claim, have also influenced his pro-Russian leanings and facilitated his rapprochement with President Klaus ahead of the popular vote. Miloš Zeman's confidants Martin Nejedlý, head of Lukoil Aviation Company, and Miroslav Šlouf, a lobbyist, Zeman's former campaign manager back in 1998, and the man who brokered the deal for Russian Lukoil to supply Bratislava Airport with fuel, were also the primary financiers of the Party of Civic Rights.<sup>24</sup> The two men were part of his presidential campaign team, and Martin Nejedlý serves as one of the president's close advisers at Prague Castle.

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<sup>22</sup> The article contains the full version of the draft declaration.

<sup>23</sup> Deputy Foldyna continues his draft declaration by elaborating on the threat of agricultural products based on GMOs produced by US giants Cargill and Monsanto penetrating the EU internal market via Ukraine, building on Article 404 of the Association Agreement that calls for cooperation between EU and Ukraine in the area of biotechnology.

<sup>24</sup> This party served as the platform for Zeman's presidential campaign.

### 3.1. The president's stances on the conflict in Ukraine

President Zeman has been very vocal on developments in Ukraine. In his public speeches, he has dismissed the conflict in Eastern Ukraine as a "civil war" (*Na Ukrajině je občanská...*, 2014), denied the presence of Russian troops on Ukrainian territory,<sup>25</sup> and labelled Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk a "war premier". Consequently, he has been critical towards EU and US approaches, namely by denouncing the sanctions as ineffective and predicting that they will be short-lived.

The government's strategy to mitigate the impact of the president's statements was at first completely ineffective. Ignoring his statements or downplaying them as personal opinions, the government claimed the primary role in determining the country's foreign policy but did not argue against the statements. With the growing realisation that not only the image of the country was at stake but also the actual credibility of Czech foreign policy and its acceptance by the country's EU counterparts and the US,<sup>26</sup> the government changed course.<sup>27</sup> The tipping point seems to have been the president's suggestion that Ukraine should denounce its NATO aspirations and embark upon a process of "Finlandisation". He spoke of the "Finlandisation" of Ukraine on several occasions, for example during an official visit to Kazakhstan on 25 November 2014 (*President Zeman proposes...*, 2014): "... I'm glad that such a reversal [in attitudes towards Ukraine's NATO aspirations among EU member states] is gradually taking place. I was one of those who were targeted with relatively stupid aggression because of it, but I can now see this tendency is growing stronger. As far as Ukraine is concerned, my consistent opinion is that the country should be neutral and should undergo 'Finlandisation'."

All the representatives of the governing coalition parties, including Deputy Prime Minister Andrej Babiš (ANO), rejected the statement. Another push for the government came in the form of strong public protests against President Zeman during celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution in Prague. At the end of 2014, Prime Minister Sobotka began actively attacking the president's comments in public. He also acknowledged the failure to coordinate on the country's foreign policy line and that it meant running the risk of further alienating its EU and NATO counterparts. As a further step, the government restricted the flow of sensitive information from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to Prague Castle. In February 2015, a coordination meeting of the country's top constitutional representatives on foreign policy took place, involving not only the president, the prime minister, and the minister of foreign affairs, but also the chairmen of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies (*Sobotka: stojíme nad...*, 2015). President Zeman was asked to present his public speeches to the government before delivery so that the administration "can prepare", but also in order to monitor and pre-empt the president's moves.

The next clash over the country's stance on Russia, however, erupted with respect to the president's planned visit to the official commemoration of the end of the Second World War in Moscow, an event in which all EU leaders declined to participate. President Zeman agreed to take part in the celebration without consulting the government, which forced Prime Minister Sobotka to acknowledge to the media that coordination on foreign policy was not "working at 100%". He raised the issue at a government meeting, threatening to cut off funding to the Office of the President for such travel. The government finally managed to persuade the president to call off his participation in the military parade on 9 May and to shorten the visit (*Klaus je extrémní...*, 2015). In reaction to the planned visit to Moscow, US Ambassador Andrew Schapiro in an unusual move had suggested to President Zeman that he not to go

<sup>25</sup> Zeman also made this point at the NATO summit in Wales in September 2014.

<sup>26</sup> A US official had allegedly told the Czech diplomats (Czech President Miloš Zeman in war of words..., 2015): "We are ignoring [Zeman] so far, as long as his words do not become fodder for Russian propaganda."

<sup>27</sup> The statements made by President Zeman have actually been skilfully used in Russian propaganda. He also actively participated in an event organised by the Russian ruling elite, more specifically by Vladimir Yakunin, president of Russian Railways and a close advisor to President Putin, in Rhodes in September 2014. Here, President Zeman called for lifting the sanctions against Russia.



to Moscow. This sparked a clash between the US Embassy and Prague Castle. President Zeman stated for the media that "...the door to Prague Castle is now closed for Ambassador Shapiro" (*Americký velvyslanec rozzlobil...*, 2015). President Zeman's participation in the EU-EaP summit in Riga followed his visit to Moscow within couple of weeks, but the president stuck more or less to the mandate prepared by the government. In his briefing for the media, he suggested that Russia should consider participating in the Eastern Partnership and that Russia was "perhaps sorry" now for not exercising the opportunity to do so in 2009 when it had been invited to participate.

With respect to the divergent foreign policy positions of the government and the president, the Czech Republic is experiencing *déjà vu*. Despite the experience with President Klaus, the government was surprisingly slow to learn its lessons, and initially approached the issue with great caution. In order to identify the reasons why the government indulged the president's positions for so long without taking any active countermeasures, one can most likely find an explanation in party politics, in particular within the senior coalition partner ČSSD. Several reasons can be identified here: first, the position of Prime Minister Sobotka had been weakened as a result of internal splits that were not resolved in the wake of the attempted party coup following the general elections, and the dormant cleavages were slowly re-emerging. Second, the effort by Minister of Foreign Affairs Lubomír Zaorálek to reformulate the country's foreign policy doctrines went too far, alienating the media and a significant portion of civil society as well as foreign policy experts. In combination with the implementation of the Civil Service Act, Zaorálek's own ministry was put into disarray, resulting in a significant weakening of his position within the party. Moreover, as one Miloš Zeman's past intra-party opponents, Zaorálek had been in the president's sights. Third, the beginning of the government's tenure was marked by a lack of cooperation with the Parliament on foreign policy matters, and a failure to make effective use of its ruling majority to deliver on certain foreign policy goals. Fourth, some of the president's policy spins are actually helping to advance the government's agenda.

### **3.2. The case of repatriation of ethnic Czechs from Ukraine**

The issue of repatriating the ethnic Czech minority in Ukraine serves as an illustration of the last point. The image of dozens or even hundreds of Ukrainian Czechs striving to return to their home country out of fear of the deteriorating security situation in Ukraine was constructed artificially by the president, who, claiming that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had refused to set up a repatriation programme, stepped up as an advocate for the Czechs in Ukraine. By actively spinning the issue in early autumn 2014 in order to gain the upper hand in foreign policy matters, the president managed to generate artificial demand for repatriation. In early September 2014, there had been only three families from Ukraine seeking repatriation, according to Ludmila Muchina, head of the Czech National Council, an umbrella association for all civil society organisations related to the Czech community in Ukraine (*Zeman se přepočítal...*, 2015).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs resisted pressure from the president to take up the issue, rejecting his claims of the existence of a list of 232 applicants from Ukraine with which the president had escalated the issue in October 2014. Zeman criticised the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Czech Embassy in Ukraine for its alleged negative attitude towards the Czech community there, and asked the Interior Ministry to deal with the issue. He also presented documents that were alleged to have served as the basis for a criminal investigation at the Czech Embassy in Kyiv. The foreign ministry suggested that Ukrainian citizens with Czech roots could use existing channels to relocate to the Czech Republic, and that Czechs in Ukraine faced no imminent threat that would justify the expense of their mass transfer to the Czech Republic. Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka also voiced his concerns on Czech TV (*Zeman's intervention steps up...*, 2015): "Demands for repatriation could be used by Russia in its propaganda against Ukraine. But they could also complicate our relations towards Ukraine... It appears that many people want to be repatriated in order to avoid being drafted into the Ukrainian Army. So this is not an easy issue, and I would not want Ukrainian Czechs to become victims in a propaganda war."

In the end, however, the government succumbed to the pressure. A plan for relocating families with Czech origins from Eastern and Southern Ukraine was proposed in December 2014 by the Ministry of Interior.<sup>28</sup> The president had managed to manoeuvre the government into an awkward position. An interim consulate was opened in Odessa in February 2015 in order to manage the application process. Those who decided to relocate to the Czech Republic and whose Czech origins had been proved were guaranteed favourable conditions, with travel, accommodation and social services covered by the Czech state, and with an initial subsidy of CZK 50,000 (c. EUR 1,850) per adult and CZK 20,000 (c. EUR 740) per child. The budgetary costs for the operation were expected to reach a maximum of CZK 12 million in 2014 (*Stát chce pomoci krajanům...*, 2015), which was provided from the interior ministry budget. Overall expenses to date are estimated at around CZK 80 million, a number that cannot be verified at the moment but is asserted to be rather realistic.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, the government ultimately made use of the repatriation of Ukrainian Czechs and its budgetary consequences within the wider debate on immigration and EU quotas for refugees from Syria and Eritrea. Ukrainian Czechs were used as an argument to justify the Czech Republic's negative stance on accepting more immigrants from other countries. Blocking mandatory quotas for all EU member states, Interior Minister Milan Chovanec stated (*Plán B: vláda by...*, 2014): "We should look for a deal within the EU that would have the least consequences for Czech society." According to a source for the daily *Právo* (*Plán B: vláda by...*, 2014), the interior ministry had planned to fulfil 95% of the mandatory quota, if agreed to by the EU, with Ukrainian Czechs, as no specifications on the structure of admitted refugees were likely to be issued. "It is better to have Russified Czechs from Donbas here than to get Libyans, Syrians or Tunisians who are not necessarily Christians," added the source. The interior minister also acknowledged that the ministry was actively contacting potential applicants from Eastern Ukraine, as by law they must show active interest before any activity can start on the part of the Czech authorities. In this case, the policies of the government and Prague Castle turned out to be mutually beneficial.

## 4. Czech support to Ukraine

Official bilateral support to Ukraine in 2014 and 2015 comprises several elements based on long-term priorities (The Transition Promotion Programme) as well as immediate needs. During the course of the Maidan events, humanitarian assistance was carried out mainly by the Czech civil society sector. In February 2014, the government decided to launch the MEDEVAC programme, providing medical assistance and long-term treatment in the Czech Republic to 39 persons injured during the Maidan protests. The expenses for the first round of MEDEVAC amounted to CZK 17.5 million. At the same time, humanitarian assistance comprising medical equipment and instruments was sent to Ukraine via the Czech Red Cross, and additional support for internally displaced persons was released for the UNHCR in the total amount of CZK 8.5 million. The Transition Promotion Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a special call targeting Ukraine in 2014 with an overall budget of CZK 12 million. Projects supporting civil society and independent media with a maximum six-month implementation period were funded from the special call. In total, CZK 2 million was allocated to the Ministry of Education in order to provide full scholarships for 17 selected Ukrainian students from Eastern Ukraine and Crimea to pursue their studies in the Czech Republic in 2014 and 2015. Another several dozen Ukrainian students received short-term scholarships for six months to complete one semester at a Czech public university. CZK 550,000 was allocated to the NATO-Ukraine Logistics and Standardization Trust Fund, and as of November 2014 there is also an expert at the NATO Liaison Office in Kyiv

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<sup>28</sup> The Ministry of Interior has been headed by Milan Chovanec (ČSSD), one of the group of ČSSD members who plotted with President Zeman against Prime Minister Sobotka after the general elections.

<sup>29</sup> Source: interviews with civil servants in Prague and Brussels.

funded from the Czech budget (c. CZK 1 million). The Czech Republic also contributed CZK 3.9 million to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and is providing additional resources to cover the expenses of 16 Czech civilian observers in Ukraine. In addition, the Czech Republic contributed 2 experts to the EUBAM advisory group for the reform of the security sector in Kyiv. Overall bilateral financial support amounted to CZK 45 million (EUR 1.64 million) in 2014.<sup>30</sup>

For 2015, the Czech Republic has allocated over CZK 90 million (EUR 3.4 million), and overall assistance could reach up to CZK 100 million (EUR 3.7 million) if a second round of the MEDEVAC programme is implemented (this is currently planned), which will be used for humanitarian assistance and development activities (CZK 33 million, humanitarian projects, convoys with assistance, and equipment and training for the Ukrainian Red Cross – field hospitals and medical tents). Short-term stays for Ukrainian children with therapeutically oriented elements have been organised; in several rounds, over 90 children and 16 adults have taken part in the programmes (CZK 2 million). An additional CZK 2 million was allocated for scholarships for Ukrainian students in 2015. Official development assistance (ODA) to Ukraine should be increased by an additional CZK 8.5 million, with the total amount distributed by the Czech Development Agency for projects and tenders implemented in Ukraine amounting to CZK 23 million (reconstruction of public buildings, training of civil servants, total allocation for 2015–2016). The Transition Promotion Programme of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is allocating CZK 14.5 million for projects in Ukraine, of which CZK 4 million will be distributed via a call for proposals by the Czech Embassy in Kyiv. The Czech Republic also continues to support the NATO-Ukraine Logistics and Standardization Trust Fund (CZK 2 million) and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (EUR 346,750).<sup>31</sup> Further bilateral assistance is provided by the civil society sector, funded from public collections and other fundraising tools. The overall figure is not available, however.

## 5. Strengthening defence

In an effort to enhance the country's defence capabilities in reaction to developments in Ukraine, a proposal was tabled in the Chamber of Deputies in March 2014 by the vice-chairman of the Committee on Defence, Ivan Gabal, to increase the Czech defence budget by 1.3%, or in real terms by CZK 8 billion for 2015. Although the proposal was rejected, a debate on the state of Czech military capabilities was initiated. The defence budget had been decreasing over the previous ten years until reaching 1.08% of GDP in 2014, which violated the country's obligations as a NATO member. A debate within the coalition parties resulted in the adoption of an agreement on the defence budget (*MO: Smlouva koaličních stran o...*, 2014).

The document acknowledges the insufficient readiness of Czech defence capabilities to face the challenges posed by the changing security environment in the proximate neighbourhood. The government coalition undertook to raise defence spending to the level of 1.4% of GDP by 2020, while maintaining the defence budget at no less than the same level until 2024. The agreement also codifies an enhanced oversight role on the part of the Parliament over defence policies and the planning of strategic spending. In addition, the agreement contains items on implementation which include a public debate and support for the Czech defence industry.

Within the V4 format, a joint meeting of defence ministers took place in Tomášov in April 2015 (*Joint Communiqué of the Visegrad Group...* 2015) on V4 defence cooperation. The upcoming Czech Presidency of the Visegrad Group (2015–2016) should facilitate the only viable project of V4 cooperation in the defence area, the V4 battlegroup. Specified as comprising approximately 3,260 soldiers, it is planned that the Army of the Czech Republic will contribute 650 persons, and the core of the group

<sup>30</sup> Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

<sup>31</sup> Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic.

will consist of mechanised companies provided by the armed forces of Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, with logistical and medical (helicopter wing and medical facility) support. Of the eight modules within which the battlegroup will operate, it is planned that the Czech Republic will be responsible for the medical and logistics module. As in the case of any other battlegroup, operational readiness is expected to be reached within six months, with a potential deployment radius of 6,000 km from Brussels. A V4 EU battlegroup should be on stand-by in 2016, although a lack of funding could seriously limit the battlegroup's potential as the increased costs would have to be justified to the public of the V4 countries (Paulech, Urbanovská, 2014).

## 6. Conclusions

The Czech Republic is experiencing yet another period of rather ineffective foreign policy formulation caused primarily by internal divisions within the senior coalition party (ČSSD). Consequently, actors challenging the government's responsibility for foreign policy, e.g. the president, have had greater leeway to gain the initiative. Although the government has managed to mitigate the president's moves, damage has been done to the country's credibility in the international and EU arenas. Attempts to reformulate the foreign policy line after the 2013 general elections have succeeded only in part. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is entangled in internal struggles and reorganisations stemming from the new Civil Service Act.

Policy practitioners suggest that the Czech policy line on Ukraine and Russia has gradually stabilised within the EU mainstream. The country supports the Minsk agreements and prolongation of sanctions against Russia, and has taken a clear negative stance on weapons supplies (of any kind) to Ukraine.

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# Trade and energy – the conflict’s limited impact on the Czech economy

HELENA SCHULZOVÁ

## 1. Introduction

The impact of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the Czech economy has been a salient issue not only in connection with the economic sanctions imposed by the EU and Russian retaliatory sanctions, but also due to Russia’s weak economic situation and the huge volatility of its currency. The issue has been politicised in the Czech Republic and the main voice against economic sanctions has been the country’s president rather than any private company. It must be noted, however, that some representatives of industry, such as the Confederation of Industry, but also the Ministry of Industry and Trade, are more eager to support trade with Russia than other state representatives or interest groups.

Nevertheless, the overall impact of sanctions and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis on the Czech economy is not profound. The automobile industry, which represents the largest share of Czech exports to Russia, has been impacted most. Yet this is a consequence of the weak rouble rather than of sanctions. The impact on food producers has been limited, and only a handful of companies have been affected.

The most important issue by far in Czech-Russian trade relations is energy, since the country is still dependent to a large degree on imports of fossil fuels from Russia. Even though more oil than natural gas is imported, the supply of gas remains the larger issue since the transport of oil is generally more flexible. The Czech Republic also has a stake in the TAL consortium, and could therefore potentially make use of another source of oil.

When it comes to natural gas, the situation for the country is less positive, since the only possibility of diversification at the moment involves the transport route, but not the source. Yet even the possibility of using another transport pipeline increases the Czech Republic’s energy security. A long-term strategy for the further reduction of the country’s dependence on a single source of gas is to focus on EU energy policies and the proposed Energy Union, which is viewed as a way forward especially with the creation of a single market in energy. However, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and fears over energy security have probably also played at least a partial role in resurrecting plans to build new nuclear reactors in the Czech Republic.

## 2. Bilateral economic relations between the Czech Republic, Russia and Ukraine

Bilateral economic relations between the Czech Republic and both Russia and Ukraine suffered a dramatic change in the 1990s, when the Czech Republic underwent the process of integration into trade ties with EU member states (which now account for over 81% of the country’s exports; MPO, ČSÚ: *Zahraniční obchod...*, 2013, p. 25) and broke off the traditional trade relations of the Comecon system. Trade intensified again, however, after the Czech Republic’s accession to the EU. Russia is a relatively important trading partner for the Czech Republic, as in 2013 it was the country’s 7th-largest trading partner by turnover and its 5th-largest trading partner by imports (*Obchodní vztahy České...*, 2014).

Machinery is dominant in Czech exports to Russia, above all transportation goods – especially cars. In case of both Ukraine and Russia, the Czech Republic has a positive trade balance in this category. With respect to Czech exports to Russia, this category is followed by manufactured articles and “manufactured goods classified chiefly by material”, which covers goods production ranging from leather to metal and non-metal goods. The Czech trade balance is only slightly positive in the area of chemicals and related products. Czech exports of food and livestock as well as beverages are minor compared to other products. In 2013, these accounted for only USD 111 million, whereas machinery and transportation goods accounted for over USD 4 billion (*Rusko: Obchodní a ekonomická...*, 2015). Due to the large amount of fossil fuels imported to the Czech Republic from Russia, however, the Czech trade balance with Russia in this area is overwhelmingly negative (*Obchodní vztahy České...*, 2014). Imports of oil and gas accounted for over USD 5 billion of Czech imports from Russia, which totalled around USD 6.25 billion in 2014 (*Rusko: Obchodní a ekonomická...*, 2015). Also negative, mostly due to tourism, is the balance of services. As a result, the most salient issue in trade relations between the Czech Republic and Russia is by far energy (imports of fossil fuels from Russia) followed by Czech exports of cars and machinery.

The role of Ukraine in Czech trade is relatively minor. In the case of goods, it accounted for 0.9% in 2013, and in services the figure was around 1%. The trade balance was positive for the Czech Republic, which exported machinery to Ukraine (*Obchodní vztahy České...*, 2014), mostly telecommunication equipment followed by other machinery and cars (*Ukrajina: Obchodní a ekonomická...*, 2015). The 2014 decline of Czech exports to Ukraine is not only the result of direct impacts of the conflict in Ukraine, but also other factors such as omnipresent corruption in Ukraine at all levels of decision-making, as well as a general lack of transparency (Tlapa, 2015). Other reasons for the decline in Czech exports to Ukraine include decreased opportunities to secure financing for investments in Ukraine and difficulties in insuring exports bound for Ukraine, which makes doing business far too risky for most exporters (*Ukrajina: Obchodní a ekonomická...*, 2015).

**Table 1. Development of the trade balance between the Czech Republic and Ukraine in billions of CZK**

	Exports	Imports	Turnover	Balance
2010	17.9	20.8	38.7	-2,9
2011	24.4	24.8	49.2	-0,4
2012	33.4	22.3	55.6	+11,1
2013	32.4	23.5	55.9	+8,9
2014	20.6	23.8	44.4	-3,3

Source: <http://www.businessinfo.cz/cs/clanky/ukrajina-obchodni-a-ekonomicka-spoluprace-s-cr-19080.html>

The difference in trade with Russia in 2013 and 2014, when the sanctions were imposed, is substantial. However, it is impossible to differentiate between the direct effects of the sanctions, the weakening of the Russian economy and the dramatic fall of the rouble at the end of 2014, which had a profound influence on the solvency of Russian companies. The relatively minor effect of the sanctions on Czech exports (which declined less than imports from Russia did) can be explained by the fact that the sanctions do not target most of the traditional products traded by the two countries.

### 2.1. Who are the biggest losers? Food exporters and carmakers

The Russian ban on food imports was significant to only a handful of larger Czech companies, in particular Hamé and Madeta. Hamé had expected to sell goods in Russia worth circa CZK 900 million in 2014 (Pavec, 2014) before the ban was put in place. The company has significant production possibilities in Russia, however, which it plans to strengthen in order to offset the loss in exports of its Czech-made prod-



ucts (*Hamé kvůli sankcím...*, 2014). Madeta, the Czech Republic's largest dairy producer, has reported losses of circa CZK 150 million in connection with the sanctions. The company, which also argued against the sanctions and is now seeking state assistance, began focusing on the Russian market five years prior to the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis and ultimately sold approximately one-fifth of its products in Russia. Nevertheless, the minister of industry and trade has ruled out the possibility of direct compensation (*Ztráty Madety kvůli...*, 2015). Other companies have reported losses especially in connection with the weak rouble. For example, Fruko Schulz, a liquor producer, reported a decrease in demand for its goods in Russia after becoming less competitive compared to cheaper domestic products.

A very large decrease of 41% in the number of cars sold in Russia was reported by Škoda Auto, the Czech Republic's largest exporter. Again, however, this is largely a result of the weak rouble and record low oil prices rather than of the sanctions (*Ruský automobilový trh...*, 2015). Demand for Škoda automobiles even rose for a short period after the sanctions were imposed, and diminished in late 2014 as the overall economic situation in Russia worsened (*Škoda prodává v Rusku...*, 2014). The rate of the decrease in demand seemed to accelerate in the first months of 2015, and therefore will be visible in the trading volume for 2015.

In addition, Czech-Russian trade was burdened by unpredictability even before 2014. This is evidenced by the significant involvement of Czech state pro-export institutions, as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Martin Tlapa asserted in a newspaper interview (Tlapa, 2015).

The Czech Republic is among the countries where tourism has suffered the most among EU member states. It suffered a 10% decrease in the number of incoming Russian tourists (*Rusové vypouštějí Česko...*, 2014), which is also connected to a significant decline in the number of passengers travelling between Russia and the Czech Republic. Czech national carrier ČSA, which had focused on destinations in Eastern Europe and Russia, has reported a 20% decrease in passenger volume from Russia. Even worse, however, has been the reported 60% drop in demand for its flights to Ukraine (*Ztráta Madety kvůli...*, 2015). This has had an impact on route planning, and the company has begun to focus on finding new profitable routes inside the EU.

## 2.2. Czech business – a mixed message

According to PwC's annual CEO survey, however, the overall impacts of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict are not significant. In the survey, the CEOs of the 88% of Czech companies that participated claimed that the crisis has not had a significant effect on their businesses, and only 7% conceded to having invested in finding new markets to offset the losses caused by the crisis (Czech CEO Survey 2015, p. 8). Also, State Secretary Tomáš Prouza claimed in January 2015 that the effects are in fact negligible (*Ruský trh láká...*, 2015). A different picture is presented in a survey by the Confederation of Industry in cooperation with the Ministry of Industry and Trade, and the ministry released a report demonstrating that the sanctions have had a more profound impact on Czech exports. This survey is hardly representative, however, since only 71 companies out of the 700 who were invited to participate actually responded, and these admittedly have strong trade relations with Russia (Mostýn, 2015). Since the PwC CEO survey was not focused purely on Russian trade relations, but also other completely disconnected issues, it is probably more representative compared to the Confederation of Industry survey, which was purely focused on this issue and the companies that decided to respond were concerned *per se* about the economic impacts of the crisis. The report also acknowledges that a majority of the harm was caused by the volatility of the rouble.

In December 2014, Deloitte Czech Republic issued a report in which it predicted only a minor impact on the Czech economy: a 20% decrease in exports to Russia might result in a circa 0.15% drop in GDP (*Russia: The 2014 Financial Crisis...*, 2014, p. 5). The impact of the economic sanctions on Germany, whose companies often have Czech subsidiaries, might also have some effect, but in the EU-wide perspective the Czech Republic is not cited as one of the countries that might sustain economic harm in connection with the sanctions (and with respect to food products it is among the least-affected countries). The sanctions have also had minor-to-negligible effect on Czech unemployment (Kraatz, 2014), which remains the second-lowest in the EU (Eurostat, 2015).

**Table 2. Development of the trade balance between the Czech Republic and Russia in millions of USD**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2014/2013 (+/-)
<b>CZ Exports</b>	3,535.4	5,220.3	6,035.3	5,942.8	5,455.0	-8.2 %
<b>CZ Imports</b>	6,822.0	8,102.9	7,934.7	7,774.1	6,255.2	-19.5 %
<b>Turnover</b>	10,357.4	13,323.1	13,970.0	13,716.9	11,710.2	-14.6 %
<b>Balance</b>	-3,286.6	-2,882.6	-1,899.4	-1,831.2	-800.2	-

Source: <http://www.businessinfo.cz/cs/clanky/rusko-obchodni-a-ekonomicka-spoluprace-s-cr-19086.html>

As much as Czech leaders were initially sceptical about economic sanctions, their greatest concern seemed to be the country's potential economic losses. In early 2014, the Czech Republic was recovering from a long economic recession and fears were widespread that economic sanctions might have a devastating effect on the country's fragile recovery, sending it once again into an economic downturn (*Sankce vůči Rusku mohou...*, 2014).

### 2.3. Discord among state representatives

Despite initial hesitation, the Czech government ultimately backed the sanctions while President Miloš Zeman repeatedly criticised them (Dorazín, Jansová, 2015; *Zeman na fóru v Řecku...*, 2014) and called for compensation to affected Czech companies (*Zeman: potravinářské firmy...*, 2014). This might be viewed as both a long-term lack of cooperation between the president and the government, and as part of the president's own agenda, which diverges deliberately from government positions not only concerning relations with Russia but on foreign policy matters in general (Rozsypal, Tupá, 2015). The Czech government wishes to keep Russian exports alive, however, and in particular the Ministry of Industry and Trade has been encouraging exporters not to give up on exporting to Russia. The minister himself has also spoken out against a further expansion of the sanctions, stating that a long-term goal of the Czech export strategy is the diversification of trading partners (outside the EU) and that Russia will remain an important one (*MPO: Na půdě Ministerstva...*, 2015). The ministry hopes to invest in economic diplomacy in Russia by sending in more economic diplomats (*Čeští podnikatelé podepsali...*, 2014), and is also considering opening a new trade office in Kazan. Support for exports to Russia, however, has been criticised by economists as too risky and as something that would come at the expense of other support for exports. Doubts have also been raised by State Secretary Tomáš Prouza, whereas the Confederation of Industry is supportive of focusing on Russian exports (*Ruský trh láká...*, 2015).

## 3. Energy security

For mainly historical reasons, the Czech energy supply is largely dependent on Russia, and despite government support for several projects to increase Czech energy security since 1990<sup>32</sup> the issue of dependence on Russia remains salient 25 years after the country became independent of Russian political influence. Hence, energy policy has remained among the top priorities of all Czech governments including the current one, and energy should also be one of the priorities for the 2015–2016 Czech

<sup>32</sup> For a long time, the focus was on diversification of import routes; it was only with the "Green for Savings" (Zelená úsporám) programme in 2008 that the topic of energy conservation acquired a more prominent presence in the government discourse.

V4 presidency.<sup>33</sup> The situation in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea have reinvigorated Czech determination to support a single market in energy, but have arguably also enhanced the position of nuclear energy in the country's long-term energy plans. The role of energy efficiency seems to have received greater emphasis recently as well, although this is likely predominantly connected with Energy Union and EU energy policies rather than the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the country's energy dependence on Russia.

### 3.1. Infrastructure – defined by the past

Due to its geographic location and history, the Czech Republic's energy sector today is strongly influenced by Russia, and thanks to increasing energy liberalisation, also by Germany. With the gradual communitarisation of energy, EU energy policies are becoming more and more important for Czech energy policy-making.

The Czech Republic has one of smallest overall energy dependency rates in the EU (Eurostat, 2014), yet it is highly dependent on imports of natural gas and oil. Its own domestic production in these areas is negligible and its prospects for producing unconventional gas are bleak thanks to geology, population density, public opposition and a lack of political support. The current government of PM Sobotka even included its opposition to shale gas exploration in its government policy statement (*Úřad vlády ČR: Programové prohlášení vlády...*, 2014). Although Czech energy security has improved significantly and has been developed systematically in order to decrease the country's dependence on a single source (Russia) for its oil and gas, energy security remains one of the crucial imperatives of Czech energy policy. Among the most important steps towards energy independence was the construction in the 1990s of the IKL extension from Germany to the Czech Republic of the TAL pipeline, which effectively ensured that the country could import oil from the Gulf states and would not be solely dependent on the Russian Druzhba pipeline. Construction of the IKL extension had a clear strategic motivation and enjoyed strong political backing, although it made relatively little economic sense at the time.<sup>34</sup>

### 3.2. Gas is not like oil

The country remained strongly dependent on Russia for natural gas, however, and gas diversification has been a major objective ever since. After the Russian-Ukrainian gas disputes, the government of the Czech Republic entered talks with RWE, at the time both a network operator and gas trader,<sup>35</sup> on a proposed extension of Nord Stream called Gazelle. This gas pipeline was finally launched in 2013 and once again enjoyed strong political support, this time thanks to the gas disputes of 2006 and 2009 (*Vystoupení A. Vondry...*, 2008). Gazelle and reverse flow (in the west-east direction) made both the Czech Republic and Slovakia less vulnerable to disruptions of gas exports from Russia via Ukraine, which was demonstrated in 2014 when no disruption to the gas supply was experienced by consumers since gas imports from the eastern direction were replaced by imports from Opal and Gazelle.

Even though the Czech Republic imports mostly Russian gas, the Gazelle connection also allowed it to trade gas on spot markets in Europe, although RWE still has a long-term take-or-pay<sup>36</sup> contract with Gazprom that will expire only in 2035. The country also has a long-term contract with Norway,

<sup>33</sup> The programme of the Czech V4 presidency had not been made public by the time this paper was submitted for publication.

<sup>34</sup> Source: interview with a representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>35</sup> Today, the operator of transition lines is NET4GAS, unbundled in accordance with third liberalisation package and in 2012 certified as ITO.

<sup>36</sup> Take-or-pay sets a floor of what a country has to consume and if it fails to do so, it pays for such amount anyway. Such a system does not motivate countries to increase energy efficiency, especially in combination with a destination clause, which prevents further resale abroad.

which was signed already in the 1990s. Regardless of where it is traded, however, the gas that physically flows into the Czech gas transmission system is still almost entirely Russian.

RWE's Czech subsidiary recently mounted a successful challenge in arbitration against Gazprom over the lowering of gas prices under the long-term contract. The gas prices in the contract were linked to oil prices, but the gas spot markets have diverged from oil prices significantly because gas prices were falling at that time (thanks to the economic crisis, unconventional gas production in the US, the use of LNG, low coal prices, and EU liberalisation policies) making long-term contracts too expensive. The arbitration tribunal changed the formula used to calculate the gas price and introduced a price index to reflect market prices to some degree. The Czech Republic, however, is one of eight EU member countries where the European Commission (EC) claims that Gazprom has abused its dominant market position in breach of EU antitrust laws. In April 2015, the EC issued a statement of objections and accused Gazprom of imposing unfair territorial restrictions such as destination clauses that limit further gas trading and ban cross-border gas trading (*Antitrust: Commission sends Statement...*, 2015).

### **3.3. Diversification – transport or source?**

With respect to large infrastructure projects that would bring more gas transmission capacity to Europe, the Czech Republic had backed Nabucco, which would offer source diversification. On the other hand, it was also among the countries that did not show enthusiasm for building South Stream, and the project's cancellation was perceived rather positively. On 27 November 2014, PM Sobotka spoke in favour of diversification of energy sources rather than merely of transmission lines (and against circumventing Ukraine and thereby providing Russia with even more leverage over its neighbour), which he deemed not to be a long-term solution for Europe and its energy security. Instead, he lent his support to developing alternative energy sources, such as importing gas from Azerbaijan or Iran. It is therefore safe to assume that the start of construction on the TANAP pipeline in March 2015 was perceived rather positively by the government. PM Sobotka has also lobbied to support export of unconventional gas from the US, and has discussed the matter with Vice-President Biden.<sup>37</sup> In addition, the PM has stressed on several occasions that it is in the Czech Republic's best interest to keep importing gas through Ukraine and Russia, and to find a solution to the gas dispute, since the Czech Republic and Slovakia would be among the countries that would be hurt most by a permanent disruption of gas transmission. Mr Sobotka has also spoken in favour of active engagement by the EU in Russian-Ukrainian talks (*Interview with PM Sobotka...*, 2014). The importance of the functioning transmission of gas through Ukraine was also stressed in a joint statement by the Czech and Slovak PMs, asserting (without directly naming Ukraine) that effective use of existing transmission lines across the two countries is in the best interest of both (*Společné prohlášení předsedů vlád...*, 2015).

### **3.4. EU policies and the third liberalisation package**

The Czech Republic is a valedictorian within the V4 when it comes to implementing the third liberalisation package, and is a staunch supporter of creating a single market in energy (ideally free of any market distortions). The effects of liberalisation have been positive, and consumers have benefited from better energy prices. Especially in the case of gas, the country sees great potential in regional gas trading, which, if successful, could dramatically reduce prices as well as the countries' dependence on a single supplier – Gazprom. Major obstacles remain, however.

First, the transmission system in the V4 countries is still predominantly oriented towards use in the east-west direction, since it was built when the V4 states were still client countries of the USSR. Interconnectors to Germany and to Austria as well as within the V4 lack sufficient capacity for wide-

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<sup>37</sup> The chances that this would improve Czech energy security in the short run are slim, as the north-south connection is still unfinished. Environmental concerns over transporting LNG across the Atlantic are not present in the Czech discourse, however.

scale trading. The Czech government is therefore in favour of investing in regional interconnectors, which would not only improve connectivity within the V4, but also to Western markets, mainly Germany and Austria. The country supports regional Projects of Common Interest (PCIs) – in its own case, three PCIs were approved (*Projects of common interest...*, 2015), of which one, BACI, would connect the Czech network to the Baumgarten gas hub. This probably also explains yet another Czech incentive for keeping the Ukrainian export gas pipeline functional: the Czech Republic is one of the key transmission countries to Germany, for which it receives fees, and therefore would profit if Baumgarten becomes a viable trading hub. Without the Ukrainian transmission, Baumgarten would lose any prospect of trading relevance. Another PCI approved for the Czech Republic is Stork II, which should provide a capacity connection to Poland. However, Stork II has been burdened with a dispute between NET4GAS (an unbundled network operator) and ERU (the independent Czech regulator). Another weakness from the Czech point of view is the project's relative economic unattractiveness, as the Czech network operator has little to gain from it at the moment, and even strategically it may only pay off in the longer term.<sup>38</sup> Poland currently has weak north-south interconnectivity, and even after LNG is imported to Świnoujście<sup>39</sup> there is only a slim chance that it will improve Czech energy security in the short term.

The second important obstacle to enhanced regional cooperation and decreased dependence on Russian gas is that of the V4 countries, only the Czech Republic has implemented the third liberalisation package. As a result, its market is more compatible with Germany and Austria than with the remaining V4 countries. In the case of Germany, however, there is probably a large disparity in motivation, as the Czech Republic has much more to gain from a deal than Germany. A more likely scenario would be for the Czech Republic to establish cooperation with Austria and Slovakia. At the moment, the chances that Hungary will fully implement the third liberalisation package any time soon are slim, and in the case of Poland large scale investment in domestic infrastructure is still needed. Nevertheless, support for regional integration of the gas markets of the V4 states and Austria is specifically mentioned in the New Energy Strategy of the Czech Republic (NES; *Státní energetická koncepce...*, 2015, p. 65).

Relatively little is known about a regional interconnection project called Eastring proposed by Czech-Slovak investment company EPH. Under Eastring, system integration would be extended to Balkan countries such as Bulgaria, which suffers not only from almost complete dependence on a single supplier – Gazprom – but also from a lack of diversification of transport lines. Eastring was praised by the PMs of the Czech Republic and Slovakia in a joint statement, but the project is still in the very early stages of preparation, and as of spring 2015 it remained unclear what route it would take. In a presentation of the project on 26 March 2015, EPH representative Tomáš Mareček claimed that it had not yet been decided whether the pipeline would go through Hungary and therefore circumvent Ukraine or vice versa, and that this depended on the political situation in both countries.

### 3.5. New Energy Strategy

All in all, the Czech Republic's energy dependence on Russia remains very high in gas, but is rather limited in oil and very low in electricity (although a third of the electricity produced in the Czech Republic comes from nuclear power plants, which currently run on fuel supplied by Russia). This is probably one of the reasons why gas plays a relatively limited role as a transitional energy source (between very dirty lignite and black coal on the one hand, and clean renewable energy sources on the other) in the NES, which was released on 4 June 2015 after years of negotiations between stakeholders (*Státní energetická koncepce...*, 2015). The share of gas in total consumption is changing, however, especially since industrial use of gas has decreased. The NES cites a decrease of 20% over the last decade, but

<sup>38</sup> Source: interview, 2015.

<sup>39</sup> The construction of the terminal has experienced multiple delays; according to the latest estimate, it might be open by the end of 2015.

about 10% of households are heated by gas without any alternative possibility (*Státní energetická koncepce...*, 2015, p. 14). The NES anticipates that overall demand for gas will rise in future, however, and therefore increased interconnectivity is highly desirable.

The NES also places greater emphasis on nuclear energy, which could be increased to over 50% of electricity production by 2035 (*Státní energetická koncepce...*, 2015, p. 14). The NES represents a change from previous plans which supported the use of nuclear technology but did not mention the construction of a new reactor in Dukovany. The NES specifically mentions building one to two new reactors for Temelín, extending the service life of the four old reactors at Dukovany by up to 60 years, and the option to build one new reactor in Dukovany as well (*Státní energetická koncepce...*, 2015, p. 47). Despite the fact that the NES does not mention energy security and dependence on Russia in relation to nuclear energy, it is probable that this will be taken into account for the selection of a technology supplier if new nuclear blocks are built at the existing nuclear sites in Temelín and Dukovany. Although PM Sobotka has stated explicitly that the country of origin of the company supplying technology should not be taken into account (*Dostavba Temelína: Je...*, 2014; Kreč, Šídlo, 2014), opposition politicians have been vocal in their rejection of the idea that a Russian company might build new nuclear blocks. It must be mentioned, however, that large-scale investment into new nuclear blocks is currently far from certain. Some analysts have claimed that the next five years will probably decide the fate of new nuclear blocks in the Czech Republic, as the climate for large investments in electricity production is negative at the moment due to very low electricity prices, mostly as a result of Germany's *Energiewende*.<sup>40</sup> Due to the liberalisation of its energy sector, wholesale electricity prices in the Czech Republic are de facto determined by the exchange in Leipzig. Low wholesale electricity prices and the government's unwillingness to guarantee minimum wholesale electricity prices for ČEZ – a majority state-owned Czech energy company – led to the cancellation in April 2014 of the procurement process for building new reactor blocks at Temelín (*ČEZ dnes rozhodl...*, 2014).

Moreover, it is also doubtful whether relatively inflexible energy sources such as nuclear power are compatible with the increasingly integrated European market and especially with its large share of renewable sources, which are intermittent and require peak supply as well as times of low supply to be balanced out by small flexible sources. The ideal sources for this are gas power stations, which, however, are currently extremely expensive to operate and in the Czech Republic are additionally burdened by the relative insecurity of gas supplies. For example, the new gas power station owned by ČEZ in Počeradý is rarely used.

Even though the procurement process for a new reactor at Temelín was cancelled in April 2014, Minister of Industry and Trade Jan Mládek said already in September 2014, that the dire security situation in Ukraine might be a reason to resuscitate the Temelín project in order to further reduce the country's energy dependence on Russia (*Mládek: neklid na Ukrajině...*, 2014). This contrasts with a statement by PM Sobotka, who in March 2014 claimed that the Russian-Ukrainian crisis should not be linked to the – then still open – procurement process for a new reactor at Temelín (Kreč, Šídlo, 2014). In any case, ČEZ Supervisory Board Vice-President Václav Pačes has raised doubts about not only the idea of building new nuclear blocks but also about whether new nuclear reactors would indeed increase Czech energy independence, since both of the Czech Republic's existing nuclear power stations use nuclear fuel from TVEL, a subsidiary of Rosatom (*Mládek: Ukrajinská krize...*, 2014). The contract with TVEL will run until 2020. Nuclear rods for Czech nuclear facilities were supplied by Westinghouse until 2011.

### 3.6. Energy Union and EU energy legislation

Arguably, the Energy Union proposal as it was presented on 26 February 2015 was perceived relatively positively in the Czech Republic, although the government was not fond of all its provisions. PM

<sup>40</sup> Jiří Gavor, ENA, Česká televize, CT24, 15 June 2015.

Sobotka even praised the project as a means of ensuring better energy security and stability for the continent (*Úřad vlády ČR: Premiér Bohuslav Sobotka jednal...*, 2015). The Energy Union proposal is perceived as an extension of existing EU energy policies and as a document that returns energy security to the EU agenda. Czech priorities therefore also remain in line with those of previous energy plans unveiled by the EU. Needless to say, the Energy Union proposal was largely influenced by the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, and the need for increased energy security resonates with the Czech Republic. The proposal also offers the possibility that the EC will react more decisively in cases of non-compliance with EU energy laws and will initiate infringement procedures if necessary (Prouza, 2015).

The Czech Republic has traditionally placed great emphasis not only on energy security but also on competitiveness, which has only been strengthened by the long economic recession that the country entered after 2008. The Czech Republic is also among those EU member states with the most energy-intensive economies. This is again largely determined by the Czech Republic's large industrial sector, a carry-over from when Czechoslovakia was a member of the Comecon system and the bloc did not worry about the scarcity of energy resources or the amount of greenhouse gases it emitted (*Úřad vlády ČR: Opatření na zvýšení energetické...*, 2014). Nevertheless, the Czech position on energy efficiency is not overwhelmingly negative, and the country will (as with previous proposals on energy efficiency) try to make sure that it does not undermine its competitiveness and does not lose financially.<sup>41</sup> While the current government of PM Sobotka claims that it is trying to be constructive when it comes to energy efficiency targets (*Úřad vlády ČR: Nemá smysl hrát si...*, 2014), energy efficiency is still mentioned only infrequently as a crucial means of improving the country's energy security.

The Czech Republic is strongly concerned with ensuring that member states will be able to choose their energy mix. One of the reasons for this is nuclear energy. The country has argued that because of its geographic and geological features, the only way for it to decrease carbon emissions in accordance with the 2020 and 2030 climate packages is to increase its use of gas and nuclear power as substitutes for coal. And since gas has become expensive and the security of its supply low, nuclear is often cited as the best alternative. Despite the strong distrust of nuclear technology in the neighbouring non-V4 states, the impetus to keep the nuclear option open in the Czech Republic is strong.

In addition, there were three major Czech objections to the Energy Union proposal as it was unveiled in February 2015, all concerning geo-strategy and energy security. First, the country was overwhelmingly against the possibility of demand aggregation for gas trading, which is intended to strengthen the bargaining position of member states vis-à-vis a dominant supplier. Demand aggregation appeared in the proposal as a voluntary option during energy crises and in the case of countries predominantly dependent on single supplier. The Czech Republic's motivation to subscribe to such mechanism is low, as its supply routes are relatively safe and it has no chance of influencing a long-term contract with Gazprom except through existing mechanisms. One of the reasons for the country's mistrust of the Polish-backed idea is that it might be seen as a substitute for building new infrastructure in countries with low interconnectivity, thus allowing them to avoid "doing their homework" and shifting the responsibility to Brussels instead.<sup>42</sup> Only voluntary demand aggregation and the possibility for member states to ask for assistance from the EC if they deem it useful or necessary seems bearable for the Czechs.

The Czech Republic has also remained critical of strengthening the role of the Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators (ACER) or the creation of some sort of EU-wide energy regulator. Both possibilities are being assessed carefully, however, as they might play a positive role in enforcing implementation of the third liberalisation package by countries which are currently not progressing fast enough or at all.

Another Czech objection was to allowing the EC to be involved *ex ante* in Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs) on energy with third states. This in theory would allow the EC to be involved in the pro-

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<sup>41</sup> The country has acted with the other V4 members against three binding targets for the 2030 energy package, and in the past has tried to protect its energy-inefficient industry by stalling ambitious climate plans.

<sup>42</sup> Source: interview with a representative of a Czech ministry, February 2015.

cess of building large infrastructure projects and to monitor whether they comply with EU competition law. It was inspired in particular by the difficult situation surrounding agreements signed by member states involved in the South Stream pipeline projects and bilateral agreements between member states and Gazprom. In these cases, the EC first saw the contracts after they had been concluded, and its ability to act (as well as member states' motivation to comply with EC proceedings) was already quite limited. The reason behind the Czech objection was mainly the concern that if the EC were allowed to be involved in IGAs, it would be difficult to maintain trade secrets, and such agreements would thus be unattractive to companies, although the country is supportive of Third Party Access (TPA) clauses and increased transparency of contracts with third states.

As all of these problematic propositions were eased after the European Council meeting in early March 2015, the Czech Republic is now overwhelmingly supportive of the Energy Union proposal. In addition, it will continue supporting PCIs as well as other financial tools such as the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF), which is not purely focused on energy infrastructure, but also on transport projects.

Another proposal which is in line with the Czech stance is the regionalisation of energy and the gradual interconnection of regional markets, as this may bring about a more realistic chance of finalising the single market in energy. A specific Czech requirement, however, is the inclusiveness of such regions and the possibility to join more than one regional integration formation. The reason behind this is simply the desire to form a gas market with the V4 and Austria, while leaving open the possibility that the country will be invited to Pentilateral Energy Forum meetings,<sup>43</sup> which have EU-wide policy-defining potential. This also highlights the country's need to cooperate with (or at least to accept and adjust to) Germany and its energy reforms introduced by the Energiewende. Especially in the case of electricity generation, the Energiewende has had a sizeable impact on Czech transmission lines, and the country fears that overflows of energy generated in the north of Germany might cause blackouts. The stability of the electricity grid and the construction of phase-shifting transformers to protect the Czech grid from overflowing German electricity are seen as important matters of energy security.

When it comes to Czechs' responsiveness to Ukraine's energy needs, the country's situation differs from those of the remaining V4 countries in that it simply does not share a border with Ukraine and therefore has not faced the decision of whether to allow reverse flow or not. In September 2015, Czech Industry and Trade Minister Mládek characterised the situation faced by Slovakia and Poland as unenviable, was supportive especially of Slovakia, and was puzzled by the fact that Slovakia had encountered difficulties with the amount of gas supplied from Ukraine even though the country had "made sure that everything was *lege artis* and no contract with Gazprom had been breached since the gas to Ukraine was simply supplied through another pipeline" (J. Mládek: *Plynovody by...*, 2014). Mr Mládek also insisted that the Czech Republic was ready to use reverse flow to supply Slovakia. In June 2014, the Czech Office of the Government released a statement indicating that the country was supportive of negotiations between Russia and Ukraine in order to ensure the supply of gas for Ukraine, and, failing this, that the Czech Republic was ready to help supply Ukraine through reverse flow (*Úřad vlády ČR: ČR je připravena na...*, 2014). In the previous gas crises, before the Czech Republic had at its disposal the Gazelle interconnector, which is able to bring gas from Nord Stream through Germany, it had allowed Slovakia to use gas stored in its own gas reserves as its gas storage capacities were greater than Slovakia's.

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<sup>43</sup> Members include Germany, France and the Benelux countries. Austria and Switzerland are invited to meetings as well.



## 4. Conclusions

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict and related sanctions have had a minor impact on the Czech Republic's foreign trade and economy. The only sizeable effect has been the inability of Czech investors to insure their investments in Ukraine. Rather, it was the fragility of the rouble that has had a sizeable impact on both Russian exports generally and imports to the Czech Republic in particular, the most impacted Czech company being Škoda Auto. In energy, the conflict has reinvigorated the Czech Republic's focus on energy independence through support for new interconnections in the case of gas, for the creation of a single market in energy, and possibly also for the idea of building new nuclear blocks and prolonging the service life of old ones.

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# HUNGARY

# Domestic political context since 1989: Hungary, Russia, Ukraine

LÓRÁNT GYŐRI – BULCSÚ HUNYADI – ATTILA JUHÁSZ – PÉTER KREKÓ

## 1. Introduction: Historical and cultural background

For historical reasons, the perception of Russia has been essentially negative in Hungarian public thinking. A string of Russian military actions against Hungary's autonomy struggles (1849, 1956), communist dictatorships in the 20th century (the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the Rákosi system and later the Kádár system), and the experience of decades-long Soviet occupation obviously worked against a deepening of positive feelings towards Russia.

Of course, in many areas cultural ties developed with Russia, a rising power from the end of the 18th century (Molnár, 2000), but the Russian state has never been viewed favourably in Hungary. In Eastern Europe with a dominant Slavic population, Hungarian leaders have always viewed Russia as a potential threat. In the 19th century, at the time of the birth of the Hungarian nation state, it was believed that Russian imperial aspirations may eliminate all chances for the advent of an independent Hungary. The Hungarian interpretation of pan-Slavism strongly influenced the Hungarian leadership's ethnic policy in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy: its efforts at assimilation involving the Slavic minority had also been guided by this fear. For instance, Ferenc Deák, József Eötvös and Lajos Kossuth all suspected Russian scheming behind the demands of the Slavic minorities, and the pan-Slavic movement appeared in the public mind as an extension of Russian power (Dán, 2000). The situation was actually more complicated, however, as Slavic populations surrounding Hungary had their own ambitions to form nation states.

The Hungarian historic trauma that has not healed to this day, i.e. the peace treaty ending the First World War – as a result of which Hungary lost a large part of its territory and population, as well as its status as a medium-sized power – has cast a pall over the Hungarian public perception of Russia. The 1919 Hungarian Soviet Republic, waging an unsuccessful war to protect territory, tried to establish power based on the Russian model and failed in short order.

Between the two world wars, Hungarian leaders primarily pursued a German-oriented foreign policy. Their revisionist politics also relied on Germany, and the Soviet Union could not have played a role in that, although from time to time the Romanian media expresses the commonly held fear to this day that both Hungary and Russia are bent on annexing some regions of Romania (Maican, 2014). Incidentally, today's Russian propaganda plays on that fear, and some Hungarian far-right groups turn to Russia in this very context, even though such a relationship actually has no historical precedent.

The perception of Russia in Hungarian society did not change even with the end of the Second World War after the country's liberation by Soviet troops, and with Hungary falling into the Soviet sphere of interest the Russian-Hungarian friendship was little more than mere propaganda. A story proliferating after 1945 is a typical example: in May 1848, a Russian officer, Gusev, and fifteen others were arrested by Russian authorities for spreading propaganda in the Russian Imperial Army (sent to put down the Hungarian War of Independence) in defence of Hungary's struggle for freedom (Vörös, 2012). As it turned out later, all the literature and memorial plaques notwithstanding, Gusev had never existed.

After the regime change in 1989, it was for the most part the political left – and within that MSZP as the successor to the former Communist Party, along with the marginal far-left Workers Party – that

maintained contacts with Russia, while Russia had no established channels with the Hungarian right. In fact, in most cases parties on the right watched with suspicion and criticised the left for its Russian diplomatic contacts. Typically before 2009 (*A hátunk közepére...*, 2015), Fidesz, then in opposition, and Viktor Orbán himself strongly criticised the Gyurcsány government for the South Stream gas pipeline agreement signed by Hungary and Russia in 2008, and for the potential of growing Russian influence due to the Paks expansion project. Once in power, however, Orbán became one of the main supporters of these projects. In other words, until quite recently PM Orbán, today considered “Putin’s man”, and the political identity of the Hungarian right were characterised by a rejection of close connections to the current Russian regime. Accordingly, the first Orbán government between 1998 and 2002 was keen on keeping Russia at arm’s length. Even though connections to Russia endured in the left-wing camp and consequently Russian politicians often placed more confidence in left-wing political actors, the left nevertheless considered Euro-Atlantic integration to be the key goal.

From a historical point of view, by looking at the far-right one cannot find any apparent signs of strong Russian contacts. Compared to the mainstream right, however, one sees a difference: namely that Turanism (i.e. the idea of kinship with Eastern people) has always played an important role for adherents to far-right ideology. In this context, in some far-right publications there have already been attempts at reconciling the prehistory of the Hungarian and Slavic peoples. For instance, in a supplement to *Jobbik’s* weekly on prehistory in February 2015 there was an article claiming that the Slavs borrowed many elements of the culture of Scythian-Sarmata tribes believed to be related to Hungarians (Obrusánszky, 2015).

Moreover, for neo-Nazi organisations emerging after the regime change (the Hungarian Welfare Association and the Hungarian National Front, which reject the parliamentary system), Russian neo-Nazi organisations have served as a model since the mid-1990s.

It must also be noted that ultra-right media organisations, describing themselves as the spiritual leaders of the Hungarian far-right, were the first to introduce Alexander Dugin and his ideology to Hungary (*Nem ma kezdték...*, 2014). In short, the pro-Russian stance of the Hungarian far-right is based in part on contacts established between Russian and Hungarian paramilitary forces following the regime change, the spiritual tradition of Turanism and the ultra-right ideology’s uncritical attitude towards Russia. *Jobbik*, established in 2003, and to a lesser extent some members of circles close to Fidesz, returning to power in 2010, continue to rely on these sources.

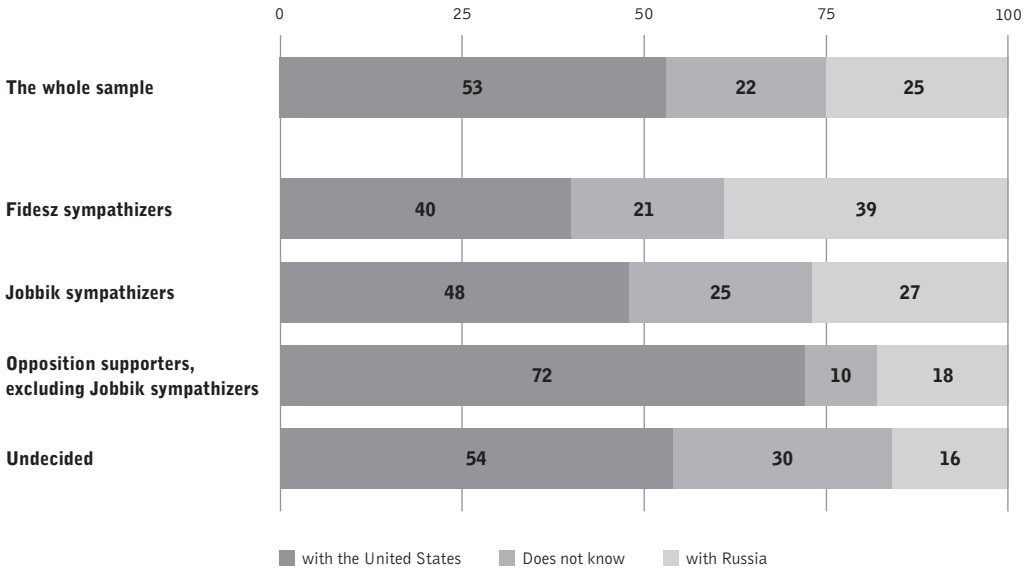
## 2. Public opinion on Russia and Ukraine

The Hungarian population is much less sympathetic to Russia and Russians in general than to the United States or Americans in general. In 1992, on a 100-point scale the sympathy index for the US stood at 73%, and it was only 36% for Russia. Fifteen years later, in 2007, the US index had dropped to 60%, while that of Russia had climbed to 41% (Medián, 2007). In 2014, the United States received 65 points, while Russia received only 44 points. Although the perception of Russia has changed slightly for the better since the regime change while the perception of the US has deteriorated, the US is still far more popular. According to a poll conducted in late 2014, 63% of respondents said that the relationship between Hungary and the US has declined recently, while 31% said it has remained unchanged. 4% were unable to respond, while 2% believed the relationship between the two countries had actually improved. In respect of the Hungarian-Russian relationship, 49% of all respondents believed there had been no change, 36% believed it had improved and 10% believed the relationship had deteriorated. Should Hungary choose sides, 53% of respondents favoured the country maintaining closer ties with the US, 25% would prefer closer ties with Russia, and 22% could not decide (*A magyarok többsége...*, 2015).

Party preference indeed plays a significant role in forming opinions. Among those with a clear party preference, Fidesz supporters are the most tolerant of Russia: 39% would like to see Hungary

develop closer ties with Russia, while 40% would like to see Hungary do so with the United States. Interestingly, supporters of Jobbik are less tolerant of Russia: 48% of them are more sympathetic to the United States, and only 27% have a preference for Russia. In the opposition camp without Jobbik, the US leads by a ratio of 72 to 18, and among those without a party preference by a ratio of 54 to 16.

**Graph 1. Should Hungary choose with which country it maintains closer ties, what would you prefer? (%)**



Source: 444.hu, 2015

Other surveys show similar results. According to an Ipsos survey conducted in early December 2014, 57% agreed and 28% disagreed with the following statement: “Hungary shouldn’t distance itself from Europe and develop closer ties to Russia.” 15% of respondents were unable to answer the question.

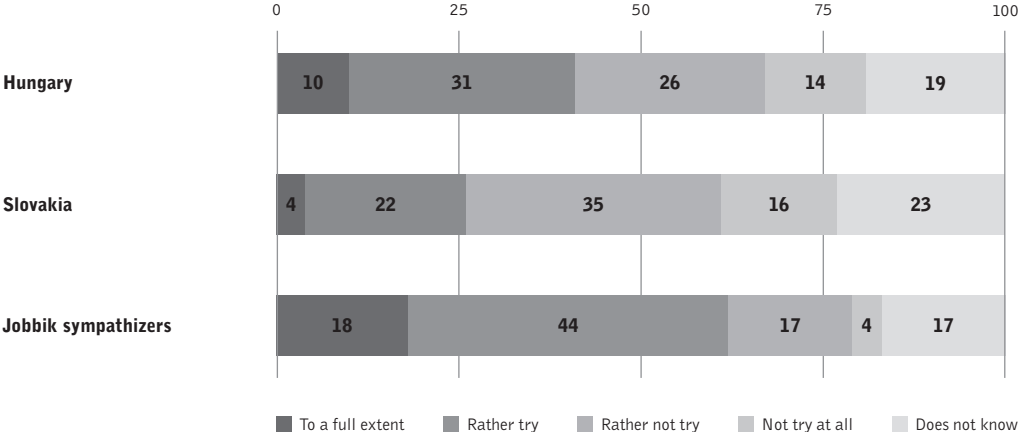
However, further research somewhat modifies the image of a Hungarian public with a fundamental Western orientation. In early April 2014, Ipsos MORI, a leading UK market research organisation, looked at public opinion concerning the crisis in Ukraine in eleven mostly West European EU countries, including Hungary (*Eleven EU countries...*, 2014). The complexity and sensitivity of the situation in Ukraine is evidenced by the fact that close to one-third of respondents were unable to say what measures their governments should take. This was a common feature in all eleven countries. However, data showed that in general, Hungarian respondents were the least supportive of any measures against Russia. While only one-third of them (34%) agreed with the statement that Russia should not be allowed to enter Eastern Ukrainian territories, in other countries one in two respondents held this opinion on average.

Nevertheless, the Hungarian population cannot be considered pro-Russian; the positions taken in response to the questions ranged along a wide scale. The population’s above-average pro-Russian attitude (in accordance with the data above showing that supporters of Fidesz are the most friendly towards Russia) might indicate that the government’s and Jobbik’s communication concerning Russia may be effective in some segments of the population, however. Although Hungary has a significant stake in the conflict due to its geopolitical position and significant Hungarian diaspora living in Transcarpathia, one in two Hungarians believe that the government should refrain from any form of interference and leave the resolution of the problem to others (Ipsos MORI, 2014).



A survey conducted by Central European Opinion Research Group in April 2014 investigated what the population in the Visegrad countries thinks about Russia’s possible increasing influence in the region. With respect to three countries, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary, Poles are the most concerned about Russia’s role, Slovaks are the least concerned and Hungarians are in the middle: 10% of the Hungarian population think that Russia will aim with all its strength at regaining influence in Eastern Europe. The ratio of those who are concerned with Russia’s influence and those who are not concerned with the question is almost even. A total of 41% think that Russia will try to exert its influence over the region again (to the full extent or at least partially), while a total of 40% think that Russia is (rather) unlikely to do so (*Jönnek az oroszok?*, 2014).

**Graph 2. To what extent in your opinion will Russia in the short term try to regain its influence over the part of Europe where we live? (%)**



Source: TARKI, 2014

### 3. Position of the Hungarian parties towards Russia and Ukraine

During the 1990s, all major parties were occupied with the establishment of new democratic institutions and a market economy, and shared the main principles of Hungarian foreign policy: Hungary’s integration into the Western political, economic and security structures (i.e. NATO and the European Union) and support for ethnic Hungarian communities in neighbouring countries. Russia, at that time, did not seem to be a significant player either from a political or economic perspective. The perception of Russia started to change after the change of government in 2002. At the same time, common national foreign policy goals have slowly faded away with Hungary’s accession to the EU.

However, foreign policy has not played a significant role in the public discourse in Hungary. The main topics have been the status of ethnic Hungarians in neighbouring countries and relations with these countries. This interest has been echoed in the election programmes of the parties and the fact that foreign policy has never been a significant campaign issue. The only recent exceptions have been the Ukraine crisis and Hungary’s relations with Russia. However, these issues have climbed high on the political agenda not because of their wider foreign policy implications but rather due to domestic political struggles: opposition parties could use these issues to criticise the Orbán government.

The positions of the mainstream players (e.g. Fidesz, MSZP, and former PM Ferenc Gyurcsány) towards Russia do not seem to be based on ideology but rather on the current position of the respective party (i.e. in government or opposition). Hungary's dependence on Russian energy supplies constitutes a structural element of the Hungarian political and economic system, and therefore translates into a pragmatic foreign policy towards Russia based on economic interests, irrespective of the party in government. However, based on domestic political struggles and "illiberal" political tendencies in Hungary, opposition parties – except for Jobbik – criticise PM Orbán's policy line towards Russia and Russia's role in Ukraine, as well as antidemocratic practices in Russia.

### 3.1. Fidesz's position towards Russia and the Ukraine crisis

#### 3.1.1. Fidesz's stance towards Russia before 2010

Because Fidesz, as the largest governing party from 1998 to 2002, presided over many of the NATO and EU negotiations (NATO accession in 1999; EU accession in 2004), its pro-EU and pro-NATO stance was unquestionable (*Az új évezred küszöbén*, 1998; *Európa a jövőnk*, 2002).<sup>44</sup> In opposition between 2002 and 2010, the party's programmes seem to have cast Russia's geopolitical significance as an unimportant part of history; any Eastern foreign policy, if mentioned, always displayed an element of the common European or NATO foreign policy (*Csak együtt sikerülhet*, 2004).<sup>45</sup> Fidesz disapproved of the South Stream project supported by the leftist government, claiming that it endangered Hungary's long-term energy security (*A Gyurcsány-kormány Oroszország-politikája*, 2007), and also condemned Russian aggression in the Russo-Georgian War, comparing it to the Soviet intervention in the 1956 Hungarian uprising (*Nem a háborúra*, 2008). A turning point came with Viktor Orbán's declaration of the need for a "21st century partnership" with Russia after talks with President Putin at the United Russia party congress in 2009 (*Miről beszélt Orbán...*, 2009).

#### 3.1.2. Fidesz's stance towards Russia after 2010

Fidesz's domestic policy towards Russia after 2010 can only be understood with its counterpart of Western foreign policy: the new autocratic regime built by Fidesz inevitably had the effect of increasingly distancing the Hungarian government from its Western allies, with its "Eastern opening" providing an ideological *casus belli* and the necessary economic foundation for foregoing Western standards of democracy. In a 2010 speech, PM Orbán explained the decline of "Western-style capitalism" embodied by the global financial crisis with "speculative capitalism" gaining ground; this trend could only be reversed by restoring moral, Christian fundamentals, and eventually by brokering a deal with Christian Russia, and its economic potential (*A nyugati típusú kapitalizmus...*, 2010). Two policy papers in 2010 outlined an economic recovery plan based on a new opening towards Russia, viewed as a vital part of "the silk railroad of the 21st century" to China (*Nemzeti Ügyek*, 2010; *A Nemzeti Együttműködés*, 2010). A major diplomatic breakthrough occurred during the 2013 meeting between PM Viktor Orbán and President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, after which economic cooperation included making South Stream a primary government project (*The government even...*, 2014), opening Hungarian trading houses in Russia (*Hungary opens...*, 2015), and finally the construction of Paks II by Rosatom, announced in January 2014 (*Oroszország kiemelkedően...*, 2014).<sup>46</sup> The Orbán government's energy dependence, and thus also political dependence, on the Kremlin grew even stronger with

<sup>44</sup> It is probably for this very reason that the Fidesz government lacked any reference to foreign policy, with the exception of a 2002 pamphlet titled "Europe is our future, Hungary is our homeland – a political pamphlet about European reintegration" which depicted the Soviet Union as a negative historical point of departure which had separated Hungary from Europe for over four decades.

<sup>45</sup> Only Fidesz's 2004 European Parliamentary programme identified a distinct Russian foreign policy to build an equal partnership with Russia in order to further the Hungarian national interest in accordance with common EU policy and to strengthen the sovereignty of Ukraine.

<sup>46</sup> With respect to Paks II, Viktor Orbán has named Russia as Hungary's "most important", and "strategic" partner outside of the EU, with cooperation spilling over into many other areas of infrastructure, education, health services, and culture.

the EUR 10 billion Paks II project,<sup>47</sup> and the Hungarian state's reacquisition of the gas business from German company E.ON, which enabled the government to negotiate natural gas prices with Gazprom directly and to fulfil Fidesz's biggest election promise of cutting household utility costs ahead of the May 2014 general elections.

### 3.1.3. Fidesz's attitudes towards Ukraine

With the situation in Ukraine becoming a full-blown crisis in March 2014, Fidesz's and the government's long-pursued foreign policies and priorities on Ukraine and Russia have turned into sea-parting geopolitical issues. Before the crisis, Fidesz had long supported Ukraine's EU accession and the Eastern Partnership initiative along with rights and cultural autonomy for the Transcarpathian Hungarian minority. Fidesz has acknowledged the new Ukrainian government, and after the annexation of Crimea underscored the need for Ukraine to maintain its sovereignty, but also cautioned of "undemocratic" tendencies among the "democratic changes" (*Magyarország osztja...*, 2014; *A területi szuverenitását...*, 2014). As a result, the Hungarian government's appeal to the new Ukrainian government led by Petro Poroshenko to respect the linguistic rights of the Hungarian minority was falsely deemed to be an attack on Ukrainian sovereignty (*Magyarország osztja...*, 2014). Nevertheless, the Orbán cabinet's position remained hard to decipher; for example, Fidesz blamed the EU for not taking a clear stance over the shooting down of the Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 in Ukraine without mentioning Russia (*A tragédia azonnali...*, 2014). On the other hand, the indefinite suspension of Hungary's reverse gas flow to Ukraine in September 2014 was clearly a move against Kyiv which had to do with pressure on the Hungarian government from Gazprom (*Brüsszel sem...*, 2014). Although the Hungarian government supported the common European foreign policy against the Kremlin (*Az Ukrajnához fűződő...*, 2014)<sup>48</sup> in the Council of the European Union, PM Viktor Orbán condemned the European sanctions against Russia as being "against Hungarian national interests", while welcoming Eurasian economic cooperation (*Az együttműködés és...*, 2015). President Putin's meeting with PM Orbán in Budapest in February 2015 also sent a strong anti-Ukrainian signal, and breached the informal policy of European member states not holding high-ranking meetings with Russian leaders (*Így látta...*, 2015).

## 3.2. MSZP's attitudes towards Russia and the Ukraine crisis

As one of the leading parties of Hungarian domestic politics and having served three terms in government since the regime change, the core stance of MSZP (the Hungarian Socialist Party) towards Russia has been rather stable and pragmatic, focusing on economic relations, and, in particular, securing energy supplies. The party's position on certain issues has always been dependent on the domestic political context, however, and on whether MSZP is in government or in opposition.

### 3.2.1. MSZP's stance towards Russia before 2010

MSZP maintained some official contacts with Russia after the regime change, partly due to the fact that it was the successor to the former Communist Party. In the 1990s, however, the Socialists, in line with the common foreign policy goals of all mainstream parties, focused on Hungary's Euro-Atlantic integration and attached little importance to relations with Russia. The situation changed after 2002 with Péter Medgyessy's Socialist-Liberal coalition government, however, which aimed at strengthening relations with Russia mainly for economic reasons. While there had been no high-level meetings between Hungary and Russia between 1996 and 2001, PM Medgyessy met with Russian president Vladimir Putin four times over his two years in office (2002–2004; *Magyar-ország...*, 2007). Hungar-

<sup>47</sup> Credit was provided by Russian banks. The construction itself would have 40% Hungarian sub-contractors assigned by the Hungarian government, which led to allegations of possible corruption.

<sup>48</sup> By condemning the Russian aggression against Crimea and welcoming the Minsk agreements.

ian-Russian relations further deepened under the premiership of Ferenc Gyurcsány (2004–2009), who maintained good personal relations with Putin.<sup>49</sup>

In Gyurcsány's understanding, his policy towards Russia was based on pragmatism, focusing on economic and in particular energy interests, i.e. securing Hungary's energy needs with Russian supplies (mainly gas). An expression of his pragmatic approach was a statement during a visit to Russia in 2006 when Gyurcsány called for an increase in business, economic, cultural and academic relations between Russia and Hungary, instead of ideological ties, and called Russia a partner and friend of Hungary (*Gyurcsány Putyinról...*, 2006). The goal to secure energy supplies was the underlying rationale for the Gyurcsány government's strong support of the South Stream pipeline project promoted by Russia despite persistent criticism from the EU, the US and the main opposition party, Fidesz.<sup>50</sup>

Criticism of domestic tendencies in Russia and Russia's foreign activities had no place in Gyurcsány's pragmatic approach. During his above-mentioned visit to Russia in 2006, Gyurcsány called Russia a "very developed democracy" (*Mindenki áradozik...*, 2007). During the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008, Gyurcsány's government remained remarkably silent and refrained from criticising Russia's actions – a tactic similar to the Orbán government's stance during the height of tensions in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. When, at last, Gyurcsány condemned Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia on 27 August, he tried to balance his statement by saying that irrespective of the parties' responsibility for the conflict, no country should threaten the territory and security of any other country (*Gyurcsány nem...*, 2008). In September 2008, Foreign Minister Kinga Gőncz characterised Russia as one of Hungary's important partners irrespective of their differing views on the Russo-Georgian conflict, and stated that Hungary's accents differ from those countries that are farther away from Russia (*Gőncz Kinga...*, 2008).

Such statements reveal the vulnerability of Gyurcsány's government with respect to relations with Russia. According to a US diplomatic cable from 2007 published by WikiLeaks, Gyurcsány acknowledged during a meeting with US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried that the Hungarian government had not realised the possible consequences of increased Russian assertiveness and had considered energy to be an issue of only short-term economic interest (*Alaposan leszúrták...*, 2011).

### 3.2.2. MSZP's stance towards Russia after 2010

MSZP's general pragmatic approach towards Russia has not changed in principle due to either the Eastern Opening policy of the Orbán government or the Russia-Ukraine conflict. While the party's position on certain issues and its rhetoric regarding Russia have been subordinated to domestic political struggles, MSZP still considers Russia one of Hungary's key economic partners – as stated in the party's 2010 and 2014 election programmes (Mesterházy, 2010; *Igazság, biztonság...*, 2013). With regard to certain issues that MSZP had advocated while in government (e.g. the South Stream project and an expansion of the Paks Nuclear Power Plant implemented by Russia), the party's position has changed almost completely since the adoption of these goals by the new Fidesz government.<sup>51</sup> MSZP's official statements reflect a careful balance between diplomacy and domestic political goals by criticising PM Orbán's moves while at the same time confirming Hungary's strategic relations with Russia.

<sup>49</sup> During his official visit to Hungary in 2006, Putin had lunch at PM Gyurcsány's private home. In 2009, Gyurcsány and his wife had an unofficial private dinner with President Putin and his wife just a few months after Gyurcsány's resignation from the premiership.

<sup>50</sup> Gyurcsány's parallel support for the competing Nabucco project promoted by the EU and the US was insincere, and intended to balance the government's foreign and energy policies.

<sup>51</sup> In government, MSZP had pushed for expanding the Paks Nuclear Power Plant. While MSZP currently does not have a clear position on the expansion itself, in its criticism the party has been focusing on aspects of the project. MSZP has condemned the deal with Russia sealed quickly and in secrecy by the Fidesz government, has criticised the lack of public dialogue, and is demanding a referendum on the expansion. The Budapest branch of the party, however, has expressed its opposition to the expansion project demanding a "green turn" (*Kitört az atomháború...*, 2015).

How the party's stance has changed due to the change in its domestic political position is made patently clear by the example of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In the midst of the campaign ahead of the 2014 parliamentary elections, MSZP chair and prime minister candidate of the opposition alliance Attila Mesterházy criticised Orbán for his silence on the sniper killings in Kyiv and accused him of waiting for Moscow's reaction (*Orbán Viktor...*, 2014). In another statement in the midst of the Crimean crisis, Mesterházy accused Orbán of remaining silent on Ukraine because of the Paks deal that binds him to Putin. At the same time, Mesterházy stated that Hungary should continue its economic cooperation with Russia on the basis of mutual benefits in the event that Russia proves its peaceful intentions and abstains from extortion (*A hallgatás ára...*, 2014). However, in an article on the occasion of President Putin's visit to Budapest in February 2015, almost one year after his resignation from the MSZP chairmanship, Mesterházy considered Russia an aggressor and Putin an autocrat, and called for a democratic Russia (Mesterházy, 2015).

Regarding the annexation of Crimea, MSZP condemned Russia's illegal actions and called for a united European response (*Elkötelezettek vagyunk...*, 2014). The party supported sanctions against Russia (*Magyarország nem moszkvai...*, 2014), and called for implementation of the Minsk ceasefire agreement, while always reiterating the need for a peaceful resolution to the conflict (*Az MSZP békepárti*, 2015).

MSZP's stance towards domestic tendencies in Russia has also become an issue in Hungarian domestic politics since 2010. Examples of this were a joint statement and demonstration by the parties of the democratic opposition, including MSZP, at the Russian embassy in Budapest in February 2015 to commemorate the murder of Boris Nemtsov and to protest against the assassins' intentions to destroy democracy and freedom of speech in Russia (*Közös főhajtás...*, 2015).

### 3.2.3. MSZP's attitudes towards Ukraine

Ukraine has always been important for MSZP mainly in the light of the Hungarian minority living in Transcarpathia. This is part of the reason why MSZP has supported the process of Ukraine's EU integration.<sup>52</sup> MSZP politicians expressed their concerns whenever actions against ethnic Hungarians in particular took place in Ukraine.<sup>53</sup> Anxiety over the situation of the Hungarian minority was the main driving force behind MSZP's position at the beginning of the Ukraine crisis as well. This is why MSZP's first reaction to the crisis was to bide for time. At the beginning of the crisis in Ukraine, President Yanukovich was considered by both MSZP and Fidesz foreign policy experts to be a reliable partner who had made significant gestures towards the Hungarian minority. Furthermore, Hungarian politicians were concerned over the nationalist and far-right forces within the opposition movement. Therefore, during the initial months of the crisis in Ukraine, MSZP was rather interested in preserving the status quo (Orbán és az MSZP..., 2013). While criticising the Hungarian government's inactivity, MSZP released statements condemning police brutality, demanding peaceful solutions and calling for Ukraine not to be forced to choose between the EU and Russia (Orbán és az MSZP..., 2013). Later, both party chair Attila Mesterházy and MEP Csaba Tabajdi condemned the abolition of the language bill in Ukraine in February 2014 (*Elfogadhatatlan az ukrán...*, 2014). MSZP's stance changed clearly with the annexation of Crimea.

## 3.3. Jobbik's position towards Russia and the Ukraine crisis

Among the parties under investigation, Jobbik featured the toughest anti-communist agenda after its foundation in 2003. The party's membership comprised a young generation of university students with no affiliation to the communist period whatsoever, who tried to capitalise on grievances of the com-

<sup>52</sup> MSZP welcomed the ratification of the Cooperation Agreement between the EU and Ukraine by the EP in a statement (*Nyilatkozat – az Európai Parlament...*, 2014)

<sup>53</sup> In 2012, Csaba Tabajdi condemned the reorganisation of electoral districts in Ukraine in a manner not based on ethnic relations (*Elfogadhatatlan a magyar...*, 2012).

unist past (Kovács Dávid..., 2005).<sup>54</sup> With Gábor Vona becoming party chairman in 2006, the party started to turn pro-Russian with the help of Béla Kovács, a former Russian-Hungarian businessman who became the party's foreign cabinet leader and then an MEP. In 2014, Mr Kovács was accused of spying on the institutions of the European Union for the Kremlin (Juhász et al., 2015, p. 20). Jobbik's 2004 and 2006 election programmes (*A Jobbik rövid...*, 2004; *A Jobbik 2006-os...*, 2006) repeated the same statements about moving Hungary's foreign policy towards neutrality, reducing the "security risk" of NATO membership, and taking economic advantage of the Russian "sphere of influence". The party's 2009 European Parliamentary programme mentioned Russia only in economic terms in the context of regaining the Russian markets lost after the transition (*Magyarország...*, 2009). The party's peculiarity stems from the fact that its pro-Russian turn is coupled with a constant Russophobic attitude at the level of grassroots political supporters and local organisations.<sup>55</sup>

Jobbik's 2010 election programme (*Radikális változás...*, 2010) took a clear pro-Kremlin position by declaring Russia a "geopolitical, and energy superpower" to be reckoned with, called for Hungary to "turn its foreign trade orientation Eastward", and placed Jobbik in the role of a mediator based on a shared "ancient history" or cultural identity of Eastern civilisation. In the parliament, the party has backed the two major Russian energy projects: South Stream and construction of the Paks II Nuclear Power Plant. The ideological juxtaposition between Jobbik and the Kremlin became more apparent in 2013, when Gábor Vona praised the traditionalist manner of "Eurasianism" in contrast to the liberal mischief of Euro-Atlanticism (*Amerikanizmus...*, 2013), and in 2014 when Jobbik's new election programme (*Kimondjuk...*, 2014) threatened to label international human rights organisations as "foreign agents" along the lines of Russian regulations.

After the crisis in Ukraine unfolded in 2014, Jobbik switched to a pro-Russian campaign mode launching one political action after another to support Russia and discredit Ukraine. For example, Jobbik's senior politicians "observed" the Crimean referendum and separatist elections (Shekhovtsov, 2014a and 2014b) and interpreted the Maidan events as an illegitimate coup staged by the West to provoke Russia (*Küszöbön...*, 2014), Gábor Vona published an open letter calling upon the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE and the International Committee of the Red Cross to investigate alleged mass murders committed by the Ukrainian Army in Eastern Ukraine, etc. (*A Donyeck...*, 2014). The last major pro-Russian action launched by Jobbik was a nationwide petition campaign on Hungary's neutrality in the Ukrainian conflict, and was intended to discredit NATO in the eyes of the Hungarian public (*A semlegességünket...*, 2015).<sup>56</sup>

### 3.4. LMP's stance towards Russia and the Ukraine crisis

The green party LMP was founded in 2008 and entered the Hungarian parliament in 2010. The party's stance towards Russia is mainly based on its commitment to the principles of environmental protection, human rights and transparency, and on LMP's opposition to both previous MSZP governments and the current Fidesz government. LMP clearly rejects Hungary's deepening relations and growing

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<sup>54</sup> Dávid Kovács, the former chairman of Jobbik, called for an independent country free from both "Russian and American boots", while in 2005 the party's then deputy chairman explained the Hungarian democratic transition in terms of conspiratorial tampering by the American and Russian intelligence services.

<sup>55</sup> The fact that Jobbik expresses overtly pro-Russian stances despite persistent Russophobic attitudes among its own supporters probably showcases the Kremlin's influence over the party. The party's local and grassroots levels retain a Russophobic stance based on the country's Soviet-Communist past; the party's voters would choose the United States (48%) over Russia (27%) in the event of a new cold war scenario. Jobbik's pro-Russian behaviour is disseminated successfully among the different far-right, neo-Fascist and paramilitary organisations within its reach, which have high hopes of a successful territorial secession of Transcarpathia to Hungary.

<sup>56</sup> Jobbik has nevertheless manoeuvred itself into a self-defeating position with respect to Ukraine, with Gábor Vona regularly travelling to Moscow to lobby for autonomy for the Transcarpathian Hungarian minority. Kyiv has banned leading Jobbik politicians Ukraine for the very same reasons, however, thus making successful lobbying on behalf of the Hungarian minority impossible in Ukraine.

dependence on Russia due to the expansion of the Paks Nuclear Power Plant and the (now abandoned) South Stream project (*Az LMP szerint...*, 2015; *Déli Áramlat...*, 2014).

LMP's position in the Russia-Ukraine conflict has been mainly based on the party's concerns over the situation of the Hungarian minority, growing Russian influence in the region and the party's European commitment. Since the beginning, LMP has supported Ukraine's EU integration and has condemned state violence against pro-EU demonstrators in Kyiv (*Az ukrán válság...*, 2013). In line with the position of the European Green Party, LMP has supported the sanctions imposed on Russia and has acknowledged that the Russian military is involved in actions on Ukrainian territory (*Meszerics Tamás az ukrániai helyzetről*, 2014). In March 2015, LMP's co-chair, András Schiffer, stated that Russia's actions in Ukraine were "in flagrant violation of international conventions" (*Ukrajna: az Országgyűlés...*, 2015). According to MEP Tamás Meszerics, the solution to the Ukraine crisis could be autonomy for minorities granted by a unitary Ukrainian state (*Meszerics Tamás az ukrániai helyzetről*, 2014).

Based on the party's commitment to the rights (e.g. to autonomy) of ethnic Hungarians living outside Hungary (*Az LMP választási programja*, 2014, pp. 85–86), LMP has strongly criticised the Ukrainian government for the abolition of the language bill (*Ukrajnában szükség...*, 2014), planned sanctions against ethnic Hungarians with dual citizenship (*Elfogadhatatlan a kárpátaljai...*, 2015), and the possible closure of border crossings to Ukrainian citizens of military service age (*Az LMP kiáll...*, 2015).

### 3.5. DK's stance towards Russia and the Ukraine crisis

The stance of Demokratikus Koalíció (DK [Democratic Coalition], founded in 2011 after seceding from MSZP), the party of former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, towards Russia does not differ significantly from the positions of the other opposition parties. DK's stance is mainly based on the party's position in domestic politics, i.e. its implacable opposition to the Orbán government. DK criticises Hungary's growing dependence on Russia due to the government's foreign policy line, mainly the Paks agreement (*Csattanós válasz...*, 2015). While the party's 2013 programme considered Russia Hungary's strategic economic partner (*Európai Magyarországot!*, 2013), DK now criticises the government's Eastern Opening policy as well. On the occasion of the abandonment of the South Stream pipeline, Gyurcsány called for an end to the policy, labelling it an "era of adventures". In his view, Hungary has become a satellite of a weakened and isolated Russia (*Gyurcsány: Léket kapott...*, 2014).

DK's positions on certain issues, however, are dependent on and limited by earlier policies of the Gyurcsány government. For example, it was Ferenc Gyurcsány himself who in Moscow in 2009 signed the treaty on the section of South Stream going through Hungary, and who in 2006 called for an increase in business, economic, cultural and academic relations between Russia and Hungary. Gyurcsány's personal perception of Putin has changed, as well. While their personal relationship used to be close and the two used to have private meetings, Gyurcsány stated in February 2015 that the Putin of today was not the Putin of the past. Gyurcsány no longer views Putin as a man of peace and peaceful cooperation, but rather as a man of conflict and aggression (*Gyurcsány: Putyin...*, 2015).

As far as the Russia-Ukraine conflict is concerned, DK takes Russia's involvement in the fighting as a given. On the occasion of Putin's visit to Budapest, DK called for the Hungarian parliament to back a resolution condemning Russia's aggression against Ukraine (*Az Országgyűlés ítélje el...*, 2015). During a meeting with Russia's ambassador to Hungary in February 2014, however, Gyurcsány failed to address the issue of Ukraine (*Gyurcsány Ferenc az orosz...*, 2014).

Regarding domestic tendencies in Russia, DK has linked these issues to domestic tendencies in Hungary (e.g. authoritarian inclinations, the threatening of NGOs, and a politically biased judiciary). In the wake of Boris Nemtsov's murder, DK promoted in Hungary an EP resolution co-authored by the party's MEP, Csaba Molnár, condemning the state of democracy in Russia (*Közlemény: Az Európai Parlament...*, 2015).

### 3.6. Együtt-PM's position towards Russia and the Ukraine crisis<sup>57</sup>

The centre-left Együtt 2014 [Together 2014<sup>58</sup>] led by former PM Gordon Bajnai was formed in 2013 to challenge Fidesz in the 2014 general elections. Its election alliance programme (*A te jövőd...*, 2014) contained only a small sub-section on energy supplies, which declared the need to decrease Hungary's energy dependence on Russia, while "strengthening the Western orientation of Ukraine". The alliance turned immediately anti-Kremlin in the wake of the Crimean crisis,<sup>59</sup> and Együtt-PM attacked both Jobbik's adamant pro-Russian stance and Fidesz's hideous background deal with the Kremlin/Rosatom viewed as Orbán's ultimate pro-Russian turnaround. The Ukrainian conflict, Ukraine's sovereignty, and any allegiance towards the Kremlin were considered by the parties to be a matter of European unity and a threat to Hungary's successful integration into Western structures which need to be defended – starting with Ukraine. The alliance capitalised mainly on anti-Russian demonstrations<sup>60</sup> and political actions<sup>61</sup>.

## 4. Other influencing agents (civic actors, pro-Russian "agents")

Traditionally, the overwhelming majority of the Hungarian public has not been interested in foreign policy questions. Due to the fact that Hungary's relations with Russia have become a major issue in domestic politics, however, players on both sides have become active and visible in the main aspects of the issue (e.g. the expansion of the Paks Nuclear Power Plant, gas supplies, the crisis in Ukraine, Putin's visit to Hungary and, most topically, the refugee crisis).

While environmental NGOs, including the most recognised ones (e.g. Greenpeace, Levegő Munkacsoport, Védegylet, Magyar Természetvédők Szövetsége), and certain public policy think tanks have expressed their opposition to the expansion of the Paks Nuclear Power Plant many times, they keep stressing that they are not "anti-Russian". However, at a demonstration against the expansion, speakers criticised the vision of an allied Eurasia advanced by the Hungarian government and participants chanted slogans reflecting Hungary's Soviet-Socialist past (e.g. "Comrades welcome"; *Ötszázan tüntettek...*, 2014). The Hungarian government's friendly policy line towards Russia was among the issues that brought tens of thousands into the streets in Budapest and other cities in autumn 2014. Besides criticising corruption, nepotism and unjust policies, demonstrators called for an end to Hungary's dependence on Russia („*Már a kormányban...*“, 2014). The series of demonstrations was organised by an alliance of civic movements and public figures. The demonstrations had lost momentum by the beginning of 2015, however, and the main organisers have disappeared from public life since then. Another occasion to criticise the Hungarian government's policy line towards Russia was Vladimir Putin's visit to Hungary in February 2015. A demonstration took place on the very day of the visit, and speakers condemned Russia's involvement in the Ukrainian conflict, expressed their solidarity with Ukraine, and criticised the expansion of the Paks Nuclear Power Plant as well as the government's "turn to the East" (*Putyin látogatása...*, 2015).

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<sup>57</sup> Even though the Együtt-PM alliance, which consisted of the Együtt ("Together") party and the PM (Párbeszéd Magyarorszáért, "Discussion for Hungary") party, dissolved after the elections in 2014, the stance of the two parties on Russia and the Ukraine crisis do not differ, and many of the activities presented here took place during the alliance. Therefore, the Együtt-PM stance is presented in a joint section.

<sup>58</sup> Officially "Together – Party for a New Era".

<sup>59</sup> The Együtt-PM electoral alliance expressed solidarity with the demonstrations in pursuit of democracy and European integration on Kyiv's central "Maidan" square in December 2013 (*Az Együtt-PM szolidáris...*, 2014).

<sup>60</sup> Organised, for example, against the Russian military intervention in Ukraine (*Az orosz nagykövetség...*, 2014) and the construction of Paks II.

<sup>61</sup> For instance, they demanded a national security screening of a pro-Russian Jobbik politician and a separate parliamentary session about the crisis in Ukraine.



In addition to those who are critical of Russia's influence in Hungary, supporters of the Kremlin's line regularly make their presence visible as well. Pro-Kremlin agents are mainly active on and spread their propaganda through social media and online news platforms (e.g. hidfo.ru, South Front Hu and the Titkolt Hírek Facebook page). As Political Capital presented in its study (Juhász et al., 2015), these platforms are embedded in the international network of the Kremlin's propaganda channels and are closely related to Hungarian far-right organisations and media networks. However, pro-Kremlin actors are keen to prove their presence beyond the virtual space as well. Even though these agents are marginal in the public, their actions aim at countering voices critical of the Kremlin and providing news material for pro-Kremlin media outlets. These were the goals of a pro-Putin demonstration in Budapest on the day of Putin's visit (*Kubátvtól a kommunistákig...*, 2015) and a demonstration against Hungary's involvement in the Ukraine conflict and the conscription of ethnic Hungarians living in Transcarpathia organised by the Jobbik youth organisation and Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom [Sixty-four Counties Youth Movement], an allied organisation of Jobbik (*Koporsóval a háború ellen*, 2015).<sup>62</sup>

Besides far-right media, Russian influence is visible in certain mainstream media outlets as well. On the staffs of certain news organisations, one finds journalists who regularly attend various political events in Moscow in addition to openly expressing pro-Kremlin positions (e.g. certain journalists at the dailies *Magyar Hírlap* and *Magyar Nemzet*, and on the television channel Echo TV). The public media have shown signs of Russian influence as well. In February 2014, public radio station Kossuth Rádió labelled the Maidan demonstrators "terrorists". As the incident caused public outrage and drew condemnation from leading opposition politicians, the public media admitted that the news had been edited on the basis of reports published on Russia Today, a clearly pro-Putin media outlet funded by the Kremlin (*Terroristáknak nevezték...*, 2014).

## 5. Conclusions

There is growing evidence that the Russian regime aims to exert political influence in Hungary and that this is not limited to extremist circles. The Kremlin's general objective is to stir up anti-Western sentiments within the population and in so doing to weaken and destabilise the EU from within. In the meantime, the Hungarian government has seemed rather to promote than hinder Russian propaganda efforts through its policy measures and political discourse. Jobbik's role has been evident in this context as well; the far-right party regularly tries to steer the government in the direction of pro-Russian policies, especially when it comes to the Ukrainian crisis.

Even though the majority of Hungarian society oppose stronger ties between Hungary and Russia and are committed to partnerships within the Euro-Atlantic region, Russian influence and pro-Kremlin propaganda have clearly increased in recent years. The signs of this influence are mostly visible in the far-right of the political spectrum, although the process is not independent of the present Hungarian government's foreign policy. PM Orbán's current policy towards Russia stands in stark contrast to his harsh criticism of Russia and the Hungarian government's policy towards Russia before 2009. At that time, Orbán opposed an opening towards Russia and the strengthening of economic and political relations between Russia and Hungary, which was then governed by a coalition of social democrats and liberals. The change in Orbán's stance is not unique, however. On the basis of domestic political considerations, the Socialist Party, MSZP, has almost completely reversed its own positions. While in opposition, MSZP criticised the government for policies that it subsequently pursued in government after 2004. In view of the fact that the Hungarian public generally have no interest in foreign policy,

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**62** An interesting development ahead of the 2014 local elections in Hungary was the campaign of a practically non-existent party called Zöldek Pártja (Party of the Greens), a fake green party which ran a pro-Putin campaign with billboards comparing Putin to Obama (*Megtaláltuk...*, 2014).

Hungary's political parties stake out their positions on such issues solely on the basis of their current domestic political interests. While governments tend to consider Hungarian-Russian relations a matter of pragmatic and economic consideration, the shortcomings of this approach were demonstrated by both the Georgian and Ukrainian crises. In both cases, the respective Hungarian governments found themselves in a situation where their scope of action was limited by dependence on Russia.

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# Hungarian foreign policy and the crisis in Ukraine

BOTOND FELEDY

## 1. Introduction

Hungarian foreign policy has been strongly influenced by domestic political factors during the Fidesz governments of 2010–2014 and the current one since May 2014. The struggle for short-term popular support in public opinion polls on the one hand, the downgrading of the classical institutional decision-making by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the other – these phenomena might place Budapest's long-term strategic foreign policy objectives at risk. These are global trends in foreign policy decision-making, however, and usually lead to centralisation in the prime minister's office and appointments of junior people to the position of minister of foreign affairs, as in Austria and Hungary. Once foreign affairs are handled by the staff of the prime minister's office, the dose of domestic arguments in the decision-making process necessarily increases. In Hungary, this global tendency has been manifested in exponential proportions, due in large part to the extraordinary legislative power of Fidesz, which has won constitutional majorities in two consecutive elections.

More specific to the Hungarian context is the fact that on occasion government communication has been articulated very differently domestically and internationally, resulting in curious doublespeak situations. While Fidesz built on its "freedom fighter" image to rally popular support at home, this approach touched foreign affairs right away in 2010, immediately after the new Fidesz government took power. The image of Fidesz and PM Viktor Orbán abroad was shaped by a provocative Hungarian prime minister, which has caused a few misunderstandings with partners in and outside of Europe.

All these factors make the analysis of the official Hungarian position on Ukraine even more interesting, as there is sometimes little in common between the communication and the actual measures taken. This chapter deconstructs the existing narratives and aims to enumerate the factual and chronological side of events in order to be able to make an independent judgment.

According to quantitative analyses of the international press, PM Orbán's image is fairly Russophile. In reality, however, he is much less pro-Putin (Rácz, 2015; Hungary in the Media, 2015); Orbán has no reason to trust Putin as Putin does not trust him. One may discern in his policies an attempt to balance between the great powers in the middle of the CEE region. The question is whether PM Orbán and his team are capable of outsmarting aggressive and self-interested partners. It would be an understatement to claim that his intentions are risky; to play with the Kremlin is to play with fire. Nevertheless, the appraisal of current Hungarian foreign policy shall be made according to existing and realistic alternatives, i.e. what else could have been done or which other option should have been chosen.

PM Orbán had benefited from an important camp of supporters among Polish voters and politicians. With the evolution of the crisis and Putin's reception in Budapest in February 2015, however, Orbán's image in Warsaw deteriorated significantly. Slovakia has been pursuing an agenda similar to that of Hungary, although much more quietly, like Austria. PM Orbán likes provocation and enjoys conflict, and thus his rhetoric sometimes outpaces his actions. This chapter compares the active measures implemented by Hungary with those of other V4 states, and demonstrates that the differences are often smaller than one might expect based on international press coverage of the Fidesz government over the past two years. Nevertheless, a serious risk always remains when one does business with the Kremlin.

## 2. The place of Russia and Ukraine in the Hungarian foreign policy doctrine

Hungary's last well-articulated and consensual foreign policy strategy is more than two decades old. It was drafted before 9/11, the rise of ISIS, several EU enlargements and the Ukraine crisis – even the BRICs had not yet been identified as a coherent group at that time. Viktor Orbán, Hungary's prime minister, has been trying to adjust the country's foreign policy to the new realities since his second mandate started in 2010. Recent events – opting to enlarge the Paks Nuclear Power Plant in cooperation with Rosatom, inviting Putin to Budapest for an extraordinary bilateral summit in early 2015, and the persistent freedom fight with Brussels – have raised doubts even among Hungary's traditional partners. Hungary has several country-specific circumstances, however, which may shed light on the Fidesz government's motivations.

The government's communications and the measures taken by Hungary during the Ukraine crisis are best understood from the perspective of the Eastern Opening policy.

This chapter provides a narrative of how the Hungarian foreign policy doctrine has evolved recently, and how the war in Ukraine has influenced elements of it. A short overview of official cooperation between Hungary, Ukraine and Russia will be introduced in order to illustrate the legal framework and the legislative actions taken. This will be followed by a selection of the most important moments of government communication since the crisis began, which also constitutes a short summary of the Hungarian interpretation of bilateral and multilateral summits. After covering the area of communication, the chapter reiterates Hungary's concrete actions and contributions. Finally, a short analysis will open a space for further questions and dilemmas.

## 3. How has the Hungarian foreign policy doctrine evolved since the fall of the iron curtain?

### 3.1. The dilemmas of the doctrine until 2010

Hungarian foreign policy has had three mostly consensual objectives since 1989:

- integration into the Euro-Atlantic community (NATO in 1999, the EU in 2004),
- support for the autonomy of ethnic Hungarian communities in neighbouring countries,
- driving a friendly neighbourhood policy in the region.

The Ukrainian crisis might thus be interpreted in Budapest not only as a geopolitical dilemma regarding Russian influence, but also as a problem with respect to the traditionally supported Hungarian minority living in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine.

While the above-mentioned three goals of Hungarian foreign policy have not been disputed, nor have conservatives and socialists ranked them equally. Fidesz and the right-wing parties have usually placed support for Hungarian communities ahead of good relations with neighbouring countries, whereas socialist and left-wing parties have often been considered to have prioritised good relations over the situation of the ethnic Hungarian minorities.

This dilemma returned symbolically for a brief moment at the very beginning of the crisis in Ukraine. PM Orbán had a controversial sentence in his inaugural speech in May 2014, after winning another two-thirds majority in the general elections. He said that the 200,000 Hungarians living in Ukraine "are to acquire dual citizenship, enjoy collective rights fully and receive the possibility of self-administration" (*Orbán magára...*, 2014). Certain leaders of Hungary's V4 partners immediately understood this as a declaration of Budapest's support for the territorial autonomy of Hungarians and therefore the division of Ukraine. This unfortunate event reflects well that Hungarian politicians



cannot avoid the dilemma of whether to show support for Hungarian minorities or to push for good relations with neighbours. The first option usually brings in more votes than the second, and therefore PM Orbán decided to push ahead with the minority-protective narrative. In turn, this caused anxiety among those who tended to interpret the Donbas conflict as a minority rights issue, as well as those who are uncomfortable with ethnically based autonomy issues, especially coming from Hungary. The timing of the speech made it more justified to show support for the Hungarians of Transcarpathia than to respect the sensitivities of the countries in the region.

Fidesz was the most articulate supporter of Hungarian minorities already during its first mandate between 1998 and 2002. Later, Fidesz opened the possibility for Hungarian-speaking foreign citizens to acquire Hungarian citizenship (and even to obtain voting rights in certain cases). The target was set that at least one million new citizens should be sworn in. The hasty acceleration in granting citizenship was revealed to be a national security risk when investigative journalists claimed that organised criminal groups – with examples from Ukraine – were abusing the government’s accommodating policy (*Ukrán maffia osztja...*, 2015). The citizenship programme was also very popular in Transcarpathia because it included a Schengen-compatible passport.

Hungarian-Russian relations gained momentum during the eight years of Socialist rule between 2002 and 2010. PM Ferenc Gyurcsány befriended Vladimir Putin in the manner of Gerhard Schröder, the two having private dinners and cosy conversations. This was not transformed into important economic gains or a significant strengthening of energy security, however.

### **3.2. Energy policy and the unavoidable East**

The European Union and especially the Eastern member states began waking up to the new realities of a strengthened Russia in the second half of the 2000s, and Hungary was no exception. In a certain regard, Budapest was stuck; almost four-fifths of Hungarian households were heating and cooking with gas, which is indeed a high ratio even among the V4 countries. On the other hand, since 2006, when the Ukrainian gas pipelines were shut down for the first time, every Hungarian government has had to face the risk of being cut off in the middle of winter.

The Hungarian energy mix for producing electricity is very sensitive to Russian influence. Almost half of Hungarian electricity production is generated from nuclear energy, and one-fourth from natural gas. Both depend heavily on Russia, as the Soviet-constructed Paks Nuclear Power Plant operates with fuel from Russia and gas imports are also reliant on Gazprom (accounting for some 80% of all Hungarian gas imports). The political logic is divided on how to solve the problem: while the short-term security of gas deliveries must be guaranteed, the country should do its best to decrease energy dependence on an unpredictable Russia.

Orbán himself remained a staunch anti-Russian figure during his years in opposition between 2002 and 2009. He had an infamous debate with Russian ambassador Igor Savolskiy in 2007, where he openly suggested that Gazprom was a political weapon of the Kremlin. One should keep in mind that this was the same year that Germany was working hard to finalise the contracts for the Nord Stream pipeline. The European public was still far away from the ambiance that would be imposed on it years later by the Ukrainian crisis.

### **3.3. The misfortunate vacuum**

By 2010, when the conservative Fidesz party took over the government after eight years of Socialist rule, the foreign policy agenda described above was largely outdated. Euro-Atlantic integration had been achieved and had never been replaced with more nuanced goals, such as profiling EU membership by focusing on certain EU policies or building up multi-institutional interest representation bodies in Brussels with government support.

This vacuum in the Hungarian foreign policy doctrine was quickly filled from two directions by members of the Fidesz government. In a more conservative way, János Martonyi, the foreign minister

of Hungary's EU presidency in 2011, drafted a new foreign policy strategy in the same year. It was rather laconic about Russia and Ukraine specifically. The latter was mentioned in the strategy as part of the EU's Eastern Partnership programme, although it is well known that in practice Martonyi lobbied Kyiv significantly on various issues at informal levels. Russia was declared to be a "prominent partner" of Hungary. Budapest supported the dialogue and partnership between NATO, the EU and Moscow (Magyar külpolitika, 2011, p. 38). Interestingly, the document mentioned the settlement of controversial bilateral economic questions, in particular that the Hungarian government wished to buy back the shares of the Hungarian oil refining company MOL from Russia's Surgutneftegas. Although Austria's OMV had sold its 21% stake in MOL to Surgutneftegas for EUR 1.4 billion in 2009, Hungary acquired the same stake in May 2011 for EUR 1.88 billion.

In the Eastern Partnership chapter of the document, the strategy vaguely mentions Ukraine as Hungary's largest neighbour, which "stands at the forefront of our foreign policy interest" (Magyar külpolitika, 2011, p. 23).

PM Orbán launched other initiatives to fill in the foreign policy gap, however. His intentions were more specific, revolving around three major axes: energy policy, the *nemzetpolitika* ["Hungarians-as-a-nation"] policy and the *Keleti Nyitás* (Eastern Opening) policy, which set the agenda for his 2010–2014 government, although the geopolitical context later elevated energy policy to the top priority. The new agenda was not intended to entirely replace the old one, however; it was merely a supplement.

PM Orbán made it clear that Hungary had to pursue an energy policy that was able to strengthen and safeguard the country's sovereignty. Secondly, Hungary had to rebalance its trade towards Asia and third countries in accordance with global trends, because the country's intra-EU exports were oscillating at around 80%. This was the policy originally called the Eastern Opening. It seems that Russia occupies a special place in Fidesz's new Eastern Opening doctrine, which is optimistic about future, long-term cooperation between the EU and Russia. Finally, the large Hungarian minorities in Slovakia, Transcarpathian Ukraine, Transylvania and Serbia received extra attention from the government, as Orbán selected the ethnic Hungarian political parties in the respective countries as partners.

The Russian violation of Ukraine's territorial sovereignty came at the worst moment and in the worst form for Hungary, as it touched all three new policy lines.

### **3.4. Eastern Opening in the making**

Orbán's foreign policy tipping point can be identified retrospectively. He sharply criticised PM Gyurcsány for inviting Vladimir Putin to his Budapest villa for a home dinner in 2006. Three years later, however, in November 2009 when his victory in the upcoming general elections seemed highly probable, Orbán met Putin in St. Petersburg, still six months before winning two-thirds of the seats in the Hungarian parliament. The party press release was laconic about the meeting, which had officially taken place at the invitation of the speaker of State Duma. The party claimed that Orbán wished to reset Hungarian-Russian relations in order to avoid repeating the two countries' previous experiences during the 20th century.

In the fall of 2013, the Office of the Prime Minister allegedly began to seriously prepare the Paks II project, i.e. to construct two more nuclear reactor blocks in cooperation with Rosatom. In February 2014, PM Orbán signed the first contract in Moscow on the credit provided by Russia for the construction works. Just few weeks after this new milestone in the Russian-Hungarian relationship, the crisis in Ukraine erupted with Russian involvement. The same year, the South Stream pipeline project was abandoned by Moscow; Hungary had been one of the very last supporters of the Russian project.

### **3.5. Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations and Russia's position**

Hungary's strongest bilateral partner in terms of trade and diplomacy is Germany. When it came to the question of whether to support Ukraine's possible NATO membership bid, Berlin was one of the

fiercest opponents. Hungary was again in line with Germany, as PM Orbán frequently makes choices similar to those of Chancellor Merkel. As for Ukraine's EU prospects, Hungary was much more vocal in fostering good relations between Kyiv and Brussels. The officials of the foreign ministry truly believed that Ukraine might become a member in approximately two decades, and worked towards this goal (Varga, 2008, pp. 1–6).

When the EU Foreign Affairs Council met in February 2014, Hungary was represented by Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Zsolt Németh, a strong pro-Atlantic member of Fidesz. He “confirmed that both the beginning of political dialogue and restarting Ukraine’s process of integration with the European Union [were] also of utmost importance” (*Hungarian position on...*, 2014).

Russia had been a partner and a potential dominant force in the Visegrad region. In 2015, this translates more as a threatening power and disloyal player. Hungary followed Germany and its pragmatic Russia policy for years, i.e. all EU-Russia partnerships and NATO dialogues were supported by Budapest. During the war in Ukraine, PM Orbán made it clear that he believed Russia must be part of a long-term European settlement plan, in the sense of “we need Russia and Russia needs us”. He has always maintained that only negotiations and peaceful means can move us towards resolving the standoff. The difference between Merkel’s recent approach and Orbán’s current position, however, could be discerned at their international press conference in Budapest in February 2015. While Orbán was talking about the Eurasian Union and its potential in the long term, Merkel took the strict line that first peace must be imposed, and rapprochement might come only after successfully implementing Minsk II.

Delivery of lethal weapons – an idea favoured by certain circles in the US – is not an option for the government in Budapest, as the male ethnic Hungarian population of the Transcarpathia region have already fled to Hungary to avoid military conscription. An escalation of the armed conflict in a neighbouring country is considered dangerously volatile and would inevitably drag in the Hungarian minority. For Hungary – and other defensively postured V4 countries – the only scenario in which arms deliveries can be considered would be if the conflict in Ukraine were to become a proxy war that prevents further escalation triggering Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty.

Before exploring the details of Hungary’s understanding of the conflict-torn Ukrainian situation, it is worth taking a look at the previously established and evolving legal relationships between Budapest, Kyiv and Moscow.

## 4. Formal mechanisms of cooperation

If one takes a look at the intensity of cooperation between Hungary and Russia, the number of international agreements or other formalised, institutionalised common areas is not markedly high. It is more interesting to assess why the Hungarian government has maintained its *bona fide* attitude even after the shooting down of flight MH17: some symbolic agreements were made thereafter, on the side-lines of Putin’s visit to Budapest in February 2015.

The last significant collaboration that was put into law by the Hungarian parliament involves the Paks II Nuclear Power Plant enlargement. Act XXIV/2014 specifies the publication of the credit agreement between Hungary and Russia, while Act II/2014 declares the enhanced cooperation between the two countries on the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Act CCVI/2012 legalised the intergovernmental agreement between the Hungarian, Russian and Ukrainian governments on the transport of nuclear fuel through Ukrainian territory.

All the multilateral international agreements were put into law precisely as required under the Hungarian legal system, such as amendments concerning the European conventional arms treaty (Act CLVII/2011), and the EU-Russia Partnership and Co-operation Agreement (Act CX/2010). Several bilateral agreements on diverse issues such as consular services, mutual investments and avoidance of double taxation, and the prevention of tax evasion were adopted and enacted into law by the Hungarian parliament.

The desire to separate political and economic relations with Russia was reflected in several decisions. While pragmatically PM Orbán toed the line concerning the EU sanctions and NATO actions, he made serious efforts to maintain good faith towards Moscow during the first year of the crisis. The remarks he made was similar to that of Slovak PM Robert Fico, who concluded that the sanctions were hurting the Europeans more than the Russians, characterising them as “shooting ourselves in the foot” (*Europe...*, 2014). This continuous good faith was further demonstrated by the promotion of Péter Szijjártó to the position, among others, of government commissioner in charge of fostering Hungarian-Russian bilateral relations, mostly concerning economic and investment issues. Szijjártó is known to be one of PM Orbán’s closest confidants. The decision was taken on 11 June 2014. Two government decrees were adopted. One, regarding the provision of health care services, was adopted during the height of the Ukrainian crisis on 12 December 2014, demonstrating that low-profile diplomatic relations were maintained. The other, more important decree dates from 9 October 2012, when the government implemented a memorandum from 2008 legalising the construction of the South Stream pipeline across Hungarian territory.

Seven days before Putin’s 17 February 2015 visit to Budapest, the government adopted a resolution declaring 2015 the Hungarian-Russian year of culture, with all the necessary mandates for ministers to bring it to fruition. While no major events have been organised thus far, HUF 200 million has been officially allocated to sponsor them. A similar year of events took place exactly 10 years ago, in 2005.

The day after Putin’s visit, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Péter Szijjártó was tasked with finalising the text of a memorandum on the “enhancement of interregional cooperation” between Russia and Hungary. The official text has not yet been published.

One of the most important aspects of Russian-Hungarian relations since 2014 is embodied in peaceful nuclear cooperation in the form of construction of the Paks II nuclear reactor blocks. There is a separate agreement for the line of credit provided by Russia to finance the EUR 10–12 billion project, as well as two other contracts regulating the construction itself. The credit agreement is public, hence the interest rates and other terms are known. As with all credit agreements, it entails a certain amount of risk, although this has a different weight in the context of international relations infused with geopolitics.

Article 5 (3) of the credit agreement specifies the sanctions Hungary would face should it fail to repay its debt on time, with the most serious penalty clause – requiring immediate repayment in full – becoming applicable after a delay of 180 days. In a scenario where Hungary does not accept a particular delivery and does not repay part of its debt, but where the matter cannot be resolved within 180 days, this provision may be applicable. The resulting penalty is an almost direct road to bankruptcy, as all debts might be immediately claimed by the Russian side.

On the other hand, PM Orbán managed to negotiate a prepayment clause, which would give Hungary the option to repay its debt in full ahead of schedule. Once the government can secure more favourable terms on international financial markets, Budapest may be in a position to switch creditors. This constitutes a delicate balance with Article 5 (3) of the agreement.

## 5. Hungarian reactions

During the crisis in Ukraine, the government’s communications and policy measures have differed. While PM Orbán has generally remained a “freedom fighter” in his public statements, his political decisions have followed the German-led EU positions. One of the main questions is how much manoeuvring room the Hungarian government might have maintained vis-à-vis Moscow after the Paks II treaty and Putin’s visit to Budapest.

All three sensitive points of Hungarian foreign policy were touched by the crisis: how to treat a war in a neighbouring country, how to support ethnic Hungarians in Transcarpathia, and how to strike a balance in the Berlin-Brussels-Moscow triangle. On 4 March 2014, PM Orbán made his priorities

clear (*Prime Minister...*, 2014): "The most important issue for us in this whole conflict is the safety of the Hungarians, including both the Hungarians living in Hungary and the Hungarians living in Transcarpathia. This is the perspective from which we view the events." So this is the line of the old-new foreign policy doctrine which has otherwise significant domestic support. He continued (*Prime Minister...*, 2014): "The second Hungarian interest according to which we are shaping our actions regards Ukraine itself. Hungary's interest is for Ukraine to be a democratic state. We want a democratic Ukraine. A Ukraine in which the citizens of Ukraine, including citizens who belong to minorities, such as the Hungarians, can feel safe and can feel at home. Accordingly, Hungary cannot accept the abolishment of the language law, we regard this as an illegitimate decision and we insist that the rights of Hungarians should not be impaired as a result of the changes in Ukraine."

The official line on the conflict's resolution has always been peaceful negotiations. PM Orbán, Foreign Minister Martonyi and everyone else have adhered to this policy line. PM Orbán put it as follows (*Prime Minister...*, 2014): "As far as the solution to the situation goes, the Hungarian position is that a solution must be achieved through negotiation. There is an obvious situation: Ukraine is bordered from the east by Russia and from the west by the European Union. It follows that Russia and the European Union must negotiate with each other."

There was no mention of membership or other promises, but Hungary insisted on pursuing the original association agreement, which "'should be signed as soon as possible', Foreign Minister János Martonyi declared following the extraordinary meeting of EU foreign ministers in Brussels" (*Minister Martonyi...*, 2014). Later, the foreign minister repeatedly mentioned respect for territorial integrity as well (*Ministry of Foreign Affairs...*, 2014): "We declare again that Hungary is committed to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of neighbouring Ukraine, and regards the violation of its territorial integrity as a non-observance of international obligations and the UN Charter. On this score, we call on the signatories to the 1994 Budapest Memorandum to fulfil their obligations specified in paragraph 1, which guarantees the inviolability of Ukraine's borders, territorial integrity and sovereignty. ... In the current tense situation we underline that the parties involved in the Ukrainian conflict can prevent an escalating crisis and military clashes only through negotiations – in accordance with their commitment made in paragraph 6 of the Budapest Memorandum – to which Hungary offers assistance." PM Orbán and his foreign minister, János Martonyi, have usually struck very different tones. While the prime minister has spoken less often but has been more outspoken, Martonyi has more precisely articulated the common EU position, as reflected in the quotation above. This doublespeak has also been a feature of previous debates with the European Commission.

The EU summit held on 7 March 2014 did not change anything in Hungary's communication. Hungary was incensed by the cancellation of the law in Ukraine that had guaranteed that minorities might use their own languages in official places. This symbolic step was most probably intended to demonstrate Kyiv's authority over Russian-speaking communities, but it hurt Hungarians as well. The Embassy of Hungary in Washington responded as follows (*Hungarian Interest...*, 2014): "With regard to the gradual introduction of EU sanctions against Russia for its separation of Crimea from Ukraine, the [Hungarian] prime minister [has] said the EU must respond to the Russian 'aggression'. He [has] noted that the EU's position was not to mix political and economic issues, and to handle economic cooperation separately from political conflict." This latter line is in respect of Hungary's Eastern Opening policy, by that time already deeply engaged in the Paks II project. More serious economic sanctions barring certain Russian exports, for example, might impact the project severely.

The Crimean referendum was not recognised by Budapest either (*Illegitim a...*, 2014), although Jobbik's MEPs travelled to Crimea as observers to offer legitimacy to the Russian ruse.

The launch of reverse flow gas transport to Ukraine was one of the first concrete steps Budapest took (*Minister Martonyi...*, 2014): "'Hungary stands ready to transport gas into Ukraine and the technical means for doing so are at its disposal,' Foreign Minister János Martonyi declared after meeting Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Danylo Lubkivsky on 10 April." This point turned out to be a very sensitive one, as Russia later made it clear that any country reselling gas that had previously been acquired from Russia might face consequences.

Amid the escalation of the crisis, the political director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Szabolcs Takács, flew to Moscow on 13 May 2014. He was received by Sergey Lavrov's first deputy, Vladimir Titov. "Mr Takács referred to Hungary's interest in stability in Eastern Europe, and voiced Hungary's trust in the settlement mechanism as proposed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Political Director Szabolcs Takács urged that a roadmap proposed by [the] OSCE to resolve the crisis in Ukraine be implemented" (*Political Director...*, 2014).

In August 2014, Hungary chose to send a new ambassador to Kyiv, Ernő Keskeny, who had been Hungary's ambassador to Moscow during the first Fidesz government in 1998–2002. Most experts agreed that he was a Russophile and that his appointment therefore constituted an odd message to Kyiv, but he has kept his seat in the Ukrainian capital ever since.

On 14 September 2014, PM Orbán received Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller in the parliament. According to the Russian side's report, the meeting had two focuses. The first concerned Hungary's options for secure and continuous gas deliveries during the coming winter, which is always crucial politically in order to avoid any interruption of domestic heating services. The second was a discussion on how the South Stream gas pipeline project was progressing. Miller was still promising that the line could be opened in 2017 in Hungary, which was later falsified by Putin in Turkey when he cancelled the whole project. The Miller visit remains one of the Fidesz government's least explained Russian-Hungarian meetings.

The only sure thing is that before the end of September 2014 PM Orbán ordered the cessation of the reverse flow to Ukraine. This was interpreted as a very strong message from Budapest, which was immediately accused of having sided with Gazprom and Russian interests.

Orbán summed it up in a public radio address (*Hungary suspends...*, 2014): "Hungary cannot get into a situation in which, due to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, it cannot access its required supply of energy." Though Slovakia was much better positioned to provide gas to Ukraine, this was a question of symbolic solidarity. In early October, Hungarian gas storage facilities were ready to cover two-thirds of the expected winter consumption with a supply of 4 billion cubic metres of gas (*Mi lesz...*, 2014). The reverse flow was quietly reopened after Christmas 2014, and by February 2015 a daily volume of 5.9 million cubic metres were again being transported to Ukraine (*Élénkül a...*, 2015).

Despite the suspension of the reverse flow, Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó supported the proposed expansion of the EU visa ban (*Hungary supports...*, 2014). Hungary was therefore still toeing the line when it came to voting in the Council of the EU. This diplomatic doublespeak – no reverse flow but support for sanctions – continued in December when Szijjártó visited Kyiv and stated "at the press conference with his Ukrainian colleague, Pavlo Klimkin, following their discussion that 'Hungary, as a neighbouring country, needs Ukraine to be stable and strong'" (*Hungary needs...*, 2014).

The Hungarian prime minister's official ties to Kyiv were weaker than Poland's, but he maintained contact. Viktor Orbán flew to Kyiv and met Poroshenko for his inauguration in June 2014, where they promised to maintain warm high-level relations (*Orbán – Poroshenko-találkozó...*, 2014). The two leaders talked by telephone in November 2014 (*Poroshenko felhívta...*, 2014), but did not meet again until February 2015, which was more of an act of counterbalancing Putin's upcoming visit to Budapest.

On 9 February 2015, a week before the visit, Hungarian Defence Minister Csaba Hende made very clear at the Munich Security Conference that "Hungary continues to share the German position on the handling of the crisis in Ukraine" (*There is a...*, 2015). Two days later, the press officer of the Office of the Prime Minister announced that PM Orbán was preparing for a "short working visit" to Kyiv, which was then realised on 14 February 2015.

The communication about the Hungarian minorities was delegated to the responsible state secretary, and it did not come up as the main focus of the PM's international press conferences. Official communication with the ethnic Hungarian minority has been maintained during the crisis (Árpád János..., 2015): "The Hungarian government pays close attention to the situation of the Hungarian community in Transcarpathia, and makes every effort to ensure that they feel safe in their native land." This may summarise the March 2015 meeting between László Zubánics, president of the Hungarian Democratic Alliance in Ukraine, and Hungarian State Secretary for National Policy Árpád János Potápi.

## 5.1. Putin in Budapest

February 2015 was a real challenge for Hungarian foreign policy decision-makers. Vladimir Putin as well as Angela Merkel were about to arrive for short visits to Budapest. Informally, the Germans pressed hard for Hungary to postpone the Putin visit for a longer time after Merkel's arrival, but in the end Putin arrived on 17 February 2015, just two weeks after the chancellor's visit on 2 February. Putin made disdainful comments about Ukrainian fighters in a speech before the Hungarian parliament, while Debaltseve – a strategic site in Donetsk – was hit hard by Russian-backed separatists during the very same hours. Putin used the moment for photographs in a European capital from where he had been banned – the European Council had said officially that no EU member state should receive Putin for regular bilateral summits after flight MH17 was shot down. The Hungarian government secured the backing of the Council on this question, affirming that Putin's trip to Budapest was an irregular bilateral meeting and therefore did not fall under the prohibition.

Putin went even further symbolically: he visited a renovated Soviet cemetery in Budapest where some tombstones bear the original text under the red star. This original format asserts that 1956 was a counter-revolution – the official Soviet term for the 1956 uprising in Hungary – which resulted in huge domestic debates about his cemetery visit. In actual fact, no Hungarian state official accompanied him on this tour.

The expiring gas import contract was one of the main topics of the summit. Hungary had negotiated special prices in 1996, and the agreement was to expire in 2016. The tangible result of the negotiations was that Hungary was allowed to use the remainder of its untouched quota of gas imports. In other words, while Hungary had promised to buy a certain amount of gas in 1996, actual consumption had been much weaker, leaving a huge unused quota. Russia could have demanded payment even if Hungary ultimately did not wish to buy that gas, but in February 2015 Putin backed a compromise whereby Hungary could continue to use the remainder of this quota in future and pay only proportionately to Hungary's consumption. This was claimed as a victory by the government, although the agreement had been almost entirely leaked to the media well before the meeting. While the *in camera* negotiations lasted for about two hours, the real focus of their agenda remains an open question.

At the international press conference, PM Orbán again underscored that there would be no solution to the Ukrainian conflict without Russia; he repeated his support for Minsk II and asserted that excluding Russia from Europe would never be meaningful (*Orbán-Putyin...*, 2015). Orbán also stated that Hungary would not pose a threat to European unity, i.e. trying to reassure Hungary's European partners diplomatically while standing side-by-side with a strong and aggressive Putin.

In June 2014, Austria had emerged from a Putin visit to Vienna relatively unscathed, but Orbán became the object of harsh criticism in the major international newspapers. The issue was quickly dropped, however, when Italian PM Renzi flew to Moscow in early March. Whether the visit itself was the long overdue price for certain favours from Russia is yet to be answered.

Hungary was forced to explain itself several times over the Putin visit. Orbán wished to improve his image by flying to Warsaw on 19 February 2015, but the visit resulted in a serious diplomatic failure: Polish politicians were ready to question him on his new warm relations with Moscow, and the political situation in Warsaw was such that there was almost a competition between the opposition and the government for who could be more direct with PM Orbán on this issue. When Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó visited Prague in May 2015, he still felt it necessary to reiterate Hungary's commitment to EU unity (*Hungary will...*, 2015): "Hungary has always participated in adopting the EU's common position. We have always stood by joint European decisions. This is how it has been, and this is how it will be."

Lastly, PM Orbán gave a long and difficult interview to Russian daily *Kommersant* which was published on 20 February 2015, three days after Putin's visit (*Kommersant Interview...*, 2015). The weight of the text is also mirrored by the fact that it is still accessible on the prime minister's own homepage: "Hungary is suffering for two reasons: from the sanctions and from the measures taken by Russia in response. This is painful because the Russians do not want sanctions against Hungary

and similarly Hungary does not want sanctions against Russia. Yet despite this we are sustaining losses. Compared to Russia, Hungary is a small country. We are not each other's enemies, and yet we are now mutually causing each other losses. ... There are situations when we are on opposite sides of an issue, but both parties are aware the whole time that they are not enemies. The case of European sanctions is just such a situation. ... One of the most important topics of yesterday's meeting was that, in spite of the negative political climate, we should encourage investors to invest in each other's countries."

This sounds like a pre-MH17 statement, although it dates from 2015. Russia's investments in the CEE region are strongly politically driven, but in times of such crises actually any major investment is viewed in the light of national security.

The Russian presence in Hungary has most probably been strengthened in the eyes of all other CEE countries. While Poland and the Czech Republic have declared certain Russian embassy staff *persona non grata*, Hungary has not been so visibly diligent at the level of counter-intelligence. The single public denunciation of a Russian spy was the case of Jobbik MEP Béla Kovács, whose story was published by investigative journalists (*A nagy...*, 2014). The relevant documents came to light during the spring 2014 election campaign, but one year later his immunity still has not been lifted by the responsible EP committee.

Russian agitation and propaganda are indeed very active, however, to the point of being harmful to the government. A Russian-backed Hungarian website reported that Hungary is delivering tanks to Ukraine, supported by a photograph of tanks on rail vehicles. No lethal arms had been traded to Ukraine by the government, of course, but official denials had to be posted (*Ministry denies...*, 2014): "The Hungarian armed forces have been transporting military vehicles and equipment from one of its warehouse bases to another by train. These consignments have not crossed Hungary's border and the transport is not linked to events in Ukraine but to an ongoing reform of the armed forces' logistics supply system. ... The internet portal that posted the misleading report earlier in the day about the transports [has] already in the past published several reports about the armed forces that lacked any truth."

## 6. Hungary's current contributions to Ukraine

Hungary's NATO commitments are recognised in the community. The country maintained a Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan within ISAF, has been hosting the heavy airlift wing at Pápa, has been contributing to the air policing mission over Slovenia and the Baltic states, and took part in the Iron Sword joint military drill in Lithuania on 2–14 November 2014. In response to the Wales NATO summit in September 2014, PM Orbán vowed to increase Hungarian defence spending considerably on a year-by-year basis. Very recently, the Hungarian parliament has voted in favour of joining the anti-ISIS coalition with 150 Hungarian soldiers. Clearly, these cases fall in line with mainstream NATO activities, leaving no doubt about Hungary's engagement.

Hungary's contribution to Ukraine is significant at the NATO level. Budapest is not a lead nation in the NATO trust funds, but it has contributed EUR 100,000 to the NATO-Ukraine Cyber Defence Trust Fund (*NATO's Practical...*, 2015). The project is led by Romania "to help Ukraine develop technical capabilities to counter cyber threats. Based on availability of funds, assistance could include the establishment of an Incident Management Centre ..."

Hungary is an in-kind contributor to the Defence Education Enhancement Programme (DEEP) Ukraine (*NATO's Practical...*, 2015). This "is a tailored programme through which the Alliance advises on how to build, develop and reform educational institutions in the security, defence and military domain. ... It is the biggest DEEP programme ever with a partner country (in 2014, 40 events with more than 30 NATO experts and 150 Ukrainian faculty members, reaching an audience of almost 2000)."



Budapest is also taking part in NATO's Air Situation Data Exchange (ASDE) Cooperation with Ukraine, initiated already in 2006 (*NATO's Practical...*, 2015): "Following the Russia-Ukraine crisis, and at the request of Ukraine, air data information provided by NATO has been extended to cover a larger area."

Actually, together with France, the UK, Israel and Ukraine, Hungary is a lead nation of the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme (*NATO's Practical...*, 2015). "15 new activities approved since April 2014", where the Hungarians are contributing to "the Development of Optical Bio-Sensors for Detection of Bio-Toxins. The main focus of this project lies on the development of a new portable, hand-held device for highly sensitive detection of bio-toxins in low concentrations based on high sensitivity, optical bio-sensors with low power consumption."

When NATO decided in February 2015 to create so-called NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs), this only concerned the territories of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania (*Statement by...*, 2015). Soon thereafter, Hungary and Slovakia also filed requests for the establishment of such a command centre (*Slovakia eager...*, 2015). While these centres in the latter countries are not going to be realised for a number of years, Hungary has not yet taken any serious defensive measures with regard to procurement at the level of its army.

At the meeting of NATO defence ministers on Wednesday, 26 February (*Ukraine is...*, 2014), "Minister of Defence Csaba Hende told Hungarian news agency MTI that... Hungary is directly involved in the development of joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities and the training of medical personnel."

Hungary committed "to provide treatment for 20 wounded Ukrainian soldiers in Hungarian health care institutions. ... Hungary participates with 21 people in the Ukrainian mission of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the functioning of which was supported by the country with a further EUR 100,000" (*Hungary needs...*, 2015). At the same time, Péter Szijjártó repeated his intentions "to provide 100 scholarships for Ukrainian students at Hungarian universities" (*Hungary needs...*, 2015).

## 6.1. Hungarian NGOs and Ukraine

The Hungarian NGO scene has been active for two reasons. Firstly, the Hungarian public is relatively open to making financial contributions when international catastrophes occur and receive extensive media coverage. Secondly, the willingness to help is always greater when Hungarian minorities are affected.

One of the main players among Hungarian international aid NGOs is Hungarian Interchurch Aid (HIA): "Responding to the current emergency situation in Ukraine, HIA was among the first agencies (during the winter/spring period of 2014) that provided medical and psychosocial assistance to the affected population in Kiev, and later provided food and NFI assistance to IDPs in Ivano-Frankivsk and Lviv with the support of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and private donors" (*Emergency Assistance...*, 2015). "Talking about the program that will last until the end of May 2015, László Lehel, president-director of Hungarian Interchurch Aid said ... that basic food items, hygiene packages and warm blankets would be provided for the families that fled fighting. He added that they intend to take care of about 1,350 families, more than 7,000 refugees" (*The largest...*, 2015).

"Péter Szijjártó said that Hungarian civil and church organisations have so far sent [HUF 13 million in aid] comprising medical equipment, medicinal products, vaccines and blankets" (*Hungary needs...*, 2015). "Member organisations of the Hungarian Charity Council – the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, the Caritas Hungarica, the Hungarian Red Cross, the Hungarian Reformed Church Aid and the Hungarian Baptist Aid – have combined their efforts to send an aid convoy to Ukrainian families, Minister of State for Churches, National Minorities and Civil Affairs Miklós Soltész said" (*Hungarian charities...*, 2015).

## 7. Conclusions

If one examines the narratives of political communication by the Fidesz government and the foreign policy it actually pursues at the pragmatic level, the result is a vocally provocative prime minister taking lots of risks in foreign affairs. Three decisions stand out from the rest: the Paks II treaty, receiving Putin in Budapest, and the suspension of the reverse flow of gas to Ukraine in the last months of autumn 2014. The government provided specific reasons for each of these decisions individually, but experts see the cumulative risks. While any one of these decisions alone might be acceptable, their succession may reflect a greater exposure on the part of Hungary to the Kremlin than one would judge safe. Hungary possesses no national security council like Poland, the president does not intervene in foreign affairs as in the Czech Republic, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been downgraded in accordance with global trends. Under these circumstances, one may wonder where the above-mentioned foreign policy decisions stem from and what kind of unwritten strategy is actually being pursued in Hungary.

No small or medium-sized EU state could reasonably believe that its existence is not dependent on political and military alliances. In times of rising global competition, of an unpredictable Russia and global economic swings, proper risk assessment in foreign policy and engagement to maintain the trust of partners are of utmost importance.

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# Hungary and Russia in economic terms – love, business, both or neither?

ADA ÁMON – ANDRÁS DEÁK

## 1. Introduction

Hungarian-Russian relations have changed considerably during the last decade. In the mid-2000s, it was a limited and cautious relationship with many reservations on both sides. Being a “friend of (in those years much less authoritarian) Russia” was often perceived as something exceptional and was predominantly a radical leftist phenomenon in the public discourse. The political class was united in banning Russian investments from Hungarian strategic industries. Returning to Eastern markets seemed to be an old-fashioned leftist concept heavily criticised by conservative thinkers.

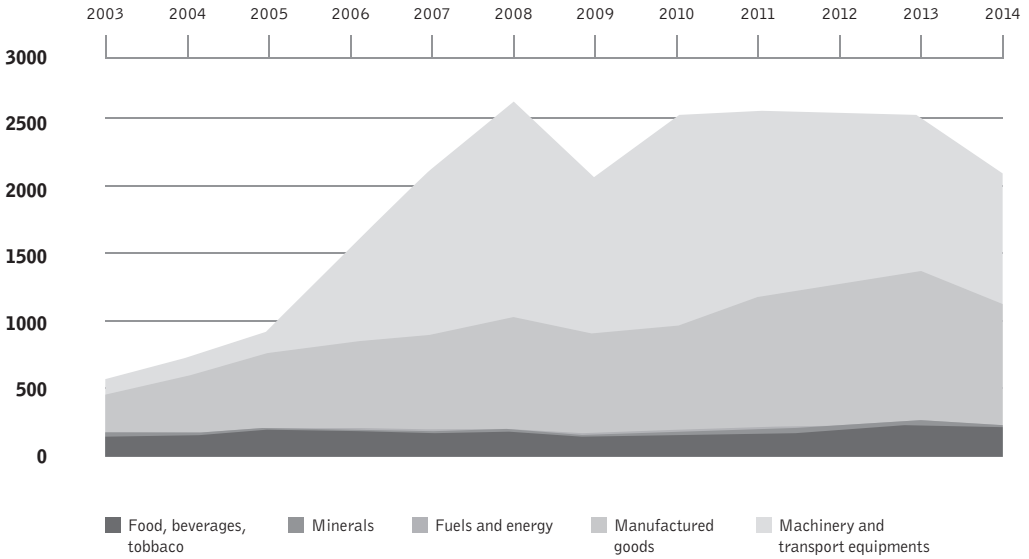
By 2014, however, Hungary had a significantly different outline of its Russia policy. By far the biggest component in this change was Viktor Orbán and his conservative followers giving up their reservations and objections against Russia. Policies and public appearances by senior officials and party leaders, approaching Russia both in economic terms and sometimes politically, demonstrate a radical shift in attitudes and preferences. All this, coupled with a highly controversial record of political developments in Hungary, leaves foreign observers at odds as to the nature, dynamics and trajectory of this bilateral relationship.

This chapter has two purposes. It attempts to provide an overview of bilateral economic ties including more recent developments. It also outlines an alternative to the Russian agenda in one of the most important linkages – energy. Finally, it endeavours to promote a better understanding of Hungary’s motivations in its Russia policy.

## 2. Just like in CEE – a limited relationship with a focus on foreign trade

For the Hungarian economy, the relevance of the Russian and Ukrainian markets – except energy – is relatively limited. In 2013, Russia’s and Ukraine’s shares of Hungary’s total exports were 3.11% and 2.39%, respectively. Even with these low proportions, these export destinations rank among Hungary’s largest export markets outside the EU. Exports in both cases grew steadily prior to the 2008 crisis, primarily in the machinery and manufactured industry segments. This is a strong indication of the increasing role of multinational companies in bilateral trade relations. Parallel to EU-Russia and EU-Ukraine economic trends, Hungarian exports practically stagnated after the crisis and fell in 2014–2015. As in some Western countries, euphoria about the post-Soviet markets was gone by 2013, and most economic groups have pursued a cautious strategy in the 2010s.

**Graph 1. Hungarian exports to Russia, mln EUR**

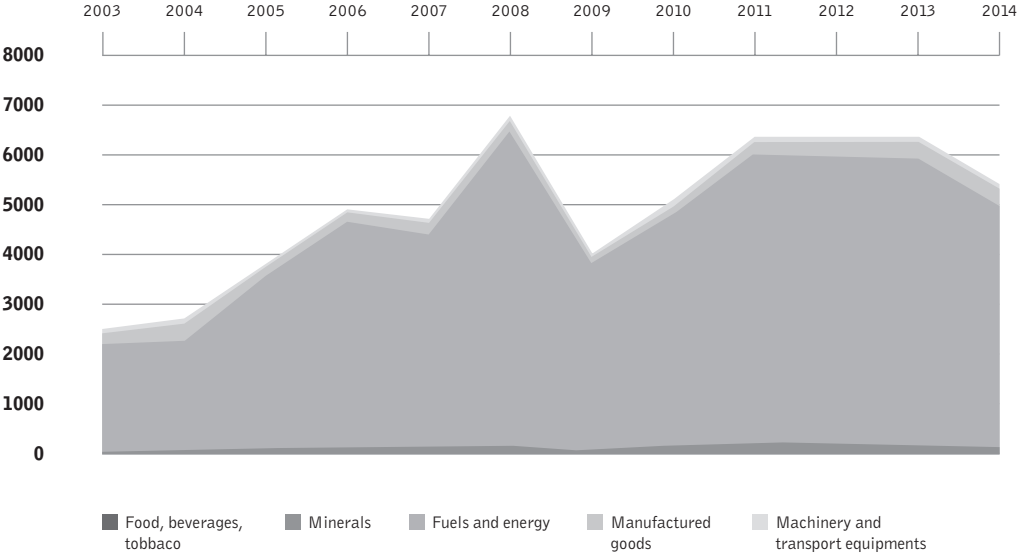


**Source:** Stadat, Hungarian Statistical Office

Imports from Russia and Ukraine constituted 8.55% and 1.65% of the total in 2013, respectively. As statistical data demonstrate, energy constitutes an almost exclusive share of imports, especially in the case of Russia. It is worth noting that growth in energy imports can be attributed almost exclusively to the price effect: imported quantities increased only modestly prior to the 2008 economic crisis and have dropped substantially in the last couple of years.

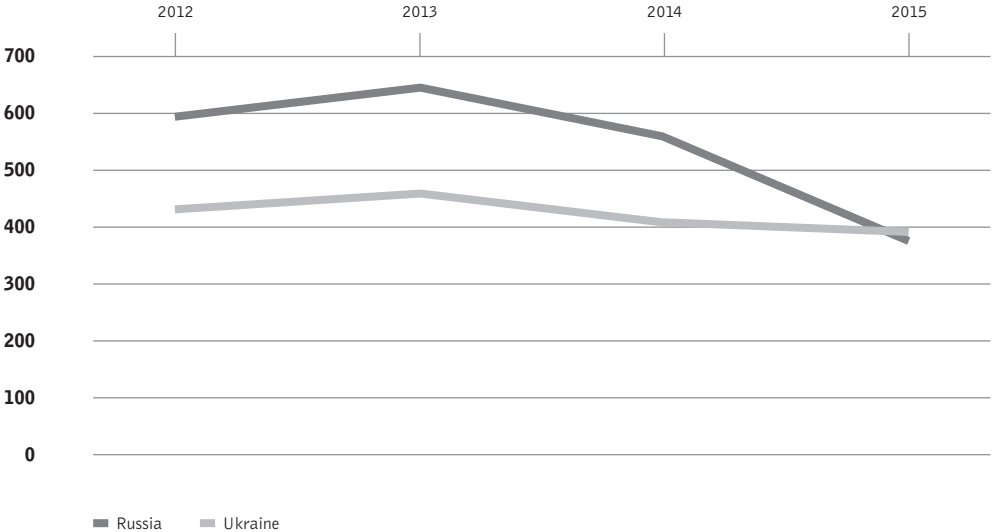
Exports have decreased significantly since hostilities began in early 2014. Hungarian exports to Russia dropped by double-digits both in 2014 and in the first quarter of 2015. There is no reliable information about the particular role of different kinds of sanctions, but exchange rate volatility and declining consumption in Ukraine and Russia have certainly had a major impact. In the case of Ukraine, Hungarian exports stalled much earlier and after 2008 never fully returned to their pre-crisis levels. Thus, the war and economic slowdown have had a slightly smaller statistical impact in the years since 2013.

**Graph 2. Hungarian imports from Russia, mln EUR**



Source: Statat, Hungarian Statistical Office

**Graph 3. Hungarian exports to Russia and Ukraine in Q1s, mln EUR**



Source: Statat, Hungarian Statistical Office

### 3. The vital, the visible and the minor – energy, trade and investment relations with Russia

As demonstrated above, the backbone of Hungary's bilateral relations both with Russia and Ukraine is trade. In the case of Russia, energy constitutes the dominant share of imports. Oil and oil products are traditionally imported from Russia by MOL, a domestic company in Hungarian private ownership (although the state also has a 24.7% share). Oil trading is relatively competitive, alternative supply routes are accessible, and no disputes have been reported except for some disturbances surrounding Ukrainian transit.

Natural gas imports present a bigger concern both in terms of supply and transit security, and in terms of prices. The 2009 Russian-Ukrainian gas dispute revealed Hungary's vulnerability and the limits of its network's resilience. High natural gas prices have also put considerable stress on social relations through utility prices in the last couple of years. The Orbán government purchased the wholesaler company holding the main long-term import contract (LTC) from E.ON in 2013. Thus, relations and negotiations about LTC conditions (price and pricing, take-over obligations, flexibilities, etc.) have become more politicised recently. Even if formally the LTC is held by state-owned company MVM, negotiations are held at the highest levels, often between Viktor Orbán and Vladimir Putin or Alexey Miller.

Nuclear issues are manifold – Russia is a key supplier of the fuel for the existing four Soviet-built VVER blocks at Paks, and Rosatom is a contractor in the current life-extension programme for these units. In parallel, the Orbán cabinet contracted two new blocks with Rosatom in 2014, for the construction of which Russia has also provided a EUR 10 billion credit line. The two new units are expected to be commissioned in 2025 and 2026 with roughly the same overall capacity as the four old blocks (2 à 1200 MW vs. 4 à 500 MW). The four old blocks will be phased out between 2032 and 2037.

Exports consist predominantly of manufactured goods and machinery. According to estimates, more than 65% of exports come from local subsidiaries of multinational companies. These outlets benchmark their exports according to their corporate strategy and market relations. Competitiveness is the dominant driver in these segments, and consequently bilateral relations and political decision-making have a limited role here. This is important, since the Hungarian government has an exclusively utilitarian approach to foreign policy, with Eastern export markets in its spotlight. Despite these ambitions, the government has little influence on this "multinational segment" of exports. Nonetheless, the decline in exports in some of these areas may have macroeconomic relevance. Although neither Audi nor Mercedes provide data about their exports, the Hungarian assembly lines supposedly have some relation to Russian and Ukrainian markets (these may even bypass Hungarian-Russian statistics if components are delivered to other EU countries for assembly).

There is not full clarity about the structure and nature of exports managed by domestic (Hungarian-owned) firms. Pharmaceutical companies (Richter and EGIS) are the most exposed to CIS markets, with almost half of their revenues coming from the region. In the case of Richter, 33% of sales were realised in Russia in 2013, with another 7% in Ukraine and 7% in the other CIS countries (*Richter Gedeon...*, 2014, p. 45). Agricultural exports are overrepresented in the public discourse, especially relative to their low statistical share (below 5% of the total). Nevertheless, certain influential groups and domestic tycoons have considerable interests in agricultural exports to Russia (e.g. Sándor Csányi).

In terms of investments, Hungary has relatively little exposure to Ukraine and Russia. The country's largest bank, OTP, placed CIS markets at the centre of its expansion strategy in the mid-2000s. Currently, Russia and Ukraine constitute the bank's third- and fourth-largest markets in terms of financial assets, respectively. This may be cause for headaches if the situation in the region worsens. For MOL, Russia had lost much of its significance by the end of the 2000s. Even though Russian assets have historically played a major role in forming the company's upstream portfolio, today MOL has



a more diversified pool of production. Certain other, smaller tycoons have relatively small investments in Russia, predominantly related to construction or other services. Thus, Hungary's overall exposure in investments is not at a critical level, perhaps with the limited exception of OTP.

## 4. Business relations without businessmen – politics take the lead

It would be difficult to identify a "Russia lobby" in bilateral relations. This is partly due to the limited significance of the Russian economy for Hungary and the lack of transparency in economic ties. Nevertheless, the government currently appears to be a more determined advocate of strengthening business ties than any other major corporate group. In the latter's strategies, economic realities, conventional business risks and uncertainties about prospects have downgraded Russia relatively rapidly of late. OTP had heavy losses in both its Ukrainian and Russian portfolios, while Richter and other major exporters are following a "wait and see" policy. Thus, even though these corporate interests may function as a buffer against deteriorating bilateral relations, they definitely fall short of explaining the current good relations on the political level. Today, normal business and corporate relations do not play a leading role in Hungary's Russia policy; political leadership is undisputed.

Fidesz has made a political U-turn in its relations with Russia over the last couple of years. Viktor Orbán, a staunch critic of Russia for two decades, has turned into one of Moscow's most vocal defenders in the midst of its war in Eastern Ukraine. Orbán, who characterised Hungary as the "happiest barrack of Gazprom" in 2008, has concluded a huge nuclear deal with Rosatom and continues to pursue the most intensive negotiations with Gazprom since the fall of Communism. What is more, Orbán's supporters have followed him through this transformation: today, Fidesz is a Central European conservative party whose voters are the most pro-Russian in the Hungarian political landscape (*A magyarok többsége...*, 2015). Moreover, right-wing radical party Jobbik, Hungary's second-strongest party according to opinion polls, has criticised the government's pro-European stance and favours even more engagement with Moscow – a historically unprecedented and totally unconventional orientation for a radical right-wing party in Hungary.

The economic component in this strange transformation is difficult to grasp, but supposedly it played a major role. Economic considerations as such play a vital role in Fidesz's foreign policy. After his landslide electoral victory in 2014, Orbán delivered this new directive at the annual ambassadors' meeting with the rather blunt observation that "ideology-oriented foreign policy was invented by smart countries for foolish ones". Hungary's foreign missions were instructed to place greater emphasis on increasing Hungarian exports and investments, since "we live in an economic world" (*Orbán: Sunnyogással...*, 2014). Given widespread government corruption and the cabinet's almost exclusive affinity for economic considerations in foreign policy, Orbán's turn towards Russia must have had a strong economic justification. Energy is certainly a major issue in this regard. Both the 2014 Paks expansion agreement and Gazprom's parallel concessions in the Russian gas LTC signal that the two countries have strong *quid pro quo* relations. Corruption may play a role as well. In this regard, there is widespread speculation about the MET gas trading company's relations both to Gazprom and perhaps even to Viktor Orbán personally or to certain agricultural export channels (*A legtöbb pénzt...*, 2015; *További Magyar...*, 2014).

Given this murky background, it is difficult to measure the magnitude of bilateral relations and their future. At this moment, it very much seems that Hungarian-Russian relations do not constitute a "love affair", but rather a business relationship on the political level. Furthermore, much of the potential benefits seem to have already been collected by the Hungarian side. In this regard, there is a certain chance that if Moscow does not offer more, Fidesz will rebalance its foreign policy and give in to suspected US and Western pressure. These rebalancing attempts were relatively obvious during the first half of 2015 after Putin's visit to Budapest in February. Nonetheless, many issues in bilateral

relations remain unresolved, paving the way for some “hard talk” between the sides in the foreseeable future. Politically motivated business relations are always shaky, and this may also be the case between Hungary and Russia.

## 5. More noise than damage from sanctions

It is difficult to measure the impacts of sanctions on Hungarian-Russian relations. It is practically impossible to separate their implications from those of Russia’s declining economic trajectory and worsening trade and investment ties. The direct impacts are negligible: Hungary does not have arms, oil or gas drilling machinery exports to Russia, and Russian financial organisations and companies do not take out loans in Hungary. Russian sanctions on agricultural exports may have a bigger direct effect, however: according to the government, Hungarian producers are losing EUR 80 million annually due to countersanctions (*Nyolcvanmillió euró...*, 2014). This constitutes roughly 0.08% of Hungary’s GDP, and Budapest has requested compensation from the EU.

Indirect effects and implications from the Russian economic downturn may be more significant. Given the limited scope of foreign trade, its overall impact could hardly exceed 0.3% of Hungary’s GDP, and is presumably much less.<sup>63</sup> Exporters are reportedly mainly suffering from the effects of the exchange rate: pharmaceutical firms, car producers, and agricultural exporters (in the non-sanctioned segments) have been affected most. For OTP, whose Russian branches focused on rouble credits in the retail sector, the increase in the CBR’s interest rates may cause difficulties. However, since the Russian economy is showing early signs of recovery from the initial panic, exchange rate volatility and interest rates have been decreasing, and some normalisation is expected during 2015.

Except for some agricultural producers, companies have not asked for help from the government, which has harshly criticised the sanctions; Viktor Orbán characterised them as “shooting ourselves in the foot” (*Orbán: Lábon...*, 2014). There is not too much differentiation between Western sanctions against Russia and Russian countersanctions. According to the cabinet, sanctions are harmful for European economies and are not bringing about results, and the conflict can only be resolved through negotiations. Nevertheless, Orbán has not threatened to veto EU or NATO decisions, and his critical remarks have remained only rhetorical thus far.

## 6. At centre stage again: Russian energy

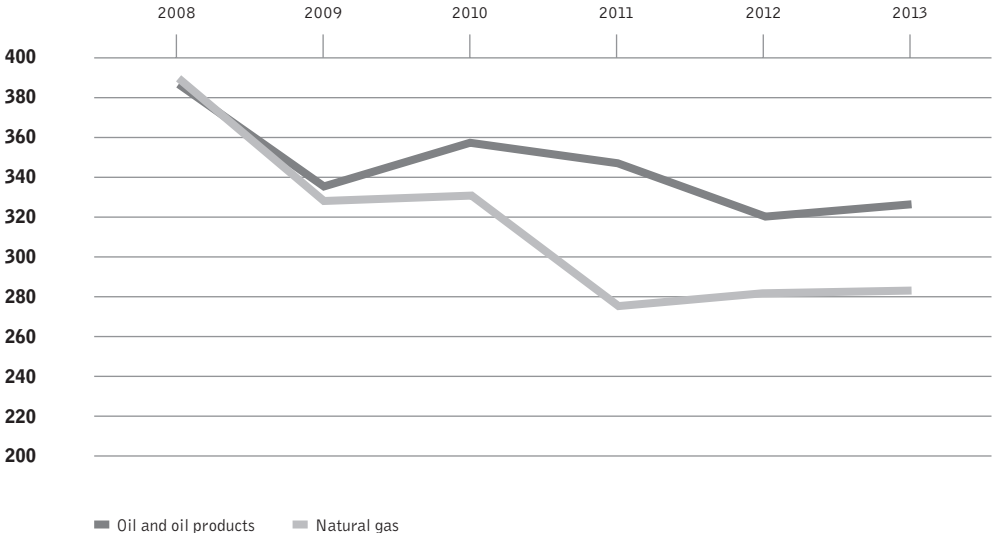
Hungary’s energy dependence on Russia in the past decade was characterised by controversial trends. In terms of volumes, imports have been decreasing rather rapidly, mainly due to a sharp drop in domestic gas consumption.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, however, Hungary pays roughly the same import bill for these decreased imports in value terms due to the rise in oil prices. As a result, it is fair to say that despite remarkable improvements in Hungarian energy security since the 2009 gas crisis, the domestic perception of Russian dependence has not changed too much. For many policy-makers and political actors, Russia remains the dominant supplier and Moscow has a strong mandate for negotiations on most energy-related questions.

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<sup>63</sup> There are no official or public statistics on this, and this figure is an estimate collected by the author from macroeconomic analysts working with Hungarian data on a continuous basis.

<sup>64</sup> Gas consumption fell from its peak of over 13 bcm in 2006 to below 8 bcm in 2014.

**Graph 4. Hungarian gas and oil imports**



Source: MAVIR

It is important to note that the energy supply situation has improved in a single major respect since the January 2009 Russian-Ukrainian gas price debate: accessibility to Western European markets has been greatly enhanced. This includes better interconnectivity with Western European hubs and within the region, the emergence of liquid hubs throughout the continent, and their impacts on contractual relations. In the Hungarian case, thanks to the pipelines with Baumgarten and the Slovak-Hungarian interconnector, the country complies with the N-1 rule and possesses sufficient border capacity to import gas from other sources if the Ukrainian pipeline is disrupted. Most of these achievements are lasting and point towards greater cohesion and consistency between Western and Central European markets. Coupled with some less visible trends, such as an emerging single electricity market and sharply decreasing domestic gas consumption, the context of Russian supply dominance has been changing. Direct Russian gas imports have practically halved, mainly due to decreased demand, but also due to more imports from Western hubs.

Despite all these policy and market improvements, Budapest and Moscow continue to engage in separate and non-transparent energy talks. Independently from the diminished relevance of Russian long-term gas contracts and the more articulated European stance on competition issues, Russia still has the potential to shape regional energy relations and probably to bias European policies on a broader range of issues.

The reasons are manifold. First, Russian energy remains the cheapest source for Hungary. Western and maritime imports are increasingly accessible, but not competitive with Russian oil or natural gas. Local hubs (Baumgarten) offer lower prices, but their liquidity is low. Imports from Western European hubs (primarily TTF in the Netherlands) lose their price advantage due to long transit routes across the continent. LNG imports have been facilitated in some CEE states (Poland, Lithuania), but there is a premium: LNG costs more than Russian gas, so it is highly unlikely that Hungary would opt for such an investment. What is more, there is no credible plan to change this situation. Unlike the period between 2008 and 2012, when the V4 countries had a credible agenda and Hungary was hoping for cheaper LNG, Azeri imports through Nabucco-West and new patterns of regional trade, today no major new developments are on the horizon. The European and regional agenda has lost much of its

attractiveness. The policy-makers are enjoying the benefits of these achievements, but it is very tempting to look to Moscow for more rather than to Brussels.

Second, the transition from bilateral LTCs to hub-based, high-frequency gas markets is a very long one. Since 2009, these contractual relations have been renegotiated incessantly. Even if Gazprom has to make concessions, this bargaining process also opens up opportunities for Moscow to differentiate between national partners. Even if there is a chance that these practices will disappear over time, the scope for bilateral bargaining is currently much broader than a decade ago. It is not always about price. Often take-over obligations (TOPs) and flexibility clauses are at least as important as prices or pricing. It is too early to write off gas contracts as a potential means for influencing national policies inside the EU and in Hungary in particular.

Nevertheless, the most important change in Hungary is the shift from considerations of energy security towards those of social affordability. Oil and gas prices have multiplied during the last decade and have remained at an unprecedentedly high level since 2010. This is not only a current account problem, but also sets the issue of energy prices higher on the domestic agenda. Despite all efforts to keep consumer prices for natural gas and electricity at lower levels, according to Eurostat the share of Visegrad utility costs ranged from 7.3% (Hungary, after introducing a ban on gas and electricity price increases for households in 2010) to 11.3% (Slovakia) of final household consumption in 2012 (*Eurostat – Annual national accounts*). This is almost double the proportions in Western Europe. Prior to the crisis, more than 70% of Hungarian households used natural gas as the primary fuel for space heating. Not surprisingly, utility prices are among the top issues of concern by the population. All of these social affordability considerations have resulted in more active political involvement on policy issues, a major, politically driven regulatory squeeze on the profitability of the utility sector, and renationalisation at the corporate level.

Fidesz introduced a moratorium on raising gas and electricity prices right after its electoral victory in 2010 (*DG Energy...*, 2014). This proved painful for corporate stakeholders especially in the gas segment, since import price levels have increased by more than 25% in subsequent years. The regulator has kept the different cost items in line with the moratorium. In 2013, Fidesz launched a major utility rate cut campaign, further decreasing consumer prices by more than 25% in the following year and a half. This was Orbán's silver bullet in his 2014 electoral campaign, a cornerstone of his second landslide electoral victory. A populist taboo has thus been established with respect to utility prices, especially as far as gas and electricity are concerned. At the same time, significant losses have emerged in the gas sector value chain, which continue to cause longstanding financial tensions. EU regulations leave little room for subsidies, thus threatening the long-term financial sustainability of Hungary's current price regime.<sup>65</sup>

Unlike energy security, which is more EU-related, social affordability is still perceived by most of the policy stakeholders as a bilateral issue with the dominant supplier. This is a major window of opportunity for external suppliers, namely Russia. Russian export price concessions constitute a major tool to help to sustain these populist energy price policies. Gazprom provided a significant set of concessions in the LTC right after the renationalisation of the wholesaler company between October 2013 and March 2014. Reportedly, both the price formula and price levels were changed, and Gazprom also decreased TOP levels (*Gazprom eyes new Hungarian deal*, 2014, p. 6). Without these concessions, the government's utility rate cut policy would hardly be sustainable even in the medium run. Paradoxically, in the case of energy price populism, the EU is more of an enemy and Russia is a potential ally for many decision-makers.

Not surprisingly, major international companies such as E.ON, GDF and RWE have been leaving the sector. The state-owned Electricity Works (MVM) and more recently the National Public Utility Company have taken over their positions. MVM purchased the wholesaler and the gas storage companies from E.ON in 2013, and foreign firms have exited from the retail sector more recently. Consequently,

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<sup>65</sup> The EC has already launched an investigation into certain discriminatory practices related to favourable electricity and gas pricing for households (Kapitulál..., 2015).

gas negotiations with Russia have again become increasingly politicised, and Viktor Orbán is personally engaged on this issue. Today, Hungary has an unprofitable gas sector, where price increases are not tolerated politically and the state is forced to subsidise the sector in a manner that is hidden from the European Commission.

The nuclear deal on the Paks expansion further increases uncertainty with respect to Hungarian-Russian energy relations. The contract came out of the blue, with no serious discussions having taken place prior to the January 2014 Orbán-Putin agreement. Notwithstanding, the replacement of the four existing VVER blocks at Paks, which deliver almost half of Hungary's electricity, constitutes one of the greatest challenges for Hungarian energy policy. This contract offers more questions than answers, however: the new blocks would be commissioned as early as the mid-2020s; the timing of the signing just three months before the elections was highly risky for Fidesz; and almost all regulatory issues, especially those related to the EU, were neglected, leaving these questions unanswered. The project also lacks quasi-consensual political support, and in its current form also economic and policy justification. It will certainly cause major tensions with the European Commission's Directorate General for Competition, and given the EUR 10 billion Russian credit line (approximately 10% of Hungary's GDP), the contracts constitute by far the single largest budget item in the bilateral relationship.

## 7. Waiting for Godot – pipeline projects and Hungary

Hungary inherited an unfavourable gas supply situation from the 1990s. Gas imports constituted a very high, almost 35% share of Total Primary Energy Supply (TPES), and almost all natural gas came exclusively from Russia and through Ukraine. The country was a dead end for suppliers, as no major transit quantities crossed Hungary. The network was able to weather the 2009 gas crisis only due to its relatively large reserves. All this led to a relatively early notion of insecurity and elaboration of interconnectivity and pipeline projects. These included the New European Transmission System (NETS) project proposed by MOL, an attempt to integrate regional networks and build new interconnectors in the mid-2000s, and the Nabucco project, designed to bring Middle Eastern and Caspian gas to the region. Russia joined this contest with the South Stream project already in 2006, and its entry was hailed by Hungary's incumbent Socialist-liberal government.

Despite its harsh criticism of South Stream in opposition, Fidesz had changed sides by 2013 and was a forceful advocate of the Russian pipeline. The fiasco with Nabucco-West in 2012 further accelerated this process, and left the Russian project as the only one on the negotiating table. After the cancellation of South Stream in early 2015, Hungary elaborated – allegedly not independently of behind-the-scenes Russian suggestions – the Tesla pipeline from Greece to Hungary through Macedonia and Serbia. This project is merely another addition to the broad set of pipeline options in the SEE region, including Slovak-led Eastring and EU-proposed Gas Ring. These are competitive proposals, and Budapest would like to remain a policy shaper on this issue. The Hungarian government is keen to bring transit to the country and fears being left out if any of these pipelines are built. It thus keeps the Russian connection alive, because Moscow is still perceived as a major policy-maker in these pipeline projects.

Russian pipeline projects remain attractive predominantly as a bargaining chip in gas supply talks. They also enhance contractual diversity, potentially providing access to other importers' contracted gas volumes. Furthermore, Hungarian policy-makers are hoping for better utilisation of their idle storage capacities (total storage is above 6 bcm, more than twice the average domestic need for annual seasonal balancing). Supply security and managing Ukrainian transit risks constitute a common interest with Gazprom, while investments as such are of particular interest for the cabinet. Revenues from South Stream transit fees would have comprised 0.2% of GDP (Lecture by Csaba Kiss, 2014), a considerable amount, albeit much less than in the SEE countries (in Bulgaria it would have been around 2%).

Although Hungarian pipeline policies are often characterised as Russia-friendly, this assessment is not fully justified. As a result of so many disappointments, the record of pipeline- and EU interconnectivity projects is relatively limited in Budapest. In view of the many different and competitive, but unrealised proposals, including those from Russia, most domestic stakeholders approach any project with caution and circumspection. Russia is still perceived as a key policy-maker in this respect, but its credibility in this area is rather limited as there is currently no major EU project on the table.

## 8. A reluctant member – attitudes towards European energy policies

In general, Hungary approaches EU energy policies with a CEE mind-set and some national peculiarities. Interests are concentrated around energy security and social affordability issues, while competitiveness and climate change take the back seat among the country's priorities. Accordingly, price and transit issues are strongly represented, while liberalisation, renewables and energy efficiency policies are almost completely absent from the national agenda. The country traditionally coordinates its actions closely with its Visegrad partners, although Budapest has started to form its own agenda on particular issues. The extensive use of administrative utility pricing and its Russia-friendly stance cause the most tension with the European Commission. In this latter regard, the Paks expansion and the issue of reverse gas flows to Ukraine are of particular interest.<sup>66</sup>

Hungary had practically completed its gas interconnectivity and security programme by 2013, much earlier than its neighbours. Interconnectors with all neighbouring states except Slovenia were constructed. Despite all the controversies, Hungary was the first to raise the issue of Ukrainian reverse flows at the corporate level as early as 2012. As far as EU security policies are concerned, Hungary's performance is rather good, despite all the political disturbances. Indeed, it is Budapest that has shown some dissatisfaction with the European Commission's downsizing of regional security efforts. According to European gas stress tests, Hungary is in the "secure" category, a classification which sounds very doubtful among Hungarian policy-makers. Attitudes were also sceptical of the European Commission's regulatory behaviour in the EU-Russia conflict around South Stream, as many policy-makers found the DG Energy's approach too rigid and inflexible. Like so many other potential transit states, Hungary would have preferred a compromise between Brussels and Moscow.

## 9. The Energy Union and Orbán – an uneasy welcome

Viktor Orbán has given conflicting assessments of the published Energy Union concept. In certain interviews, he has praised it, while on other occasions he has characterised it as unacceptable, contending that it further limits national sovereignty over energy policies (*Orbán says...*, 2015; *Orbán at Visegrad 4...*, 2015). Obviously, the initiative is too complex and at too early a stage to provide a comprehensive assessment. Most regulators and corporate actors have been waiting for the final legal drafts. In the light of Hungary's past reactions and current energy policy record, it may be reasonable to expect a calm and highly restrained welcome coupled with loud criticism by Viktor Orbán personally.

The Energy Union concept refers to a broad range of potential measures, and consequently opens up room for compromises between member states. Like many other CEE states, Hungary supports diversification and infrastructure development projects from the common budget, since the country is a net beneficiary of these transfers. The government has a mixed attitude towards proposals related

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<sup>66</sup> Hungary suspended reverse flows temporarily in September 2014.

to climate change: primarily because of the Paks expansion project, it supports the increased carbon reduction target (40% by 2030), while it opposes the 27% renewable target. The most controversy may come from efforts to increase transparency, stricter implementation of measures under the third package, the new responsibilities of the regulator ACER, and new legislation concerning nuclear fuels and projects. All these measures would further limit the role of national jurisdiction and delegate competencies to common institutions. Hungary certainly will strive to keep its sovereignty untouched, opposing most of these new potential limitations.

## 10. Shipping and cutting – the case of reverse gas flows to Ukraine

Hungary played a positive role in establishing the physical and regulatory framework for reverse gas flows to Ukraine. Unlike Slovakia and like Poland, the Hungarian pipeline operator (FGSZ) initially had a dedicated, empty pipeline between the two countries. This capacity induced FGSZ to start reverse supplies without formally requesting Gazprom's approval or investing additional funds into the network. Since FGSZ had long been advocating for Ukrainian reverse flow, the Hungarian Regulatory Office established an exit point and allowed its capacity to be auctioned in spring 2013, just after the Polish reverse supplies started. The utilisation rate was relatively low, far below the technical limits. Constraints mainly came from Ukrainian national oil and gas company Naftohaz, and involved cheaper access to Russian or Slovak supplies, or a lack of funds in the Ukrainian budget. More recently, in June 2015, FGSZ and Naftohaz agreed to upgrade the interconnector's regulatory standards in order to comply with EU requirements. This is the first action of its kind among CEE-Ukraine border capacities; it is strongly opposed by Gazprom and has been welcomed by the Energy Community.

In September 2014, Budapest temporarily stopped reverse flows citing technical reasons, and increased import demand for Hungarian storage. From a legal point of view, FGSZ had the right to do this, as reverse flows were contractually interruptible. Technical data did not justify this action, however, as ample free capacity had been present in the successive period. It is more likely that Alexey Miller's meeting with Viktor Orbán just three days prior to this statement played a role in the gas export suspension. Gazprom publicly condemned the existing system of reverse flows to Ukraine and contracted Hungarian storage capacity for the winter period. Supposedly, the move had been prompted by the Hungarian side requesting Gazprom to fill the storage capacity, since MVM lacked the necessary funds. Reverse flows were resumed after Vladimir Putin's visit in February 2015. This short episode aptly demonstrated the duality of the issue: FGSZ, owned by MOL, is financially interested and strongly advocates reverse flows, while the government maintains hidden control and uses it according to its volatile preferences.

## 11. Hungary at a crossroads? – a rational or “Russian all” energy policy

From the description above, it is obvious that Hungarian-Russian relations are not balanced and that Hungary is on the vulnerable end of the string. In the trade balance, the Russian portion is much larger and energy carriers or energy-related suppliers constitute a massive portion of the inflow of goods. Hungary thus depends on Russia to a great deal in terms of its energy production. The current official energy strategy thus states very clearly that Russia is Hungary's most important partner in this connection, but also states that this one-sided dependence should be eased (*National Energy Strategy 2030*, 2012, p. 27).

At this point, we need to understand that everything that would make Hungary less dependent on Russian resources and less vulnerable to Russian political turns has nothing to do with Russia. The measures or policies or technologies that would make Hungary less reliant, more independent and self-sufficient, flexible and stronger in the context of energy – i.e. the things that would strengthen Hungary’s bargaining position – are independent of any Russian relations. Energy efficiency and renewable technology after all are not the strongest part of the Russian economy. To be clear, the Hungarian government would not need the consent of the Russian president to launch a massive energy efficiency programme, or to strengthen the weak renewable feed-in tariff. The postponement of or failure to implement sustainable energy measures during the last decade has thus helped to create a situation in which Hungarian energy policy is much more defenceless against the Russian energy industry than it otherwise would have been. And we can add that the quality of the energy policy and governmental actions in this area has worsened significantly over the past five years.

This is the reason why the remainder of this chapter will focus less on Russian gas deals, the various potential routes for pipelines and the details of the new Russia-financed nuclear power plant, and much more on what has distorted the Hungarian energy market and on actions not taken in the past. These actions would have been the fundamentals and the bases of Hungarian energy security, and would have resulted in further benefits as well, but the environment and the economic reality are not really among the current government’s concerns. (To be fair, however, the environment has never been a concern of any Hungarian government.) These measures are the relevant, effective, expected and agreed actions of an EU member state. More significantly, however, we must underscore that these measures – enhancing efficiency and the uptake of renewable technologies – would have been rational actions in Hungary not because of its commitments to the EU, but because of Hungary’s own interest.

Why are experts convinced that these are rational actions? To answer this question, we need to re-examine the characteristics of Hungary’s energy market as well as recent developments in energy policy. Based on this, we can make an informed judgment about the situation and the Hungarian government’s preparedness and ability to cope with it.

Several facts, major trends and developments are worth repeating as bullet points:

- limited conventional energy sources and reserves;
- major imports from Russia in oil (85%), natural gas (79%) and nuclear fuel (100%) in 2012 (*Member States’ Energy Dependence...*, 2013);
  - in terms of oil, the Hungarian import structure is among the most concentrated in the EU (*Member States’ Energy Dependence...*, 2013);
  - Hungary had one of the highest shares of gas in the energy mix among EU countries in 2010; the household sector is very dependent on natural gas (70% of household use this source of energy one way or another);
- solid fuel/lignite constitutes only a limited share of the energy supply (11%), although with respect to this source Hungary is in a relatively strong position in terms of dependency compared to the EU average;
- Hungary’s storage capacity for natural gas is enormous compared to national consumption;
- Hungary’s geopolitical position is very beneficial for long-term energy flows through the country;
- Hungary has a huge and unexploited energy efficiency potential<sup>67</sup> – in the household sector alone, the economic energy savings potential is 15% of the country’s total primary energy supply;
- Hungary has a huge and unexploited renewable potential; in 2013, the share of renewables was around 10% of gross final energy consumption (*Share of renewables...*, 2015) and the target for 2020 is 14.61%; both Hungary’s current share and its official target are in the lower third among EU countries;

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<sup>67</sup> Everything you want to know about Hungary’s energy efficiency potential is at Energiaklub’s NegaJoule website: <http://negajoule.eu/en>.



- Hungary has new cross-border infrastructure with EU member states and other neighbouring countries (for both natural gas and electricity).

The European Commission's last report on European energy dependence (*Member States' Energy Dependence...*, 2013) concludes that Hungary has total energy import dependence in line with the EU average, but its high energy intensity contributes to its high energy trade deficit. It is important to note that the high overall energy intensity originates from the transport sector and more importantly the household sector. Increasing the country's current low level of renewable energy production while improving energy efficiency would reduce Hungary's energy trade deficit. Furthermore, given the very high proportion of Russian gas in its energy mix, alternative, potentially cheaper (in light of the recent fall in global natural gas prices) gas supplies could also reduce the energy trade deficit.

We can thus conclude that one of the eminent aims of Hungarian foreign policy and energy policy should have been to decrease this dependence. The solution to this problem is not rocket science. The above-mentioned report and many other documents, as well as Hungary's energy strategy and international commitments, all include and refer to increasing the use of local resources through: a) energy efficiency, b) renewables, and c) diversification of natural gas routes.

What is really striking here is that the last of these options usually receives much more attention from decision-makers, the media and experts. Diversification of gas pipelines – as recent examples show – is a risky business. Governments, state-owned and private companies, institutions and diplomatic circles can spend years negotiating a deal and suddenly a new development or an announcement by Gazprom or President Putin can scuttle the whole plan.

By contrast, developing domestic resources, lowering domestic demand through smart measures and innovative financing options, and systematically building up the capacity of new technologies as well the confidence and trust of investors – this strategy is entirely in the hands of national governments. It requires persistence, commitment and a certain amount of creativity – and the fruits of these efforts admittedly cannot be harvested in a fortnight – but this strategy certainly has a greater likelihood of effectively influencing the national energy market and the various players in this area than the foreign policy manoeuvres of a small European country trying to influence Middle Eastern energy moguls, the Russian government and/or Russian energy companies, or of having any impact on global energy prices as such.

With this in mind, how can we characterise the Orbán government's energy policy?

One major effort is obvious and has been well communicated: providing cheap energy to the people. The favourable deals with Putin on natural gas and construction of a new nuclear power plant are said to be the underlying fundamentals of this goal, but most energy policy experts would consider this to be rather misleading propaganda.

Let us examine what has happened and what has not happened in the name of this tunnel-vision policy goal.

## 12. Household energy bills cut

This is a commonly used weapon in the post-Soviet bloc, and Orbán played this card well, winning the general elections again in 2014. As indicated above, cutting household utility prices is a misleading measure even if we assume that there had initially been some room such reductions. The policy started at the end of 2012, and by now it should be obvious that this has caused market distortions in the form of cross-financing between the household and industrial sectors. Recently, new announcements have been made, and a further decrease is anticipated. An additional government-imposed decrease in the household sector will increase cross-financing and thus raise energy costs for industry, worsening Hungary's competitiveness.

This is also a mentally, socially and politically problematic issue, as consumers are led to believe that the prime minister can set energy prices at will. There is also an institutional problem here: the integrity and accountability of the Hungarian administration and in particular the Hungarian energy regulator which had to prepare and implement the new rate system. This market distortion created an unpredictable business environment for international energy companies (E.ON, RWE, EDF, etc.), which induced them to halt operations and even to relinquish capital investments in order to escape from the country. All told, this sole measure will have a very long-lasting negative impact not only on energy policy, but also on the trust of major investors and multinational companies. It will take a tremendous effort, political marketing and a strong course of action to regain this trust.

### 13. A new Russian nuclear power plant

Following the manipulation of energy prices, the construction of a new nuclear power plant was introduced as a cornerstone of cheap energy and energy security. The new power plant, if ultimately constructed and brought online, will generate electricity at a much higher price than the European and Hungarian electricity systems produce today or would otherwise produce in the coming decades (Felsmann, 2015), thus making the entire Hungarian energy system more costly and raising prices for end users. Alternately, if the capital costs of the plant are not included in electricity prices, as the Hungarian prime minister suggested while explaining the origin of cheap electricity, then these costs will fall to taxpayers.

In terms of energy security, it is very difficult to verify that tying Hungary to Russia with an additional string will make the country's energy situation more resilient. In fact, just the opposite is true.

The Russian-Hungarian nuclear deal is at least as important as the natural gas business between the two countries, if not more so, and – although this has been denied – it could be the case that the two agreements go hand in hand. The new nuclear deal further ties Hungary to the Russian sphere of influence in multiple ways. The plant is to be financed, constructed and supplied with fuel<sup>68</sup> by the Russians, and they will also treat the spent fuel.

Since the announcement of this deal, there has been no answer to the obvious question of why this agreement was so urgent and signed several months before the elections. Politically, it was a very risky move for Viktor Orbán, since any major business with Russia leaves a bad taste in the mouths of Fidesz supporters. The list of questions is much longer than this, however, and there have been no reasonable answers on practically any of the basic issues, and no responses or compelling arguments have been offered in respect of any of the concerns raised.

We now know that the price per kilowatt-hour of electricity from this plant will be much higher than the government has communicated thus far. We also know that the European Commission will conduct a thorough inspection of whether or not this deal and the financial component of the construction involve illegal state aid. This will obviously impact the Russians, for whom the construction of a nuclear power plant within the borders of the EU is a prestigious project. The Russian state will finance it, build it, and supply the fuel for it at least initially. Although Euratom's institutions have significantly shortened the term of the original contract on the supply of fuel, the spent fuel will also be taken care of by the Russian nuclear industry. The Russians will thus control the whole cycle.

In addition to all the above-mentioned problems connected with the construction of Paks II, the project also constitutes a huge obstacle to the future development of sustainable energy in Hungary. Given the country's size and GDP, an investment of this magnitude into a single project will have the practical effect of blocking all the capital flow into other areas of energy production.

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<sup>68</sup> The Euratom Supply Agency has reduced the guaranteed and contracted period during which Russian fuel producers will be the principal suppliers, however (Euratom signs off..., 2015).

## 14. Energy efficiency first

As has already been stated, energy efficiency is the first and most important aspect of energy policy for many reasons. It makes the whole economy less energy-intensive, less dependent on outside resources and more competitive, and it improves housing conditions, which results in fewer health issues connected to poor living conditions. Investments in energy efficiency would create a huge number of jobs all over the country, and would require people with more education and training. And the list goes on with beneficial environmental and budgetary impacts, as well as a positive, long-term effect on the trade balance.

It seems that Fidesz understood this in the run-up to the elections, and a substantial portion of the campaign was devoted to new energy efficiency schemes and government-supported financial programmes. Since then, however, practically nothing has happened in this area, and the utility rate cuts have halted even these investments in the household sector, which otherwise probably would have been made even without any governmental support scheme. There were no effective information campaigns, awareness-raising programmes or financial incentives, and even the building code and regulations of renovations were not strengthened to a reasonable level, let alone to an optimal level. These were basically a series of non-actions that caused a significant backlash in the construction industry, already severely impacted by the economic crisis.

The promises and the small amount of short-lived financial support provided by the government over the last five years have probably resulted in more damage than benefit. They created a very hectic situation in the market, forcing industry to react very quickly to these small, campaign-like support schemes. They had to hire and then lay off workers from among the ranks of those who had remained in the country after the outbreak of the crisis. At the same time, many households postponed their investments while waiting for new support schemes that never materialised.

Altogether, the Hungarian government has acted as if it would like to sabotage or block any major progress in this area. They must know that energy efficiency is slowly creeping into all spheres of energy consumption, and that it would be much better to direct this development than to suddenly be confronted by a decline in demand that would render unnecessary much of the investment in the natural gas network, for example. They must know that in the household sector alone such projects would save 15% of the country's total primary energy demand, which is actually equivalent to the output of the existing Paks Nuclear Power Plant.

## 15. Renewables – “the sun never shines at night”

This is a classic quotation from László L. Simon, previous head of the parliament's cultural committee. “What are we going to do if the wind doesn't blow and the sun is not shining? We still need electricity.” (*Nem lehet csak naperőmű...*, 2014)

This is the level of understanding of energy policy among MPs and even the government's top decision-makers. They must be aware, however, that surveys show the Hungarian public have a much better understanding of this issue and support the development of renewable energy sources – they would laugh at such a statement.

Hungary has huge and unexploited potential for wind, solar, geothermal and biomass energy. According to Energiaklub's latest modelling effort (Sáfián, 2015), the country could function very well in 2030 without a new nuclear power plant but with cogeneration partly based on biomass, 2,800 MW of wind capacity and 1,400 MW of solar. This would produce 27% of Hungary's electricity consumption in 2030. This scenario necessitates many new investments and infrastructure upgrades, but these need not involve that much state financing if better legislation and governance are in place. It would also provide many more jobs in a far wider geographic area than is envisaged in the official energy plan, which contains basically a single project: Paks II.

The government's attitude is obviously much more hostile towards this area of policy and investment. The new Fidesz government's first move in 2010 was to withdraw the announcement of "winners" in the 440 MW wind tendering, which was in the final stage at that point. No explanation or reason was given. Subsequently, the government announced that it would reshape the feed-in tariff system, but then the process was suddenly halted right after it had begun and has never been resumed. The government is keeping the entire industry in this extra-legal position. Occasionally, there is a new episode in the form of an unprecedented levy on solar installations, as was the case in early 2015.

## 16. Conclusions: a big no to sustainability

From the above, we can conclude that Orbán's government does not want to see sustainable energy compete with nuclear power, and at the same time wishes to buy votes with the promise of ever-decreasing energy prices. Most of the energy business is characterised by non-transparency and state secrecy (e.g. MET and Paks II), which implies a strong possibility of corruption. The Hungarian government does not want to see wind turbines or solar panels on the roofs of residential houses throughout the country, and has not made it advantageous to farmers to transform their residual agricultural materials into biogas. The government does not want people and industry to save energy, even though this is the cheapest energy source for the coming decades.

At the same time, for unknown reasons, the Hungarian government wants to build a taxpayer-funded nuclear power plant that would totally distort the Hungarian energy market and tie the country to Russia in additional ways. This energy policy is not based on evidence, research and rational reasoning. Rather, it is based on unrealistic assumptions and old, retrograde reflexes from Soviet times: the state needs to build power plants and to own the energy industry in order to control energy prices and provide cheap energy to the people at all costs. And the Russian state and state-owned companies are good at serving this type of energy policy; this is the policy they understand and can work with.

As has already been stated, energy efficiency and renewable energy seemingly do not have anything to do with Russia, but the fact that Hungary is not building on these diverse and innovative technologies determines the direction of energy development and ties the country even more tightly to an old-fashioned empire that wishes to keep the "conquered" nations in a vulnerable position. The main problem is that the Hungarian government is assisting in this effort.

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**POLAND**

# The long shadow of the Kremlin: Polish domestic reactions to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

JACEK KUCHARCZYK – ALEKSANDER FUKSIEWICZ

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to look closely at the complexities of the reactions of Polish public opinion and the public discourse regarding the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the context of Polish-Russian and Polish-Ukrainian relations over the last 25 years and earlier. In spite of the fact that many outside observers have a rather simplified view of Poland as anti-Russian and pro-Ukrainian, it will be argued that Poles' attitudes both towards Poland's two neighbours as well as their reactions to the conflict between these two neighbours have been very complex and defy simple formulas and easy generalisations.

## 2. Russia in Polish political discourse prior to 1989

Poland entered the 20th century occupied by the three neighbouring European powers: Austria-Hungary, Germany and Russia. The First World War, in which the three powers fought on different sides, created a new geopolitical opportunity for Poland to regain its independence. Poland's 20th-century discourse on foreign policy and geopolitics was shaped by conflicting views among Polish elites on how to gain independence and which occupying power to support against the others in the First World War.

Józef Piłsudski, the main political figure of pre-World War II Poland, is the person most responsible for shaping an independent Poland after 1918 and represented an anti-Russian front. According to his strategy, Poland was to cooperate with Germany and Austria-Hungary and to forge an alliance with other Eastern European nations (including Ukraine) against Russia. On the opposite side was Roman Dmowski, a statesman as well as co-founder and chief ideologue of the right-wing National Democracy (or *Endecja*) political movement. In Dmowski's view, the main threat to Polish culture and thus to national survival was Germanisation, and therefore it was the Russian Empire that he sought out as an ally.

There is a great paradox in these two strategic foreign policy concepts that have haunted the Polish political discourse in the 20th and 21st centuries alike. Unlike the cases of Slovakia and the Czech lands, where a pan-Slavic and Russophile cultural orientation overlapped with pro-Russian attitudes in the foreign policy discourse, Dmowski's conception of Polish-Russian cooperation against Germany was based on admiration of German culture and civilisation, which for him posed the greatest threat to the Polish national identity precisely because of its vitality and attractiveness. On the other hand, Dmowski thought that (in a nutshell) Polish culture was so superior to Russian culture that even as part of the Russian Empire the Polish national identity would not be vanquished. In contrast, Piłsudski knew Russia intimately, and he saw Russian imperialism as a mortal threat to Polish aspirations for independence. For him, the alternative to tsarist and later Bolshevik Russia, which he saw as a "prison of nations", was an alliance of captive nations going back to the romanticised history of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.



Thus, the clash between Piłsudski and Dmowski at the dawn of Poland's Second Republic is symbolic of the fact that in modern Polish history many of the toughest critics of the Russian government – from tsarist, communist and post-communist times – have been at the same time attracted to Russian culture. One of the key figures of the democratic opposition during the communist period, Adam Michnik, famously described himself as an "anti-Soviet Russophile".<sup>69</sup> On the contrary, pro-Russian policies have typically been advocated by Polish nationalists who have also often happened to be Russophobic.

The defeat of Germany and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy at the end of the First World War, as well as the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, meant that the opposing conceptions of Dmowski and Piłsudski seemed to have lost their validity. Also, the idea of a Polish-Ukrainian alliance did not prove realistic, as the outcome of the war between Poland and the Soviet Union saw Ukraine de facto partitioned between the two states. The two concepts of alliances soon became out-of-date and Poland had to find another way of ensuring its national security, i.e. equal independence from the two aggressive powers of Russia and Germany, looking towards the Western powers as allies and guarantors of Polish independence.

The conflict between the two patriarchs of modern Polish politics, socialist Piłsudski and anti-Semitic nationalist Dmowski, is still visible in the Polish foreign policy discourse. Attitudes towards Russia have always divided the Polish left and right. The Polish left has had two trends: a democratic and pro-independence left embracing Piłsudski's view of Russia and pro-Russian Communists. On the other hand, right-wing political parties in Poland often refer to Dmowski's "political realism" vis-à-vis Russia, while pan-Slavic ideas remain rather marginal and secondary to the political identity of Poland's nationalist right. However, this latter version of the "Russian factor" has never been significant in Polish politics due to anti-Russian sentiments in Polish society after the Second World War and the era of Communism.

At the outbreak of the Second World War, the Polish ruling elite firmly rejected the offer of a Polish-German alliance against Soviet Russia, placing their hopes in French and British "guarantees" against possible German aggression. On 17 September 1939, the Red Army invaded eastern Poland on the basis of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, whereby the two totalitarian powers once again agreed on partitioning Poland. Ever since, this geopolitical nightmare scenario has remained crucial to understanding not only the Polish fear of Russian imperialism but also Polish suspicions of too close or too friendly relations between Russia and Germany. Even though in the case of Germany transatlantic and European integration should have invalidated this concept, it has kept resurfacing e.g. when it was used in 2004 by Radosław Sikorski, invoking the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in a discussion about the Baltic pipeline directly connecting Russia and Germany.

Earlier, during the communist period, the rise of the Solidarity (Solidarność) movement brought a new lease on life to the Piłsudski-Dmowski dispute. In the 1960s and 1970s, the original internationalist and progressive ideas of Polish Communism gradually lost their significance for the legitimization of the ruling regime, and communist propaganda relied increasingly on the revival of the Endecja ideology with its ingrained fear of Germans (but only Western Germans) and with the Soviet Union/Russia as the guarantor of the (limited) independence and territorial integrity of Poland. As Czesław Miłosz once aptly observed, communist Poland, ethnically uniform, authoritarian, pro-Russian and anti-German, was the realisation of Dmowski's and other nationalists' political dream. And in 1980–1981 the Solidarity movement adopted the opposite vision – Piłsudski's. Not only did it aim for European integration and reconciliation with Germany, but it also supported the independence of the Eastern European states, especially neighbouring Ukraine. On 8 September 1981 during its first (and last) national assembly in Gdańsk, Solidarity adopted its manifesto to working people from Central and Eastern Europe.

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<sup>69</sup> One should add for the record that in Poland one can also come across more typical liberal Russophiles who believe that we should stop criticising Mr Putin's policies because "Dostoyevsky was such a great writer".

The 1981 manifesto, although short-lived and controversial in its perceived radicalism, became one of the pillars of post-1989 Polish foreign policy. Successive governments, both “post-Solidarity” and “post-communist”, supported the independence of the Baltic states, Ukraine and other former Soviet republics (Poland was the first country to recognise Ukraine’s independence in 1991).

### 3. Ukraine and Ukrainians in Polish public discourse

Although Poland is perceived as the most pro-Ukrainian state in the European Union, attitudes towards Ukraine in Polish society are quite ambiguous, and Ukraine has both a strong positive place and a strong negative place in the Poles’ mind-set. This also impacts current debates in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Generally speaking, when, in the ongoing debates on Russian aggression against Ukraine, certain politicians and public intellectuals in Poland oppose mainstream policy as being too anti-Russian and too pro-Ukrainian, it is rather a result of negative sentiments towards Ukraine than positive views about Russia. One can rarely see these anti-Ukrainian attitudes in the mainstream media, but they are present for instance on the internet.<sup>70</sup>

Unlike in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Ukraine has had a distinctive presence in the modern Polish political and historical imagination at least since the publication, in the late 19th century, of the historical novel *With Fire and Sword* by bestselling author and Nobel laureate Henryk Sienkiewicz. The novel is a historical romance set against the background of the Cossack uprising against Polish rule in Ukraine and by and large pits noble Poles against bloodthirsty Ukrainian mobs. Although such a depiction of the conflict was immediately criticised by some liberal public intellectuals, among them another great 19th-century Polish writer, Bolesław Prus, the book continues to be a source of anti-Ukrainian stereotypes in Poland.

These negative stereotypes were strengthened greatly by certain developments during the Second World War, such as massacres of ethnic Poles in the Volyn region by Ukrainian paramilitary units and the alleged atrocities committed by Ukrainian units during the Warsaw uprising.<sup>71</sup> Communist-era propaganda explored anti-Ukrainian sentiments through popular culture – films and books<sup>72</sup> which exploited such plots as Polish soldiers fighting with Ukrainians or Ukrainian slaughters in south-eastern Poland.

On the other hand, pro-Ukrainian attitudes were strong among intellectual elites from the democratic opposition. In 1974, Jerzy Giedroyc, an émigré political writer and publisher, editor-in-chief of the monthly *Kultura*, argued that the independence of Ukraine, Lithuania and Belarus was an indispensable factor for Poland’s independence, whereas domination over these countries by Russia could also result in its domination over Poland (Giedroyc and Mieroszewski, 1974). This concept became a fundamental tenet of Polish foreign policy after 1989, and resulted in strong pro-Ukrainian attitudes among the Polish political elite, but these are not necessarily shared by the whole of Polish society.

Anti-Ukrainian sentiments that are ingrained in history, particularly the Volyn Massacre, sometimes appear in the political debate in different forms. This was the case when in the presidential campaign Andrzej Duda said that as president he would demand a stop to the “glorification of the UPA”

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**70** A good example of this is the case of Bogusław Paż, who was suspended from his position as a professor at the University of Wrocław after posting the following comment on his Facebook account in reference to a film featuring separatists bullying Ukrainian soldiers: “It warms my heart to see Bandera’s scumbags get a pounding” (non-literal translation). He also calls Ukraine “UPA-ine”. UPA refers to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army; Stepan Bandera was a Ukrainian nationalist leader.

**71** In fact, the notorious Waffen SS units which took part in putting down the uprising and massacred tens of thousands of civilians consisted of Russians and other Soviet citizens, while the Ukrainian unit, Waffen SS Galicia, was not involved in putting down the uprising – contrary to popular belief.

**72** For instance, *Wilcze echa* (1968), *Ogniomistrz Kaleń* (1961, based on the 1959 novel *Łuny w Bieszczadach*, which was part of the school curriculum).

by the current Ukrainian government.<sup>73</sup> This was also the case when the Polish parliament debated the wording of a resolution on the 70th anniversary of the Volyn Massacre in 2013.<sup>74</sup>

On the other hand, one has to notice that the Polish media and public opinion favourably perceived both the Orange Revolution and the Maidan. Polish non-governmental organisations provided humanitarian and other support to activists in Ukraine, while many ordinary citizens protested in front of the Ukrainian embassy in Warsaw.

## 4. The trajectory of the political discourse and public opinion on Russia and Ukraine after 1989

Poland's Foreign policy after 1989 and the political discourse were built upon two fundamental rules: that Poland aimed towards European and Atlantic integration (in NATO and the EU) and that, as in the Giedroyc concept, it supported the independence and democratisation of Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. The independence of these Eastern European states has been treated as a Polish reason of state. These two fundamental rules have by and large enjoyed the support of all mainstream politicians and political parties for the last 25 years, although European integration and the pro-German discourse of successive Civic Platform (PO) governments has sometimes been questioned by Law and Justice (PiS), as well as other right-wing forces. Although they have never opposed European integration as such, their politicians often present a kind of suspicion towards the EU and Germany. They focus more (at least in their declarations) on the alliance with the United States and NATO, and on building alliances with other Central European states.

The Piłsudski-Giedroyc approach has dominated Polish foreign policy discourse and all major political forces, and mainstream ideologies have subscribed to it. Dmowski's successors can be found mainly on the far-right of the political spectrum. What is more, the label of being "pro-Russian" has always been damning in the political discourse. In the 1990s, it was usually aimed at the former communists turned social democrats, and some prominent politicians on the left have been the victims of attacks by the right-wing media and right-wing politicians. The successor to Poland's communist party was accused of being financed by Russia. Its first prime minister after 1989, Józef Oleksy, was accused of being a Russian spy, which ultimately led to his resignation. Similar accusations were levelled against President Aleksander Kwaśniewski.

Left-wing politicians denied having any such ties, and no such accusations were confirmed, but they were the Left's burden for years. Because of this, these politicians had to be "holier than the Pope", which resulted in the strong pro-Americanism of the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) as exemplified by Poland's participation in the US intervention in Iraq (the president and prime minister at the time were both from SLD) and possibly also by their agreement to an illegal and secret CIA prison on the territory of Poland.

After a low period for Polish-Russian relations under the Kaczyński government in 2005–2007, the Civic Platform government attempted its own version of a "reset policy" towards Russia, which was strongly criticised by Law and Justice. The more reconciliatory attitude towards Russia was never accompanied by neglecting relations with Ukraine, however. To the contrary, it was the Civic Platform government (together with Sweden) that proposed the Eastern Partnership (EaP) programme for the EU. The Tusk government seemed to prefer supporting Ukrainian democratic transition via Brussels rather than independently.<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, Law and Justice President Lech Kaczyński preferred

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<sup>73</sup> Interview in TV Republika, See more on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?t=435&v=jAkaIHTZ1Ko>.

<sup>74</sup> While Law and Justice MPs demanded that the massacres be characterised as "genocide", the ruling Civic Platform preferred "ethnic cleansing that has the characteristics of genocide", arguing that the resolution should aim at Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation.

<sup>75</sup> This despite the fact that Ukraine has always been a priority beneficiary country for Poland's democracy support and development aid.

a more independent approach, manifested by regional alliances with Lithuania and Georgia. These divisions played a secondary role, however, to the consensus over the common appreciation of Ukrainian independence and its expected democratic transition. The main political forces have also been united in suspicion of Moscow and its negative role in the region, even when they have argued strongly over Polish policy towards Russia.

Paradoxically, the crash of the plane carrying President Lech Kaczyński and almost one hundred high-ranking Polish officials in Smolensk in April 2010 briefly created a more "friendly" atmosphere in Polish-Russian relations. During the presidential campaign, even Law and Justice adopted the reconciliatory language. One example was a televised message to "Russian friends", where Jarosław Kaczyński, a presidential candidate, expressed thanks for the sympathy that the Russian people had demonstrated after the Smolensk tragedy.<sup>76</sup> This atmosphere did not last longer than the elections, however, which Jarosław Kaczyński lost only narrowly. A large number of right-wing media and some politicians were indulging in conspiracy theories about the "Smolensk assassination", in which the aircraft crash was not an accident but a terrorist attack by Russian security services. Newly elected President Komorowski ("Komoruski", as the PiS-friendly media used to call him) as well as Prime Minister Tusk were frequently accused of having been implicated in the tragedy, who at best neglected the investigation and at worst were co-conspirators in a plot to kill President Kaczyński.

One should also observe that Kaczyński's message to the Russian friends fits in rather well with the traditional romantic outlook of the Polish intelligentsia. Within this type of political discourse, it is Putin's regime that oppresses Russian society, just as the regime of the Soviet Union oppressed Russians and other Eastern European nations. This approach appreciates Russian culture, especially literature. Russian movies are also popular in Poland, as are festivals of Russian films (e.g. "Sputnik over Poland"). At the same time, a cultural Russophile is not the same as a political Russophile, as is the case in certain Western European countries (e.g. Italy or France). In this vein, Adam Michnik, who had been a consistent critic of the Kaczyńskis, praised the courage of Lech Kaczyński when the then Polish president flew to Tbilisi to show his solidarity with President Saakashvili during the Russo-Georgian War of 2008.

Regardless of the fluctuations in Polish-Russian relations, political elites have traditionally been united in their appreciation of the importance of keeping Ukraine on a path towards democracy and European integration. This positive approach to Ukraine was strengthened by the Orange Revolution, which was welcomed by political forces and civil society as a second wave of unfinished democratic transitions in Central and Eastern Europe. This thinking also led Polish politicians to become advocates of Ukraine's integration with the European Union and NATO.

## 5. Political actors' stances towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

From the very beginning, the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine was received with a pro-Ukrainian viewpoint by the main political actors, as well as the media. The Maidan was received positively as a revisited Orange Revolution and an opportunity for renewing the democratic transition in Ukraine. Since the annexation of Crimea, there has been a consensus that Russia is responsible for escalating the military activity in Eastern Ukraine by actively supporting separatists. This has been the consistent message of the main Polish media and politicians.

The government and the politicians of the ruling Civic Platform spoke up at the national and European levels in the name of supporting Ukraine, defending its territorial integrity, and imposing political and economic sanctions on Russia. Prime Minister Donald Tusk tried to play an active, pro-Ukrainian

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<sup>76</sup> Kaczyński spoke in Polish with Russian subtitles, See more on: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZ3EEZs39zE>.

role in resolving the issue at the EU level, meeting all key EU partners. During five days at the beginning of 2014, he met with 13 leaders, including counterparts from the largest EU states, the Scandinavian and Visegrad countries, the presidents of the European Commission and European Parliament, and the US Secretary of Defense (*Europejska trasa Donalda Tuska...*, 2014). His aim was to elaborate a common EU approach to the conflict.

After the annexation of Crimea, Donald Tusk and his government took the position that the annexation could not be accepted, often referring to a "New Yalta". At the same time, he stressed that neither Poland nor Europe would go to war and that Poland would not support Ukraine militarily. The Polish government's positions can be characterised by the following statement made by the prime minister (*Tusk: nasza polityka...*, 2014): "Poland has to have its own interests, but also has to skilfully incorporate them into the interests of the West. This is because the alienation of Poland, the lack of understanding of our views of the East, Russia and Ukraine in other European capitals and in Washington, would be the greatest risk in a political confrontation with Russia. This is a *sine qua non* condition of conducting effective policy, even if it remains a difficult policy." This clearly shows that the official Polish position towards the conflict can be characterised as "multilateralist" and not "hawkish" as it is often misrepresented in the international media, especially (but not exclusively) Russia-friendly media.

Law and Justice has adopted a more hawkish tone, but has failed to offer specific policy alternatives to the government's multilateralist policy. Nonetheless, it has consistently criticised the government for its insufficient response to the crisis. The opposition party has also taken every opportunity to criticise the Tusk government for the earlier reset policy with Russia and for following mainstream Eastern policy of the EU. Some politicians have even suggested that PiS could have stopped the annexation of Crimea. Former PiS Minister of Foreign Affairs Anna Fotyga said: "If Law and Justice had ruled the country, and especially if Lech Kaczyński had been president, this situation that we have today [the annexation of Crimea] probably would not have happened." This view is also endorsed by the current president, Andrzej Duda, who claims that he wants the Polish Eastern policy to be conducted according to "the legacy of Lech Kaczyński" (*Gdyby rządził Lech Kaczyński...*, 2014).

In view of the fact that the two largest parties in Poland share a basic understanding of the reasons for the conflict and its desired outcomes, one may find it strange that the domestic political debate on Eastern policy issues is so polarised and so bitter. The key reason for this is the fact that Law and Justice has evolved into a right-wing populist party, looking to Hungary's Fidesz and its leader Viktor Orbán for both programmatic and organisational inspiration. In 2011, when Donald Tusk led Civic Platform to an unprecedented second victory in parliamentary elections, Jarosław Kaczyński promised his followers that the next elections would bring on a landslide victory for his party, which he imaginatively described as "Budapest in Warsaw". In this context, it seems ironic that since then and in reaction to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict Viktor Orbán has become a symbol of the pro-Russian right-wing populism which is haunting Europe. This fact has clearly diminished the ostentatious admiration for Orbán in the right-wing spectrum of Polish politics. In fact, during Orbán's visit to Warsaw in February 2015 Kaczyński refused to meet with him and strongly condemned his pro-Putin stance (*W dniu wizyty Orbana...*, 2015). Nonetheless, Orbán with his ideas of "illiberal democracy" has remained a tacit source of inspiration for many right-wing politicians and ideologues who hope that his "success" can be emulated by Law and Justice.

Like its Hungarian role model, Law and Justice has embraced a strategy of total moral and political de-legitimation of the government and the ruling Civic Platform, and accusing the government of being "soft on Russia" is just the tip of the iceberg. The right-wing media, especially social media, have specialised in depicting key PO politicians as nothing more than Russian stooges or spies. Thus, President Komorowski has been referred to as "Komoruski" and accused of collaborating with Russian intelligence agencies. These allegations have been centred on the Smolensk air crash, with a plethora of conspiracy theories accusing the government of complicity or even active collaboration in a plot to assassinate President Lech Kaczyński. Although party leader Jarosław Kaczyński has never explicitly made such accusations, the Smolensk conspiracy theory was "investigated" by Kaczyński's right-hand man, Law and Justice Vice-President Antoni Macierewicz, whose "team of experts" claimed to have

found evidence of foul play on board the crashed TU-134. Macierewicz went so far as to draw a parallel between the Smolensk crash and the downing of the Malaysian flight over Eastern Ukraine, and spoke of both President Kaczyński and other victims of the crash as having “fallen in the line of duty” (*Macierewicz: Generał Błasik...*, 2014). Other PiS politicians, including President Duda, have neither explicitly endorsed nor rejected the Smolensk conspiracy theory.

While Law and Justice kept criticising Civic Platform for being too soft on Russia, the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and to a lesser extent the Polish People’s Party (PSL, a PO coalition partner) were reluctant to endorse the government’s policy as too “anti-Russian”. However, neither of these “post-communist” parties have adopted openly pro-Russian language, which puts them in the “pragmatist” category. In one incident, SLD was criticised because one of its members of parliament went to Crimea as an observer in the phony independence referendum. SLD’s presidential candidate in the 2015 campaign criticised Russia for its aggression, but also demanded more dialogue with Putin by the Polish government and rejected the idea of selling military equipment to Ukraine (which was rather spurious as no other candidate, including Mr Duda, wanted to send weapons to Ukraine). SLD’s politicians have often sounded ambiguous, stressing that Moscow violated international norms, but also that “Putin kills civilians, but Ukrainian troops also kill other civilians” (party leader Leszek Miller, *Putin zabija cywilów...*, 2015), and that “sanctions have yielded nothing and have not affected Russia’s behaviour; meanwhile, what is suffering the most is the Polish economy” (party spokesman, *Polscy Orbanowie...*, 2015). This was also the case for another leftist party, Twój Ruch. Its leader, Janusz Palikot, has said (*Polscy Orbanowie...*, 2015): “Poland cannot afford to conduct a ‘business war’ with Russia. We have no interest as a country in having a war with Russia, in having hatred in Russian hearts. We need to return to trade and collaboration for normal relations.” SLD and PSL were the only political parties that in a pre-election questionnaire in 2014 (European Parliament elections) stated that Poland should not demand a strengthening of sanctions against Russia at the EU level.

Despite these differences, in March 2015 the Sejm (the lower chamber of the Polish parliament) adopted by acclamation a resolution expressing its solidarity with Ukraine. In the resolution, it characterised the new Ukrainian government as “a legitimate power in Ukraine” and stated that the “political-military activities of Russia against Ukraine, especially Crimea, violate the rights of a sovereign state” (*Uchwała w sprawie solidarności z Ukrainą*, 2015). This shows that despite the above-mentioned differences there is a degree of political consensus over Poland’s role in this conflict. Even leftist politicians, rather than being pro-Russian, sometimes accuse the current government and right-wing political parties in Poland generally of being “Russophobic”. Thus, PSL for instance has distributed leaflets with a picture of a mushroom cloud and Law and Justice’s possible government leaflets, including the slogan “PiS=WOJNA” [“Law&Justice=WAR”].

Notwithstanding such differences and interparty struggles, one must note that in Poland there is a mainstream political consensus on Ukraine’s accession to the European Union. The Polish government has always been one of the biggest supporters of accession, and this is unlikely to change under a different coalition. Even SLD, according to its five-point “road map” for Ukraine (2013), supports EU membership with prior abolition of visas and extended financial aid (*Miller: papieramy wszystkie działania...*, 2013).

If one wants to find an example of a Russia-friendly political movement more typical for other EU countries, one needs to examine the very far end of the political spectrum. One representative of such a brand of politics can be found in current MEP Janusz Korwin-Mikke and his various parties.<sup>77</sup> He is a radical Eurosceptic, and during the last European elections his party declared itself to be “the only party in Poland which is consistently and uncompromisingly anti-EU”. Then, according to Korwin-Mikke, Poland’s EU membership “should be abolished as soon as possible; Poland should remain a member of the Schengen Agreement and the European Economic Area – but these are institutions independent of the EU”. In the case of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, he is openly pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian. He

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<sup>77</sup> His current party is called KORWiN; the party with which he entered the European Parliament was called Congress of the New Right, while his original party was called Real Politics Union.

repeats Russian propaganda directly, stating that the annexation of Crimea was “absolutely natural”, that the conflict is “fuelled by the United States” and that the “terrorists, who killed 30 militiamen on the Maidan were trained in Poland” (*JKM powtarza rosyjską propagandę...*, 2014).

Korwin-Mikke is currently a Member of the European Parliament. He is a one-man-show, omnipresent in the media as a politician and political commentator, in spite (or rather because) of his outrageous conservative views. In fact, he is most famous for his extreme economic liberalism (he once declared that the US was a socialist country). He has rarely enjoyed political success, but in recent European elections the party he set up (Congress of the New Right) was quite successful.<sup>78</sup> His new political party, KORWIN, has registered for the 2015 parliamentary elections and has failed to reach the electoral threshold of 5%.

Similar views are represented by the party *Zmiana* (“Change”), its leader, Mateusz Piskorski, and the party’s think tank, the European Centre for Geopolitical Analysis. Piskorski is a former spokesman for *Samoobrona*, a now defunct populist agrarian party that served in the ruling coalition with Law and Justice for 14 months in 2006–2007. He is openly pro-Russian, and according to the media he benefits (also financially) from Russian support and has had contacts with other controversial regimes as well, such as Kaddafi’s in Libya. The party is not visible on the political scene and failed to register for the 2015 elections. Piskorski and his think tank seem to be better known in Russia and in EaP countries than in Poland, where they are virtually invisible to the broader public.

Other radical right and nationalistic movements, all referring to Roman Dmowski’s legacy, are divided in their approaches to Russia. Representatives of the National Movement call Russia “Poland’s rival in this part of Europe” (*Ruch narodowy o sytuacji...*, 2014), but at the same time have criticised Poland’s engagement in the conflict and its support for Ukraine (“another rival”). The Camp of Great Poland, on the other hand, is openly pro-Russian; it has organised protests against the government’s support for the Ukrainian authorities, and stipends to Ukrainian students. It also welcomed the Russian “Night Wolves” to Poland.<sup>79</sup> Their representative went to Donetsk to become a “Polish spokesman” for Novorossiia. Polish Slavic Committee, another example, congratulated “the Russian Nation, all Nations of the Russian Federation and President Putin on the triumphal return of Crimea to the Mother Country, Russia” (*Popieramy Rosję...*, 2014). Such organisations and views do exist in Poland, but their significance in the public debate is very limited.

Although these nationalistic and extreme right-wing movements have never enjoyed much electoral success, this could change as many of them have been “adopted” and placed on electoral lists by Paweł Kukiz, a rock star and populist politician who shook the Polish political scene when he came in third in the first round of the Polish presidential elections in May 2015. Kukiz himself has never been outspoken about any foreign policy issues, but he is known to be rather sceptical of Polish support for Ukraine in the present conflict. His electoral committee Kukiz’15 came third in the 2015 parliamentary elections, with almost 8% of the vote and 42 MPs, some of whom with strongly right wing and anti-Ukrainian views.

## 6. Non-political actors’ stances towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

Both the Orange Revolution and the Maidan were very well received by Polish civil society. There are many non-governmental organisations working towards supporting development and democracy in Ukraine (including through Polish Aid projects financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and supporting the integration of Ukrainians living in Poland, etc. During the Maidan protests, many spon-

<sup>78</sup> The Congress of the New Right received 7% of votes and won 3 seats in the EP.

<sup>79</sup> The Night Wolves are a Russian motorcycle club (or gang) established in 1989 which supports Putin’s policy. Its provocative visit to Poland in April 2015 was blocked by the authorities.

taneous actions were organised across Poland to provide humanitarian aid to Kyiv. Food, clothes and medical equipment were collected in many Polish cities and transported to Kyiv. A number of demonstrations in support of democratic movements in Ukraine were organised by Polish NGOs. Non-governmental organisations are also demanding stronger Polish engagement in support of Ukraine. In 2014, 30 of them<sup>80</sup> signed an appeal to the Polish government to contribute more to humanitarian aid for Kyiv (*Apel polskich organizacji pozarządowych w sprawie pomocy Ukrainie*, 2014).

Civil society activity is also influenced by the fact that there is a large Ukrainian minority living in Poland. The minority is officially recognised and is estimated at 39,000 people (the third-largest minority in Poland after Germans and Belarusians).<sup>81</sup> However, this number includes only Ukrainians living in Poland officially and permanently. Taking into account the large number of Ukrainians coming to Poland for temporary stays, it is difficult to estimate the real number of Ukrainian immigrants in Poland. About 50,000 Ukrainians (without Polish citizenship, representing 25% of all foreigners in Poland) reside in Poland legally according to Foreigners Office and probably tens of thousands illegally. Ukrainian media estimate the number to be as high as 800,000 (*Ukraińcy zaleją Polskę?*, 2012). All these numbers have grown rapidly since the beginning of the conflict. Whereas in 2003–2013 the number of Ukrainians applying for refugee status in Poland remained below 86 annually, in 2014 this figure rose to 2,318 and in the first eight months of 2015 to 1,568. 41% of these people come from the Donetsk region, 18% from the Luhansk region, and 13% from Crimea. Also, the number of Ukrainians applying for legal residence in Poland (not refugee status) has grown rapidly during the conflict from 12,901 in 2013 and 5,791 in the first half of 2014 to 23,108 in the second half of 2014 (almost 400% growth) and 35,406 during first eight months of 2015.

The conflict has been a catalyst for the Ukrainians living in Poland to organise and mobilise public opinion. Their activities have included organising several pro-Maidan demonstrations, well-attended by both Ukrainians and Poles, collecting money, clothing, etc., to help Ukrainian internal refugees and maintaining a constant presence on social media in an attempt to counteract Russian propaganda in Poland.

## 7. Common points with Russian propaganda in the Polish public debate

While one can hardly find examples of direct support for or “understanding” of Putin’s policies, there are forces that openly refer to values or slogans characteristic of the current Russian regime and its propaganda: anti-Western sentiments, anti-modern conservatism and ethnic nationalism, general anti-democratic and anti-progressive currents.

The radical “anti-EU-ism” of Janusz Korwin-Mikke, combined in his case with anti-Ukrainian rhetoric and justification of Russian aggression with Western “provocations”, has already been mentioned. On the other hand, the type of Euroscepticism endorsed by Law and Justice does not explicitly have much in common with Russian attempts to weaken the EU. It likes to compare itself to the British position on the EU (both PiS and the British Tories are members of the moderately Eurosceptic European Conservatives and Reformists group in the European Parliament). Nonetheless, if one takes into consideration the fact that part of the aim of Putin’s propaganda is to weaken trust in the EU and to reduce the EU’s ability to undertake common action, then even such less extreme Euroscepticism (i.e. than in the case of Korwin-Mikke) converges with the aims of Russian propaganda. As critics of Law

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<sup>80</sup> These included the Helsinki Foundation, the Stefan Batory Foundation, the Association of Ukrainians in Poland, and the Institute of Public Affairs.

<sup>81</sup> Source: *Charakterystyka mniejszości narodowych i etnicznych w Polsce*, <http://mniejszosci.narodowe.mac.gov.pl/mne/mniejszosci/charakterystyka-mniejszości/6480,Charakterystyka-mniejszosci-narodowych-i-etnicznych-w-Polsce.html#ukraincy>.



and Justice rightly point out, in terms of geopolitics Poland is not the UK and Polish Euroscepticism has serious implications for Poland's position vis-à-vis Russia, as it undermines the basic tenets of Polish foreign policy.

Even more importantly, Law and Justice and most right-wing parties in Poland have much in common with the Russian regime when it comes to so-called social-moral issues. The Polish campaign against so-called "gender ideology", reluctance with respect to policies of equality (e.g. women's and LGBT rights), and backing for close institutionalised ties between the state and the Church (in contrast to Western secularism) all seem rather closer to Moscow's conservative crusade than to contemporary European norms and values.

It is important to point out in this context that just before the outbreak of the conflict in 2013, as part of Polish-Russian reconciliation efforts, the Polish Catholic and Russian Orthodox Churches signed a joint declaration. Somewhat ironically, apart from calling for "rapprochement and reconciliation of the two nations" based on forgiveness and "fraternal dialogue", the declaration showed that the two Churches are mainly united by the same approach to so-called "new challenges". These include combating "the promotion of abortion, euthanasia, and relationships of people of the same sex presented as a form of marriage". Both Churches committed themselves to defending the right of religion to be present in public life (*Wspólne przestanie...*, 2012). In 2013, a meeting of Polish and Russian clergy agreed to defend the religious identity of the European continent (*Cerkiew i Kościół razem...*, 2013). Although these statements apparently had no bearing on any positions of the Polish Catholic Church concerning the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (on which it has remained silent), there is no doubt that these days the Catholic Church in Poland is on the side of anti-European, anti-liberal and anti-democratic political forces who elsewhere in Europe are looking to Putin's Russia for inspiration, guidance and (sometimes) material support.

Another dimension of the convergence in Polish public life is anti-Americanism. Poles have generally been a very pro-American society with a long tradition of emigration to America. However, after being engaged in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Poles' opinions about the US have become less positive. In addition, for traditionally very pro-American right-wing and conservative circles, sympathy towards the US has been weakened by Obama's (liberal) presidency. Anti-US sentiments also appear in circles of leftist activists, especially in the context of the current negotiations between Brussels and Washington on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). None of this anti-American behaviour has a Russian context even though, as in the case of TTIP, it may converge with Russian interests.

At the same time, it should be mentioned that the Russian model of socio-economic development, despite its common points with the conservative agenda, is not attractive for the majority of Poles. According to opinion polls, Russia is perceived in Poland very negatively. It is most often viewed as an extremely corrupt country, where an impoverished population is exploited by political and economic elites. According to a 2014 Pew Research Center survey, 81% of Poles have unfavourable opinions about Russia (the highest result among 44 countries surveyed, even higher than in Ukraine) and 86% think the Russian government does not respect the personal freedoms of the Russian people (*Russia's Global Image...*, 2014).

If Russian propaganda is to achieve any success in Poland, this will not come by way of the attractiveness of the Russian model of development, but rather through anti-Ukrainian sentiments within society. On this issue, an ally can be discerned in the movements cultivating the myths of the *Kresy* ["Borderlands"], former Polish territories in the current Eastern neighbourhood. These myths are generally anti-Ukrainian, suggesting that Poland has a territorial claim to these areas. The best-known proponent of this view, and a source of constant Ukrainian bashing, is the website *kresy.pl*. In a similar vein, well-known priest Tadeusz Isakowicz-Zaleski has been a tireless promotor of the vision of blood-thirsty Ukrainian nationalists (Banderivtsi) and a fierce critic of Poland's commitment to Ukrainian independence (*Ks. Tadeusz Isakowicz-Zaleski...*, 2014).

Such propaganda spills over into politics, including the Law and Justice party. Immediately after the presidential elections, Law and Justice MP Krzysztof Szczerski, who is also chief advisor to President Duda, refused to meet with a group of Ukrainian deputies visiting the Polish parliament to protest

against newly adopted Ukrainian “historical” laws. It can be assumed that this is merely an instance of the contradiction between support for Ukraine’s independence from Russia and the particular vision of Polish history (always right and always innocent) endorsed by Law and Justice.

The political representation of the Polish minority in Lithuania, Akcja Wyborcza Polaków na Litwie (AWPL, or Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania) is sometimes perceived as an ally of Russia. In 2014, AWPL’s leader, Waldemar Tomaszewski, opposed sanctions against Russia<sup>82</sup> and criticised the post-Maidan government in Ukraine for including nationalistic politicians. He attended the official commemoration of the end of the Second World War wearing the black and orange ribbon of Saint George, a symbol of Russian militarism used by the separatists. It should be noted that for years this organisation has opposed the improvement of Polish-Lithuanian relations, which clearly benefits Russia.

Generally speaking, while there are few, if any, friends of Russia in the Polish public debate, upon closer examination one may find powerful voices and intellectual milieus whose messages overlap with, if not directly amplify, the messages sent out by the Kremlin’s propaganda.

## 8. Prevailing trends in public opinion concerning the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

According to opinion polls conducted since the conflict started, Polish public opinion has been relatively clear as regards responsibility for the conflict and the resulting threat level, but rather divided as regards the country’s policy response.

According to a 2015 Institute of Public Affairs opinion poll, 76% of Poles are afraid of a Russian military threat. 61% of Poles think that it is Russia that is responsible for the conflict, while only 20% think that Russia and Ukraine are equally responsible, and only 6% think that Ukraine is responsible. Consequently, most respondents believe the current European Union sanctions against Russia should be strengthened (42%) or maintained (35%), rather than weakened (6%). Poland should support Ukraine economically (56%), but it should not provide support to Ukraine’s army (56% against). On the other hand, only 37% of Poles agreed that “Poland should support Ukraine even if it means worsening relations with Russia”. Despite the political consensus on this issue, 45% of Poles are against lifting the visa requirement for Ukrainians while 30% are for it (Kucharczyk et al., 2015).

Opinions are much more ambiguous when it comes to assessing the Polish government’s response to the crisis, however. According to IPA research in early 2015, 41% of Poles had a negative assessment of Polish policy towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict while 26% had a positive assessment (Kucharczyk et al., 2015). It was also found that a pro-active and pro-Ukrainian approach is more often endorsed by supporters of the ruling Civic Platform than by supporters of Law and Justice. The most Russia-friendly voters support the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the Polish People’s Party (PSL), which is consistent with the fact that their respective presidential candidates in the 2015 campaign used rather conciliatory language vis-à-vis Russia.<sup>83</sup>

In another opinion poll, a plurality of respondents agreed that “Poland should not engage in a special manner in the East, but first and foremost should try to maintain good relations with Russia” (44% of responses). The opposite statement, that “Poland should have an active Eastern policy and support the pro-European aspirations of Ukrainians and other post-Soviet nations” was supported by only 25% of respondents.<sup>84</sup> The above-mentioned opinions about Poland’s engagement in the East should be interpreted as a result of fear of provoking Russia rather than of a pro-Russian attitude.

<sup>82</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQ9Po604g2I>.

<sup>83</sup> Although PSL is in the current government, the PSL candidate criticised the government’s policy towards Russia as being too aggressive.

<sup>84</sup> 25% selected the neutral option, and 7% selected “difficult to say”. Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS), Research Bulletin, 85/2015.

As was argued above, while Poland's politicians, opinion makers and general public have few illusions concerning Russia's policies towards Ukraine, Polish views of Ukraine and Ukrainians are much more complex. The 2013 Institute of Public Affairs opinion poll, which was conducted shortly before the beginning of the Euromaidan protests, provides a more in-depth look into Poles' opinions about Ukraine (Fomina et al., 2013). The study shows that the social distance between Poles and Ukrainians was generally small and the acceptance of Ukrainians in various social roles (from tourist to family member) was relatively high. On the other hand, Poles' views of Ukraine – in contrast their views of Ukrainians – were largely shaped by historical sentiments. For example, one-fourth of spontaneous associations with Ukraine were related to history, and half of these were related to the Volyn Massacre (it should be noted, however, that the poll was conducted in 2013 on the 70th anniversary of the tragedy). When asked directly, 73% of Poles said that Ukrainians are historically guilty of actions against Poles (Fomina et al., 2013). This is important in view of the fact that according to CBOS research, 58% of Poles think that revealing the truth about history is more important than maintaining good political relations.

## 9. Conclusions

Polish elites and society are often perceived in Europe as anti-Russian and pro-Ukrainian, and the Polish response towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is often described as "hawkish". In view of the analysis presented here, however, such generalisations are at odds with a much more complex and ambiguous social and political reality. While Poles are suspicious of Russia even in the best of times, this attitude has not automatically translated into dislike or hostility towards the Russian people. In a similar vein, respect for Russian culture and close friendship and sympathy towards the Russians does not exclude strong criticism of the Russian government and its policies. Similar complexities can be discerned in Polish attitudes towards Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. While the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has strengthened a key tenet of Polish foreign policy, which is that supporting Ukraine's independence and pro-European orientation is the key to Polish security in a stable and friendly international environment, there are a number of problems with respect to Polish views of Ukraine and especially the interpretation of their shared history, which may prove an obstacle to creating deeper ties between the two societies.

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# Back to basics? Polish foreign policy and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

AGNIESZKA ŁADA – ŁUKASZ WENERSKI

## 1. Introduction

Eastern Europe has been one of the most important issues in Poland's foreign policy since the beginning of the 1990s. Since regaining its independence in 1989, Poland has tried to pursue an ambitious policy towards the region, which it has regarded as crucial for its security and international standing. One of the main goals of Polish foreign policy has been to effectively implement a well-tailored policy towards each Eastern partner. But the differences between these countries, the role they have played in the Polish foreign policy doctrine, their position on the international scene and their openness towards Poland led very soon to a split in Polish policy towards Eastern Europe into two general blocks: relations with Russia and relations with other Eastern European countries. In the last few years, this split has also materialised in the European context with the establishment of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and a separate policy towards Russia.

For Poland, the most important country of the six belonging to the Eastern Partnership initiative has always been Ukraine. For many years, this country has been treated by Poland as a "younger brother" that needs Poland's support in representing its interests vis-à-vis the EU and NATO. Russia, on the other hand, has always been a problematic neighbour, and Polish-Russian relations have periodically deteriorated and improved over the years.

The last few years have brought a fundamental change in relations between these two countries, the main factors of which have been a revolution of dignity in Ukraine, Russia's annexation of Crimea and the Ukrainian-Russian war. One could say that official relations between Warsaw and Kyiv have never been so warm and those between Warsaw and the Kremlin have never been so cold in the last twenty-five years. Poland is supporting Ukraine on the domestic (reform) and international levels (mainly through the Eastern Partnership), but is now trying to do so more as a partner rather than as a mentor. At the same time, Warsaw is a strong opponent of Russia's aggressive policy towards Ukraine. This position is not necessarily supported in all respects by Poland's neighbours and traditional allies. Whereas after long years of Polish-German disagreements in the area of Eastern policy Warsaw and Berlin are now speaking in a very similar voice (notwithstanding their differences of opinion on NATO's presence in the region), the Visegrad countries are no longer perceived as partners in Poland with respect to the Eastern policy.

## 2. Ukraine in Poland's foreign policy doctrine

Ukraine plays a key role in Polish foreign policy. Poland is interested in having a partner that is governed by predictable politicians with a thriving economy and well-functioning state institutions. Still, attitudes have changed somewhat over the years. While support for Ukraine's European and transatlantic integration has remained intact, views of how much the process will cost and how difficult it will be to implement have become more and more pragmatic.

Poland has been a strong supporter of an independent Ukrainian state. Warsaw was the first capital in the world to recognise the independence of Ukraine. Polish authorities confirmed recognition on 2 December 1991, i.e. even before the meeting in Białowieża Forest where the leaders of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus decided that the Soviet Union would cease to exist as a subject of international law. Diplomatic relations between Poland and independent Ukraine were launched on 17 January 1992. Since the very beginning, Ukraine has been treated as a priority in Polish foreign policy. From Warsaw's perspective, it has been a key issue to have a stable and accountable neighbour that would develop friendly relations with Poland based on effective political and economic cooperation. The situation in Ukraine also has an influence on both the security and economic situation in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. Polish authorities have seen Ukraine and cooperation with this country as one of many important factors in strengthening Poland's role in the region and building a counterweight to Russia.

For all the above-mentioned reasons, Polish foreign policy has been engaged in the promotion of Ukraine on the international level vis-à-vis different supranational institutions, especially the European Union and EU initiatives. Poland is a long-term supporter of Ukrainian integration with the European Union. For many years, Warsaw has seen itself as a mentor for Ukraine – a model country regarding the implementation of the tough reforms that are expected by the European Union and reflected in the EU's *acquis communautaire*. Poland possesses know-how for successful integration with the EU and has been ready to pass it on to Ukraine. As a consequence of this policy, Poland has always ranked among those countries that are open to and have even pushed for offering Ukraine the prospect of joining the EU. In Warsaw's view, an EU membership prospect is an important incentive, because it sets a goal and thus might visibly influence the effectiveness and pace of reform.

Poland's readiness to grant EU membership to Ukraine was especially visible after the Orange Revolution. When it started in 2004, Polish authorities were actively involved in facilitating a resolution to the conflict. Aleksander Kwaśniewski, then president of Poland, was responsible for mediating between Leonid Kuchma, Ukraine's outgoing president; Viktor Yanukovich, accused of electoral fraud; and Viktor Yushchenko, the political leader of the Orange Revolution. Both Polish politicians and Polish society supported Ukrainians with enthusiasm. After the revolution in 2005, the belief that Ukraine had the potential to be effectively reformed at a rapid pace was widespread in Poland. Poles were more optimistic concerning Ukraine's prospects for EU integration than most other EU countries. Poland was involved in intensifying the debate about membership and pursued a pro-active EU policy towards Ukraine. This Polish role as an advocate was noticed in Europe, but not always appreciated. Joseph Borell, president of the European Parliament in 2004–2007, assessed Warsaw's engagement as follows (Barbuska, 2006, p. 58): "Poland appears to be closer to Ukraine, than to other EU countries." Polish elites and political parties still claim that it was a major mistake on the part of the European Union not to have offered Ukraine membership immediately after the Orange Revolution. This lack of concrete promises is perceived in Poland as a factor which discouraged Ukrainian elites and society from embarking upon the necessary steps and reforms.

Although the changes in Ukraine after the Orange Revolution failed in the end, Polish policy-makers have never stopped supporting the EU vector of Ukrainian foreign policy. Even after Viktor Yanukovich came to power in 2010, and when the Party of Regions secured a majority in the Ukrainian parliament, Polish authorities were ready to support them (although criticising domestic policy) every time Yanukovich or his political allies declared that Ukraine was interested in strengthening its relations with the European Union. Polish support for Ukraine's European aspirations was reaffirmed by Polish President Bronisław Komorowski and Prime Minister Donald Tusk when Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov came to Poland for an official visit in September 2010 (*Komorowski zapewnił Azarowa...*, 2012), and by the Polish president when he visited Ukraine in September 2012 and met with President Yanukovich (*Polska wspiera aspiracje...*, 2012), as well as on a few other occasions.

Since the Euromaidan, Poland has continued to support Ukraine's EU aspirations. A concrete change can be observed, however, in how Warsaw perceives its own role – now less as a mentor and more as an advisor. The differences between the two cases of successful and potential EU integra-

tion – the Polish case and the Ukrainian case – are more visible now than they were after the Orange Revolution, and Ukrainians themselves see that the Polish example is comparable with their own state only to a limited extent. Nevertheless, Warsaw has continued to remind other European partners that Ukraine is of crucial importance for the EU's security and stability strategy. Nevertheless, every attempt to insert a statement on EU membership as part of the Eastern Partnership project has failed. German opposition is perceived in Poland to be the main reason why no such formal obligation has been made. Even though the Treaties of the European Union stress that every European country might join the EU if all necessary conditions are satisfied, Warsaw – as well as the Ukrainian government – want to see a concrete commitment from the EU. A similar promise made in the early 1990s, as is argued in Poland, motivated the Poles to implement the necessary reforms after the collapse of the communist system. This is why Poland was among the EU countries that were willing to include a statement about a membership prospect for Ukraine during the Eastern Partnership's Riga summit in May 2015. A majority of EU countries were not ready to take such a step, however, and "acknowledging European aspirations" was the most they would offer at the time.

Polish political elites are united in insisting that Ukraine must be given a membership prospect. The EU Accession Agreement with Ukraine was unanimously ratified by the Polish Sejm in November 2014. During the parliamentary debates, politicians stressed the necessity of Polish support for Ukrainian reforms, so that the country could take its position on the economic and political map of Europe. At the same time, the opposition accused the government of not preparing any specific plan for how Poland could support Ukraine in the EU and the EU in Ukraine (*W sejmie jednomyślność...*, 2014).

### 3. Poland as a driver of the Eastern Partnership

Since EU membership for Ukraine now seems to be a very distant possibility, EU cooperation with this country is being developed through different mechanisms, the most important of which is the Eastern Partnership (EaP), an initiative proposed by Poland and Sweden, and launched in Prague in 2009. The EaP was initiated in order to bring six post-Soviet republics (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine) closer to the European Union. The EU has provided EaP countries with guidelines for reforms in various spheres, including the judicial system, the electoral system, public procurement and the functioning of a market economy, and has offered administrative and financial support for launching them. The EaP stopped short of offering the possibility of EU membership to Eastern Partnership countries, however.

As one of the initiators of the EaP, Poland has tried to be very active in promoting the initiative as an effective tool of cooperation with the partner countries. The Eastern Partnership was one of the priorities for the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2011. During the Presidency, the Eastern Partnership Summit and Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum were organised as events summarising the initiative's successes and failures.

From the very beginning of the Eastern Partnership's implementation, special attention was given to Ukraine and the process of signing the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. The discussion over the AA began already in 2007 with Viktor Yushchenko still serving as president of Ukraine, but the final version of the document was concluded (but not signed) in 2011 with President Viktor Yanukovich. Although the Association Agreement was initialled and scheduled to be signed by Ukraine and the European Union at the Eastern Partnership's Vilnius summit in November 2013, there was no unanimity between EU countries over what preconditions should be implemented to prepare Ukraine for signing the AA. The EU countries viewed the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich with disapproval, and criticised the level of corruption, human rights violations, selective justice and imprisonment of political opposition leaders (Yulia Tymoshenko, Yuriy Lutsenko), but they disagreed on the level of change that would have to be undertaken before the AA with Ukraine was signed.

The Association Agreement was perceived by Polish authorities as the main and indispensable tool of Ukraine's gradual integration with the EU, and a commitment to the state's future comprehensive modernisation by Ukraine's political elites. The consequences of this were twofold. First of all, Poland did not seem to be strict about implementing preconditions before signing the Association Agreement, emphasising that the mechanisms under the AA would be the best tool for implementing the changes. Second, Polish authorities were committed to having the AA signed at the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius in November 2013. This included diplomatic efforts in February and March 2013. Polish President Bronisław Komorowski met twice with President Viktor Yanukovich (on 20–21 February in Wisła and on 22 March in Warsaw), and hosted Minister of Foreign Affairs Leonid Kozhara (on 27 February) and Verkhovna Rada Chairman Volodymyr Rybak (on 25 March) in Warsaw. Although Polish authorities concentrated mostly on dialogue with the Ukrainian president and government, at the same time they tried to strike a balance by organising meetings with the political opposition (e.g. by meeting with Vitali Klitschko in March 2013).

In Warsaw, the Eastern Partnership was perceived with a growing awareness that EU countries were expecting a "success story" in order to maintain confidence that this initiative was having any positive impact on changes in EaP countries. If not for the Euromaidan, which started as a consequence of Yanukovich's refusal to sign the Association Agreement, the Vilnius summit could even be considered a failure of the Eastern Partnership. But the revolution of dignity swept away the negative atmosphere that had surrounded the EaP due to the actions of Yanukovich and his allies.

Since the Vilnius summit, the situation in Ukraine has changed dramatically. The Euromaidan ended with the collapse of the Yanukovich regime, and the newly elected Ukrainian authorities signed the Association Agreement together with the DCFTA.

Since the Eastern Partnership's Riga summit, in May 2015, Polish authorities have remained positive about the initiative, which in Warsaw is still perceived as a set of tools useful for bringing the Eastern neighbours closer to EU standards. For Polish officials, the deterioration of EU-Russia relations has not been a result of the EU policies in the region, but of the Kremlin's aggressive policies not only towards Ukraine, but also towards Georgia, Moldova and even Armenia (Buras, 2015).

The main message of Polish government officials after the Riga summit was that the European Union managed to remain in solidarity. They underscored the effectiveness of the EaP initiative and framed its future goals (*MSZ: Szczyt Partnerstwa Wschodniego...*, 2015). They also admitted that much needed to be done to upgrade the EaP in order to face current challenges, which include the need for more tailored policies for countries that have signed Association Agreements and are seeking EU membership (Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia), as well as countries less committed to cooperation with the EU (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus). Nonetheless, the success of the Eastern Partnership should not be underestimated, they say.

For Ukraine, two positive developments should be emphasised. The first, of course, is the Association Agreement. If effectively implemented, it will bring about substantial changes in Ukraine. The second is the possibility for Ukraine to obtain a visa-free regime for EU countries in the near future.

## 4. Poland and the question of Ukraine's NATO membership

Since Ukraine gained independence in 1991, membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has almost never been among the top priorities on the agenda of the Ukrainian authorities. The exception was the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko, but only until the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, where NATO member countries failed to offer Ukraine a Membership Action Plan. During the Yanukovich presidency, Ukraine declared neutrality with respect to military alliances.

The situation has changed dramatically since the Russian annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict in Donbas. In 2014 Ukrainian politicians issued the declaration of



intent to join the NATO. In December 2014, the Ukrainian parliament changed a Ukrainian law (introduced during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich) and abolished the country's neutral status (*Ukraina zrezygnowała...*, 2014), which means that Ukraine may now legally apply for NATO membership.

Ukraine's bid for NATO membership has been supported by Poland for the last ten years and declared openly by consecutive MFAs from Adam Daniel Rotfeld to Radosław Sikorski. These days, Poland still seems to support Ukraine's possible NATO membership, but its official rhetoric has changed. Although NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has confirmed that the "open-door policy" for Ukraine is still in place, i.e. Ukraine can apply to become a member of NATO after implementing necessary reforms (*NATO. Stoltenberg: polityka otwartych...*, 2014), member states remain reluctant or even strongly oppose Ukraine's joining the alliance. Polish authorities confirm that they see this problem. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Grzegorz Schetyna stated in an interview that "there is no question about Ukraine joining NATO nowadays. If someone raised this issue, it would create an irreconcilable international problem." Still, there are crucial differences in the reasons why Poland and certain other NATO countries are reluctant. While the majority of NATO countries do not want Ukraine in NATO because they are afraid of Russian retaliation, Polish authorities find themselves in the mainstream because they simply do not see any possibility of putting this topic on the agenda. Nevertheless, it seems that the Polish position can easily be changed when it becomes possible for Ukraine to join the alliance. This two-track policy can be read from the actions of Polish officials. While Grzegorz Schetyna has remained cautious with respect to Ukrainian NATO membership, Stanisław Koziej, head of the National Security Bureau, has declared Poland's readiness to support Ukraine in the process of NATO integration.

## 5. Russia in Poland's foreign policy doctrine

Polish-Russian relations have been negatively perceived by outside observers. Indeed, bilateral contacts since 1990 have not always been easy or friendly. However, there have been periods and initiatives that could be considered successful, and it would be erroneous to claim that anti-Russian attitudes dominate Polish foreign policy.

Relations between Poland and Russia since the beginning of the 1990s have been accompanied by serious problems. Securing Poland's vital interests very often meant being in opposition to Russian policy towards the region. Fortunately, the departure of Russian (formerly Soviet) troops from the territory of Poland was completed without any difficulties. The last Russian soldiers left the country in September 1993. In the longer term, Poland's main goal had been to join the European Union and to become a member of NATO. The Kremlin was critical of Poland's joining new alliances, and especially strongly opposed its membership in NATO. Russia perceived Poland's accession to this military alliance as a threat to its sphere of influence, or even the first step leading to a situation where Russia would be surrounded by NATO (at the time, however, NATO was not perceived by Russians as an enemy, but as an organisation that represented a different view of what the balance of power and spheres of influence are). It must be emphasised that Russia's opposition to Poland's membership in NATO became one of the factors that influenced the opinions of other NATO member countries. Questions were raised as to whether the accession of new countries to NATO would provoke a second Cold War or would negatively influence the process of democratisation in Russia and halt the constructive dialogue with Moscow. Polish authorities managed to counter such misgivings, however, by arguing that the rejection of enlargement would not protect the world from a new Cold War, but would instead cause a further deepening of old divisions. What is more, Poland's membership in NATO would bring Poland peace and stability, and would protect the country from any perturbations in the event of a possible worsening of relations with Moscow. Another argument was even more practical: Polish authorities warned NATO members that in the event of any conflict in Eastern Europe, it would be better to face it on the Poland's eastern border, than on Germany's.

For Poland, the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s was a time of accession negotiations with the European Union. It should be noted that at that time Russia did not present a forceful opposition to the process of enlargement. The perception of the EU by Russia generally was different than it is now; it was not seen as a project competing with the Eurasian Union, but more as a partner organisation.

Nevertheless, during the first few years of Poland's membership in the European Union relations with Russia were very cold. Russia was critical of Polish support for the Orange Revolution, and Polish authorities were very sceptical about the idea of building Nord Stream, the gas pipeline that would deliver gas to Germany directly from Russia, avoiding transit through Poland and Ukraine. In 2005, Russia introduced an embargo on Polish meat and agricultural products, and in retaliation Poland blocked negotiations on a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with Russia.

Polish-Russian relations began to normalise and even improve after 2007–2008 following political changes in both countries, when Civic Platform won the elections in Poland and Dmitry Medvedev became president of Russia. Both parties seemed to be seeking a more constructive approach to bilateral relations, and the peak of positive cooperation came in 2011 and 2012.

The 2008–2010 period was marked by a polarisation of Polish foreign policy and competition between President Lech Kaczyński on the one hand and PM Donald Tusk and MFA Radosław Sikorski on the other. While the former tried to pursue a tough line on Russia, the Tusk-Sikorski tandem initiated a Polish version of a reset in bilateral relations. In view of the fact that the Polish constitution grants relatively limited powers to the president, Kaczyński's initiatives were mainly symbolic, such as his dangerous trip to Tbilisi in the midst of the Russian offensive against Georgia. The official government reaction to the Russian aggression was relatively moderate, and largely limited to an endorsement of the EU's peace-making efforts led by President Sarkozy (this occurred during the French rotating presidency). President Kaczyński did not put much faith in the EU's will and ability to properly respond to Putin's war on Georgia, and he attempted to build a coalition of like-minded countries with Lithuania and Ukraine. These efforts were not terribly successful due to the ongoing Polish-Lithuanian disagreement over the status of the Polish minority in Lithuania and the weakening position of President Yushchenko, who was Kaczyński's main partner in Ukraine.

The president and government also had opposing views concerning the Bush administration's plans to place an anti-missile shield in Poland. Lech Kaczyński was an enthusiastic supporter of the plan, while MFA Sikorski believed it would actually expose Poland to a threat of pre-emptive strikes and therefore tried to negotiate additional security guarantees from the Americans. President Obama's decision to cancel the missile shield project (which was unfortunately announced on 17 September 2009 – the anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland under the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact) removed one of the most contentious issues in Polish-Russian relations at that time, and paved the way to the peak of the Polish-Russian "reset", which was Mr Putin's presence in Gdańsk in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War.

The tragic death of President Kaczyński in a plane crash in Smolensk and the initial reaction of the Putin administration seemed to be in tune with the general improvement of bilateral relations. As time went by, however, the lack of cooperation (or worse) in the investigation on the part of the Russian administration fuelled a bitter domestic Polish debate about the responsibility for the crash and ultimately contributed to the premature demise of the "reset".

Russia's current engagement in the conflict in Ukraine has led to a deterioration of relations with many countries, including Poland. Before the crisis, however, Poland had been engaged in a constructive dialogue with Russian authorities, which resulted in a number of interesting initiatives.

The most important of these was an agreement on local border traffic between Poland and Russia that entered into force in July 2012. This initiative allows citizens of Poland living in two Polish voivodeships (the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship and the Pomeranian Voivodeship) and citizens of Russia living in the Kaliningrad region to travel to the neighbouring area without obtaining a visa, after obtaining a local border traffic card. The size of the zone covered by the local border traffic agreement between Poland and Russia is an exception to EU rules, as such agreements usually cover an area of 30 km<sup>2</sup> and here the area is significantly larger. Poland had advocated for a special arrangement concern-

ing small border traffic that would be allowed to cover Kaliningrad Oblast as a whole, including Kaliningrad city. It was the common idea of two ministers of foreign affairs – Sikorski and Lavrov. Poland made efforts to persuade the EU that it was possible, and negotiated the special arrangement for the Kaliningrad region with the European Commission. The Commission agreed with Poland's arguments and issued the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council in July 2011.<sup>85</sup> The European Parliament and the Council then accepted the Commission's proposal.

Local border traffic has had a visible influence on the economy on both sides of the border. The two Polish regions included in the local border traffic initiative have become important destinations for Russians from Kaliningrad. Small Polish cities close to the border are visited by Russians who want to buy groceries, which are cheaper than in Russia. For bigger shopping and tourism, Russians from Kaliningrad go to cities such as Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot.

Local border traffic started as an economic initiative, but has a vast potential to positively influence personal contacts and to be a good tool to develop cooperation between various Polish and Russian organisations. Worsening relations between Warsaw and Moscow have had a significant negative influence on Poles' and Russians' perceptions of one another, but local border traffic keeps functioning despite political difficulties. Local politicians from both sides emphasise that local border traffic still has a positive impact on bilateral relations and should not only be maintained, but also expanded to new cities on the Polish side.

2011 saw the launch of another important initiative, the so-called "Kaliningrad Triangle", an annual meeting of ministers of foreign affairs from Germany, Poland and Russia. The first meeting took place in Kaliningrad in May 2011 with the participation of Guido Westerwelle, Radosław Sikorski and Sergey Lavrov. Thus far, four meetings have been organised, covering issues of importance for cooperation between Germany, Poland and Russia. Global challenges were also subject of discussion. In 2012, for example, the summit's discussions focused on the war in Syria, energy security and academic cooperation.

The engagement of Germany in talks with Russia was important for Poland. The format of a triangle was appreciated as it helped to soften deep-rooted fears of German-Russian negotiations over the heads of the Poles. Polish officials and experts also expected that the Kaliningrad Triangle could help build a more positive image of Poland within the EU as a reliable partner for shaping policy towards Russia.

After the deterioration of relations between Russia on one hand and Poland and Germany on the other, the future of the Kaliningrad Triangle is uncertain. The last summit took place in June 2014 in Saint Petersburg after the annexation of Crimea, but the meeting did not yield any results as Poland and Germany were unable to influence Russia and its policy towards Ukraine (*Trójkąt kaliningradzki...*, 2014). *There is no official information on whether the Triangle is going to be organised in 2015.*

## 6. Polish reactions to events in Ukraine in 2013 and 2014

Polish reactions to the crisis were a direct consequence of ongoing Polish support for a Ukrainian aspiration to join the European Union. From the beginning of the crisis, Polish authorities have argued that Ukraine must be assisted by the EU countries and that it is Russia that is responsible for the conflict.

Poland was actively engaged during the Euromaidan from the very beginning. Polish media commented on the situation in Ukraine on a regular basis, devoting most of their airtime to interviews with Polish experts and politicians or to broadcasting directly from Kyiv. Polish politicians demonstrated solidarity with Ukrainian citizens by participating in demonstrations on Kyiv's Independence Square. Representatives of the two largest political parties – the ruling Civic Platform (PO) and opposition Law

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<sup>85</sup> See: [ec.europa.eu/home.../1\\_EN\\_ACT\\_part1\\_v6.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/home.../1_EN_ACT_part1_v6.pdf).

and Justice (PiS) frequently visited Kyiv.<sup>86</sup> Although the Polish parliament demonstrated unusual unanimity in expressing solidarity with Ukraine, Polish politicians continued to criticise their opponents for insufficient engagement in resolving the conflict (PiS towards PO) or too much involvement (Polish People's Party towards PO and PiS; *Politycy podzieleni...*, 2014).

If the participation of most Polish politicians in demonstrations had nothing to do with real decision-making and was rather an opportunity to show solidarity with protesters and to promote themselves, Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski had an important task to address during the Maidan. Together with the foreign ministers of Germany and France, Sikorski facilitated negotiations between President Yanukovich and the Ukrainian opposition on 20 and 21 February 2014, and helped to circumvent deadlocks – seven previous meetings had finished with no agreement on the table (Potocki and Parafianowicz, 2014). The negotiations began on the third day of heavy clashes between protesters and the Ukrainian Berkut special police forces, which took the lives of more than 100 people. Neither Yanukovich nor the political opposition, represented by Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Vitali Klitschko and Oleh Tyahnybok, were ready for a compromise. There is a famous sentence by Sikorski addressed to the Ukrainian opposition that illustrates how strong the arguments used by mediators had to be to finally make a deal: "If you don't support this, you will have martial law, the army, and you will all be dead."

The participation of representatives from Poland, Germany and France helped reach a compromise, i.e. a six-point agreement, which included restoration of the 2004 constitution (with more parliamentary prerogatives), a new presidential election to be held no later than December 2014, a de-escalation of the conflict and an investigation of crimes committed on the Maidan with the participation of the political opposition and the Council of Europe (*Agreement on the Settlement of Crisis in Ukraine*, 2014). The agreement never came into force, however; on the night of 21 February, Viktor Yanukovich left Kyiv and on 22 February he was removed from the office of president by the Verkhovna Rada.

Sikorski's participation in the mediation process was commented on not only in Poland, but also in other European countries. According to the BBC, Poland played a key role in facilitating negotiations, and Radosław Sikorski's involvement was perceived as an opportunity to strengthen Poland's position in the European Union (*BBC docenia działania Sikorskiego...*, 2014). In Ukraine, one of the participants in the negotiations (from the opposition side) emphasised that "the fact that Yanukovich did not decide to entirely pacify the Maidan is a huge contribution by Radosław Sikorski. It is thanks to him that there was no more bloodshed in Kyiv" (Potocki and Parafianowicz, 2014). In March 2014, the Czech weekly *Respekt* named Sikorski a new leader in Europe. According to the authors of the article, "... Radosław Sikorski has pushed events forward, and it has to be admitted that the Pole is becoming a political star, which Central Europe has been lacking since the 1990s" (*Sikorski liderem Europy...*, 2014).

In Poland, Sikorski received both accolades and criticism in accordance with traditional divisions on the Polish political scene, with the ruling party (and its sympathisers, including many mainstream media commentators) praising Sikorski. Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk went so far as to underscore that Sikorski and Frank-Walter Steinmeier saved many lives. Representatives of the main opposition party Law and Justice (and its supporters) accused Sikorski of not helping but threatening the political opposition in order to force them to compromise with the Yanukovich camp while negotiating the peace agreement.

## 7. Sanctions against Russia and support for Ukrainian reforms

The annexation of Crimea and Russia's engagement in the war in Eastern Ukraine led the European Union and other countries opposed to Moscow's aggressive policy towards Ukraine to introduce sanctions as a retaliatory measure intended to prevent further escalation of the conflict. From the very

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<sup>86</sup> Among others, the following politicians were on the Maidan: Paweł Zalewski, Grzegorz Schetyna, Miron Sycz, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski and Jacek Protasiewicz from Civic Platform, and Jarosław Kaczyński, Ryszard Czarnecki and Joachim Brudziński from Law and Justice.

beginning, Polish authorities, represented by Polish MFA Radosław Sikorski, were in favour of targeting separatists fighting in Eastern Ukraine and Russia with sanctions. The first round of sanctions was implemented after the referendum in Crimea, which was used by Russian authorities to justify its annexation. As Radosław Sikorski stated in March 2014 before a European Union Council meeting, "instead of a de-escalation of the crisis, we are witnessing the *Anschluss* of Crimea. This cannot stand without an answer from the international community. The referendum was unconstitutional, illegal and the annexation of Crimea cannot be accepted. It means that the EU is going to do, what it has announced," i.e. to introduce sanctions (*Sikorski: "Anszlus" Krymu...*, 2014). During the subsequent meetings of the European Council, the Polish MFA argued in favour of strengthening the sanctions. Before the meeting in Brussels in July 2014, Sikorski had supported the introduction of new sanctions, pointing to the fact that Russia had not stopped delivering weaponry to the separatists. He also emphasised that shooting down the Malaysian airliner over the territory of Eastern Ukraine was a consequence of the fact that weapons had been delivered to the separatists across the Ukrainian-Russian border (*Sikorski chce zaostrezenia...*, 2014).

Grzegorz Schetyna, Poland's current MFA, also supports the policy of maintaining or even strengthening the sanctions if the situation in Donbas worsens. After the shelling of Mariupol in June 2015, when 30 people were killed by separatists and almost 100 were wounded (*Ostrzał Mariupola...*, 2015), Schetyna used harsh words to blame Russia and its support for separatists, and called for strengthening the sanctions (*Grzegorz Schetyna w "TVP INFO": UE...*, 2015): "There is no accepting what happened in Mariupol – the deaths of innocent citizens, the support for separatists that Russia provides. Our discussion in Brussels is going to bring about a strengthening of the sanctions."

In February 2015, an agreement on alleviating the conflict in Eastern Ukraine was reached in Minsk. From the very beginning, however, there was great concern that the agreement would not be implemented. The Polish MFA stressed on various occasions (for example, while meeting with the British MFA Phillip Hammond) that Poland would support maintaining or even strengthening sanctions against both the separatists and Russia if the Minsk agreement was not implemented (*Grzegorz Schetyna: możliwe kolejne...*, 2015).

The sanctions had also been supported by Polish President Bronisław Komorowski. Although using more conciliatory language, Komorowski declared the legitimacy of sanctions and expressed no wish to end them if the situation in Eastern Ukraine was not rectified. After the shelling of Mariupol, however, the president emphasised that Russia was to blame and stressed that in this situation there was no chance of easing the sanctions; to the contrary, the EU should consider strengthening them (*Komorowski: Unia powinna...*, 2015).

The Polish government's position on sanctions was criticised by the political opposition from two different angles. The main opposition party, Law and Justice, had been calling on the government to impose even tougher sanctions, such as excluding Russia from the SWIFT banking system (*PiS: plan działań wobec Rosji...*, 2015). At the same time, the left-wing parties in the Polish parliament had been calling for more pragmatic relations with Russia and for a return to the policy of dialogue with the Kremlin (*Polscy Orbanowie są na lewicy...*, 2015).

A strong policy of sanctions is broadly supported by Polish society. According to a recent public opinion poll conducted in February by the Institute of Public Affairs and the Bertelsmann Foundation, three out of four Poles want the sanctions to be maintained or strengthened: 41% of Poles agreed that sanctions should be strengthened and 35% wanted to keep them as they are (Kucharczyk et al., 2015).

Aside from providing political support to Ukraine, Poland also delivers humanitarian and development aid to this country, and tries to help with the implementation of democratic reforms. This support began long before the crisis, but during the conflict certain activities have been strengthened. There are several reasons for Poland's engagement. The first is a pragmatic one – democracy assistance and human rights promotion are part of Poland's efforts to build a coherent policy towards Eastern Europe and to ensure a stable neighbourhood. At the same time, Poland wants to project the image of a country that has undergone a successful transformation from an autocratic regime to a democracy, and whose experience can serve as a model for Ukraine's Europeanisation.

Polish assistance has both a bilateral and a multilateral character, and includes many different activities and levels. In 2014, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs financed medical treatment for injured Ukrainians (PLN 4 million for 140 people), holidays for Ukrainian children, as well psychological support. Furthermore, as part of its multilateral engagement, Poland is co-financing projects implemented by the UNCHR (PLN 850,000), UNICEF (PLN 300,000) and the International Red Cross (PLN 1.05 million; *Pomoc humanitarna...*, 2015). Poland also conducts joint operations with other EU member states. Together with Germany, Poland sent humanitarian aid for internal refugees in Ukraine, including food, medical supplies, basic household supplies, etc. (PLN 1.5 million; Juncker, 2015). Poland has also joined a convoy of a number of EU countries coordinated by DG Echo (*Polski transport...*, 2015). Altogether since the end of 2013, the Polish government has allocated more than PLN 13 million to humanitarian aid for victims of the Ukrainian conflict (*Polish Aid for Ukraine*, 2015). At the beginning of 2015, the Polish government also repatriated a group of Ukrainians of Polish descent from the Donbas region, who are to begin a new life in Poland (*Uchodźcy z Donbasu...*, 2015).

Polish assistance in the area of democratisation is focused on two issues: combating corruption and local governance. A special committee was created to support the decentralisation reform, led by MP and former President of Warsaw Marcin Świącicki, and a special office was established at the Ukrainian Ministry of Regional Development to coordinate visits by Polish experts and local authorities (*Polska Pomoc dla Ukrainy...*, 2015). Its main tasks include cooperation in preparing a local council reform on the basis of the Polish experience. Polish experts offer training sessions, study visits and consultations (*Minister Schetyna i Wicepremier Zubko...*, 2014).

Opinion polls indicate that Polish society supports economic assistance to Ukraine (56%), while the majority of Poles are against any military aid in the form of equipment, weapons, or military training (Kucharczyk et al., 2015).

## 8. Disappointments and surprises – Poland’s partners in its approach towards the crisis

Poland is perceived as a strong supporter of Ukraine – both in respect of its bid for EU accession and with regard to measures punishing the Russian regime for its activities on Ukrainian territory. This position is not always met with a warm welcome by the other EU member states. On some issues, such as sanctions against the Kremlin, Warsaw can count on Berlin; on others, however, such as the prospect of Ukraine’s membership in the EU and a NATO presence in the region, Warsaw seems isolated, sharing these positions only with the Baltic states.

Poland’s non-involvement in negotiations between Russia and Ukraine under the so-called Normandy format (involving senior representatives of Germany, Russia, Ukraine and France) has been the source of the biggest controversy in Polish foreign policy since the beginning of the conflict. After Radosław Sikorski’s successful mission with partners from the Weimar Triangle in Kyiv in winter 2014, many commentators expected Poland to continue to be directly involved in European efforts to negotiate a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The Polish government grudgingly accepted the Normandy format, asserting that Polish non-involvement was not a major problem, as the Poles were regularly consulted by the Germans. At the same time, some Polish officials, including Foreign Minister Schetyna, have called on Germany and France to open the format of the negotiations (*Schetyna: Polska powinna...*, 2015). Polish MPs, including some representatives of the ruling coalition, have been more outspoken. Opposition Law and Justice politicians directly assessed Poland’s absence as the biggest failure of the Civic Platform government’s Eastern policy. In their view, it was Berlin who should be blamed for not inviting Poland as a partner in the negotiations. Newly elected President Andrzej Duda, who had pledged to open up the Normandy format during the election campaign, issued a call for Poland’s inclusion in future negotiations on the eve of his first presidential visit to Germany, but this was immediately rejected by Ukrainian President Poroshenko and by the German government.

The Polish public have received conflicting explanations as to the reasons for this exclusion. According to some, it was the only format that both Russia and Ukraine would agree upon. Some experts blame the German government for accepting Russia's terms for the negotiations. Others claim that it was Kyiv that was not willing to have Polish partners on board due to concerns over possible negative reactions from Russia.

Right-wing commentators, who blame Germany for Poland's absence from the negotiations, are promoting the view that the German position towards Russia and its intervention in Ukraine is diametrically opposed to the Polish position, as Germany will always pursue a "Russia first" policy. This claim is far from the truth. Like its Polish counterpart, the German government has supported sanctions and maintained a hard line towards the Russian regime. The fact that Germany is having a robust debate about Russia (and other policy issues) is selectively used by certain media and commentators to create the mistaken impression that the Germans wish to talk to Russia in order to return to "normal" relations as soon as possible, even if this means abandoning Ukraine. This, in turn, creates the impression that Poland and Germany are far apart with respect to the crisis. This misperception has trickled down to the general public, which seem convinced that policy towards Russia is the main challenge for Polish-German relations.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps this view will change somewhat in light of the fact that during his first visit to Berlin newly elected President Duda thanked Angela Merkel for her tough policy on Russia.

Polish foreign policy experts mention a number of arguments for why Poland should be included in the peace talks. Firstly, it is the only country that borders both Ukraine and Russia (the Kaliningrad region). Furthermore, Poland is a large EU member state whose opinion has always played a role in shaping the EU Eastern policy. Last but not least, for historical reasons Poland has extensive expertise concerning Eastern countries, with many experts who know the region very well. In fact, German diplomats and politicians have praised the fact that many Polish NGOs regularly cooperate with partners in the region, and there are a number of Polish politicians whom Ukrainian leaders trust.

There have been other commentators, however, who ascribe to the view that being excluded from the peace talks and not being responsible for the Minsk II agreement is in fact advantageous for Poland. This has not changed the general view, however, that the format should at least have been enlarged to include such figures as the European Council president. Only then, this view holds, would it really have the right to represent the whole EU.

There is a strong perception in Poland that other V4 partners are at odds when it comes to framing a common position vis-à-vis the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. While Hungary is perceived in Poland as the country with the most pro-Russia policy within both NATO and the EU, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have been viewed with some suspicion since the establishment of the Slavkov Triangle, a Czech-Slovak-Austrian regional grouping, in January 2015. Since neither its format nor its objectives have yet been clearly defined by the signatory states, Polish experts and commentators view the Slavkov Triangle as troublesome for the Visegrad Group. The main reason is its pro-Russian approach and declared range of activities including the idea of consultations before the European Council, which could duplicate some of the V4 activities (Kalan, 2015). On other issues as well, Polish diplomats and experts have serious doubts about the coherence of the V4. There has been no cooperation on security issues within the Visegrad Group and no V4 common positions on NATO. From the Polish perspective, both the NATO summit in Wales and the EU discussion on the third wave of sanctions against Russia revealed serious divergences within the V4 (Gniazdowski et al., 2014). Polish MFA officials admit that it is very difficult to prepare any relevant concrete common projects, so V4 cooperation is now even less visible in the Polish political debate than it has been in the past.<sup>88</sup> These alleged splits between Poland and other V4 members formed part of the criticism of the PO government and of then President

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<sup>87</sup> Source: A. Łada, *Barometr Polska-Niemcy* 2015.

<sup>88</sup> One should take into consideration, however, that Visegrad cooperation and interest in the other three countries have not been especially strong in Poland in recent years.

Komorowski by PiS and Andrzej Duda in his election campaign. They blamed the government for not exercising strong leadership within the V4, and pledged that strengthening regional cooperation would be one of the newly elected president's priorities. They have not, however, provided any detailed examples of areas in which such cooperation might be developed or how to go about initiating it. At the same time, one can speculate that they will likely push other V4 members to adopt the Polish position on the conflict in the East.

## 9. Enhancing Poland's defence and security policy

The conflict has also influenced Poland's defence and security policy. In response to Russia's belligerence, Poland has increased military spending from 1.95% to 2% of GDP. Poland also hopes to have NATO troops stationed permanently on its territory and has made efforts to bring this to fruition, which has received rather negative feedback from many NATO partners. Warsaw has great expectations for the upcoming NATO summit that it will host next summer. The issue of defence resonates in public opinion, which shares the view that Russia's actions in Ukraine pose a military threat to Poland. In the presidential campaign, then incumbent President Komorowski, who was constitutionally the head of the Polish armed forces, chose to run for a second term under the slogan "choose unity and security", while his opponent, Andrzej Duda, put forward the "Newport Plus" plan envisaging the establishment of permanent NATO military bases in Poland.

Just how important defence issues have become in Poland is demonstrated by the fact that in May 2015 the usually divided Polish parliament – the Sejm – voted almost unanimously in favour of raising defence spending<sup>89</sup> (402 MPs voted for the expenditure hike from 2016 onwards, while only two voted against and two abstained).<sup>90</sup> The military budget will increase by 18%, thereby meeting the NATO spending target of two per cent of GDP on defence.<sup>91</sup> Poland will thus achieve the largest increase in military spending of any country in Europe and join the handful of NATO member states, currently consisting of the United States, Britain, Estonia and Greece, which are maintaining the 2% target (Britain is likely to drop out of this group next year, however). The new Polish funds will mainly be spent on purchasing new military equipment (*Media Backgrounder: Military Spending In Europe...*, 2015).

Alongside military spending, Poland perceives its security to be guaranteed by NATO membership. In 2014, on the fifteenth anniversary of Poland's accession to NATO, 62% of Poles supported membership and 51% claimed it increased Poland's security (*15 Lat Członkostwa Polski W Nato*, 2014). The Russian intervention in Ukraine has increased support for NATO. According to a Pew Research Center study from spring 2015, 74% of Poles hold a favourable opinion of NATO – the highest percentage among all societies polled. According to this source, Polish support for the alliance has risen by 10 percentage points since 2013. To compare, six or more in ten French (64%), Italians (64%) and Britons (60%) also hold a favourable view of NATO (Simmons et al., 2015).

Still, although Poland joined the pact sixteen years ago, the alliance has no combat troops permanently based on its soil. This situation is the result of an agreement signed with Russia in 1997 forbidding the stationing of combat units in any country east of Germany – unless the "security environment" changes. In the current situation, however, Poland believes that Russia's behaviour has indeed changed

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<sup>89</sup> The Polish Ministry of Defence budget for 2015 amounts to PLN 38 billion.

<sup>90</sup> See more at: <http://www.thenews.pl/1/9/Artykul/208317,Parliament-votes-to-raise-defence-spending-to-2-of-GDP#sthash.D4o0W1U5.dpuf>.

<sup>91</sup> For comparison, defence spending in previous years amounted to: 1.95% of GDP (2014), 1.95% of GDP (2013), 1.91% of GDP (2012), 1.83% of GDP (2011) and 1.91% of GDP (2010). See more on: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pl.html>.



the security environment.<sup>92</sup> This position, which is shared by the Baltic states, is not supported by other NATO members. Responding to Poland's and the Baltic states' security concerns, the NATO summit in Newport agreed on the construction of airbases and fuel and ammunition depots, which could be used by a rapid reaction force of around 4,000 troops at a moment's notice.

Great expectations are connected with the NATO summit to be held on 8–9 July 2016 in Warsaw. Its main topics will be charting the course for the Alliance's adaptation to the new security environment, so that NATO remains ready to defend all allies against any threat from any direction, and building on work with partner nations and organisations to keep its neighbourhood stable (*NATO Secretary General...*, 2015). According to unofficial information from the National Security Bureau, Poland's objectives listed for this summit in Warsaw include "seeking NATO's permanent regional presence" and "military bases with heavy equipment" (Szary, 2015).

At the same time, the Polish public has enthusiastically welcomed NATO soldiers training on its territory. Over 2,000 troops from nine countries belonging to the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force took part in the Noble Jump manoeuvres in south-western Poland in June 2015. Multinational drills were also held at Poland's north-western range in Drawsko Pomorskie. These were NATO's largest manoeuvres since the end of the Cold War. Also, the NATO tank drive through Poland – Operation Dragon Ride – was warmly welcomed, with many people standing along the army's route and waving (*Wiwatowali i witali...*, 2015). These reactions are well in line with the above-quoted opinion poll figures.

## 10. Conclusions

The outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has strengthened rather than changed the main tenets of Polish foreign policy as they were formulated after Poland regained its independence in 1989. These included membership in NATO and the EU as the two pillars of Poland's security. At the same time, Poland has continued to support Ukraine's independence and pro-Western orientation as key elements of its security, and views Russian imperialistic revisionism as a key threat. In response to the crisis, Poland has adopted a multilateralist approach, working with Germany and other EU member states to build broad coalitions in support of Ukrainian reforms, sanctions against the Kremlin, and strengthening NATO's commitment to the territorial defence of its members.

At the same time, the conflict has had serious implications for Polish foreign policy debates and the foreign policy itself. It has ended the already flagging "reset" in Polish-Russian relations, has seriously weakened V4 cooperation, and has renewed the debate about the convergence of Polish and German interests and policy on Russia and the post-Soviet political space. Lastly, it has led to a renewed sense of the importance of the transatlantic alliance. All of these issues were raised during the presidential and parliamentary campaigns, and it remains to be seen what adjustments to Polish foreign policy will be made in consequence of the new political arrangement following these elections.

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<sup>92</sup> This position is shared by experts. See more at: <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/swiat/apel-ws-dalszej-ekspansji-nato-dr-straus-strategia-musi-byc-inna-niz-w-przypadku/zz728n>.

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# Consequences of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict for the Polish economy and energy sector

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## 1. Introduction

Russian exports to Poland largely consist of natural energy resources like gas and crude oil. In the last few years, mineral products have constituted approximately 75% of total imports coming from the Russian Federation (*Handel zagraniczny Polski w 2013 r.*, 2013). Therefore, the prices of fuels have a crucial influence on where Russia is ranked among Poland's largest trading partners. In the 21st century, the value of Russia's exports to Poland has grown extensively, mainly due to a rapid increase in oil and gas prices. For example, between 2003 and 2006, crude oil prices rose from USD 27.2 per barrel to USD 61.2. In the same period, natural gas prices increased from USD 105.1 / 1,000 m<sup>3</sup> to USD 221.3 / 1,000 m<sup>3</sup>. Between 2000 and 2006, total Russian exports to Poland increased by EUR 4.6 billion, which was almost twice as much as in the year 2000. As a consequence, Russia exported EUR 9.7 billion worth of goods to Poland in 2007, and the following years saw a growth trend (*Współpraca gospodarcza polski z krajami wnp...*, 2007). According to statistical data, Russia is Poland's second-largest exporter today, with estimated total exports of EUR 19.1 billion (*Handel zagraniczny Polski w 2013 r.*, 2013).

Polish exports to Russia are much more diversified and do not depend so much on the rise of global prices surrounding a single product or category of products. Nevertheless, historical experience shows that currency exchange rates can significantly affect Polish exports to Russia. For example, between 1993 and 1997, Polish exports to the Russian Federation increased very quickly, growing by 83% per year on average and at one point reaching USD 2.8 billion. When the 1998–2000 Russian financial crisis hit the economy, however, the rouble lost 80% of its value. Polish imports stopped being profitable for Russian companies and dropped to USD 700 million in 1999. It took Polish exporters six years to return to pre-crisis levels in 2004. Another obstacle influencing trade between the two countries are Russian import bans. In 2005 Russia introduced a ban on Polish meat and vegetable products. It is estimated that Polish farmers lost around EUR 300 million because of this embargo.

Nowadays, Polish exports to Russia consist of agricultural products but also electrical, chemical and metallurgical products, as well as products from the wood and paper industry (*Współpraca gospodarcza polski z krajami wnp...*, 2007).

We can observe a huge difference between Polish-Russian and Ukrainian-Russian trade volumes. Already in 1992, Polish trade with the Russian Federation constituted only 7% of the total, while over 60% was with the EU. In contrast, only 14% of Ukraine's exports went to the EU while over 40% went to Russia in 1994 (the first year for which reliable data are available). By 2012, Poland had increased the share of its exports going to EU member states to three-quarters, while Ukraine exported just 25% to the European Union in the same year (Tilford, 2014).

## 2. Polish-Russian economic relations in the time of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

According to the Polish Information and Foreign Investment Agency (PAIiIZ), 12.1% of Polish imports in 2013 came from Russia, making this country Poland's second-largest trading partner after

Germany (21.7%). The Russian Federation was also an important trading partner with respect to Polish exports. In 2013, 5.3% of Polish exports went to this neighbouring country and Russia became Poland's fifth-largest export partner. Only to Germany (25.1%), Great Britain (6.5%), the Czech Republic (6.2%) and France (5.6%) did Poland export more. In 2014, Poland exported EUR 7 billion worth of goods to the Russian Federation. During the same period, Russia exported EUR 17 billion worth of goods to Poland, leaving the latter with a EUR 10 billion trade deficit (*Informacja o handlu zagranicznym...*, 2015).

It has to be emphasised that Polish-Russian trade relations have changed visibly in 2014 and 2015. Polish exports to the Russian Federation in the first quarter of 2015 fell by approximately 32% year-on-year (*Handel zagraniczny Polski po I kwartale 2015 r.*, 2015). This drop in exports took place during a period when Poland's GDP had been growing at 3.4% and its exports worldwide had risen from PLN 647.9 billion to PLN 682.4 billion (*Informacja o handlu zagranicznym...*, 2015). The main factors that have influenced this decline in Polish-Russian relations include the decrease in gas and oil prices, the sanctions imposed on Russia and the countersanctions imposed by Russia on the EU and other Western countries.

### 3. The role of sanctions

After the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian Federation in spring 2014, the EU decided to impose sanctions on Russia, which can be categorised as follows: diplomatic measures, restrictive measures (asset freezes and visa bans), restrictions for Crimea, measures targeting sectorial cooperation and exchanges with Russia ("economic" sanctions), and measures concerning economic cooperation. The aim of the sanctions has been to de-escalate the Russian-Ukrainian crisis.

During an extraordinary meeting on 3 March 2014, the Council of the European Union condemned the violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the form of acts of aggression by the Russian armed forces as well as the authorisation given by the Federation Council of Russia on 1 March to use its armed forces on the territory of Ukraine (*EU sanctions against Russia...*, 2015). While some sanctions, such as the diplomatic ones, were not so controversial, other measures more closely related to existing economic relations between EU member states and Russia have been disputed by certain countries such as Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania Slovenia, as well as Visegrad Group countries. The EU sanctions in force are therefore a compromise between the member states' interest in sanctioning Russia and the negative consequences for their economies.

The EU has prohibited all imports originating from Crimea and Sevastopol unless accompanied by a certificate of origin issued by Ukrainian authorities. Also, investments by EU-based companies on the Crimean Peninsula have become illegal. This includes purchases of real estate or entities in Crimea, financing Crimean companies, or supplying related services. In addition, tourism services by EU operators on the peninsula were prohibited as of 20 March 2014, and the export of certain goods and technologies are no longer allowed (*Ibid.*). The EU has basically suspended almost all existing trade relations with Crimea and Sevastopol.

Concerning economic sanctions against Russia, EU nationals and companies are no longer allowed to trade new bonds, equities or similar long-term financial instruments with five major state-owned Russian banks, three major Russian energy companies and three major defence companies. There is also an embargo on the trade of arms and related material to and from Russia. In addition, exports of energy-related goods and services destined for deep-water oil, arctic, or shale oil exploration and production are banned.

On 16 July 2014, the European Council requested that the European Investment Bank halt future projects in Russia, and that the financing of projects through the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development be suspended. The European Commission was invited to audit EU-Russian cooperation programmes to assess which should be suspended on a case-by-case basis. However, it was decided

that projects dealing exclusively with cross-border cooperation and civil society should be maintained (Ibid.). A Polish example of such cross-border cooperation would be the Local Border Traffic programme between Kaliningrad Oblast and parts of two Polish voivodships, namely the Warmian-Masurian Voivodship and the Pomeranian Voivodship, which allows inhabitants from this region to cross the border without needing to obtain a visa (Wenerski, 2014).

The Polish government supported the introduction of economic sanctions despite relatively strong trade and energy ties with the Russian Federation. Poland wants the sanctions to be continued until the provisions of the second Minsk protocol are implemented by the Russians. This includes the withdrawal of the Russian Army from Eastern Ukraine. Polish Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz said during a meeting with her Canadian counterpart, Stephen Harper, that the sanctions must be expanded if Putin continues his aggressive policies towards Ukraine (*Ewa Kopacz i Stephen Harper...*, 2015).

At the same time, Polish politicians have tried to convey their point of view regarding sanctions and the current Russian-Ukrainian crisis to other countries that are conflicted over whether sanctions on Russia should remain in place. A meeting in Warsaw with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in February 2015 serves as an example. It is known that Ewa Kopacz tried to persuade Orbán to adopt a more united European policy towards Moscow. At a joint press conference, the Polish-Hungarian friendship was emphasised as well as the need for deeper cooperation within the Visegrad Group. Kopacz also underscored the importance of condemning Russian aggression (*Viktor Orbán w Warszawie...*, 2015). Polish Foreign Minister Grzegorz Schetyna said during a radio interview on 18 February 2015 that Budapest wanted to renegotiate its gas contracts with Russia and that the principle of solidarity should be applied to energy security issues within the EU should be found (Energy Union). According to Schetyna, Orbán's decision to meet with the Russian president was a sovereign Hungarian decision, which has to be respected. Nevertheless, Hungary did not violate EU sanctions. In general, one can say that Warsaw was looking for a more inclusive policy, finding common ground and re-assessing decisions taken with its partners (*Schetyna o wizycie Orbana i sankcjach*, 2015).

As a consequence of the failure to implement the Minsk agreements, EU foreign ministers unanimously decided in Luxemburg on 22 June 2015 to extend the sanctions against Russia. Under their decision, the sanctions will be in force until 31 January 2016. Otherwise, the sanctions would have expired at the end of July 2015. EU member states justified the extension of the sanctions with the violation of the ceasefire agreement, mentioning the fighting in the Ukrainian town of Maryinka close to Donetsk. Polish Foreign Minister Grzegorz Schetyna said that "sanctions are the only language which Russia understands regarding the conflict", and underscored that "Russia's readiness to implement the understanding of the Minsk protocol has to be constantly observed and further steps must depend on this will".

The Polish government's current policy towards the sanctions imposed on Russia enjoys strong support in Polish society. According to a February 2015 opinion poll conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs and the Bertelsmann Foundation, more than 40% of Poles agree that the sanctions imposed on Russia should be strengthened and over one-third (35%) claim that the sanctions should be kept at the current level. Only 6% of Poles want the sanctions to be eased (Kucharczyk et al., 2015). In their assessment of sanctions, Poles' opinions appear to be very similar to those of Ukrainians: according to a July 2015 opinion poll conducted by IPA and the Bertelsmann Foundation, half of Ukrainians think that the sanctions need to be strengthened and 15% want to keep them at the current level (Kucharczyk et al., 2015).

## 4. The role of "countersanctions"

Another factor that has had an important influence on Polish-Russian trade relations are the countersanctions imposed by Russia on the EU and other Western countries in August 2014. It must be emphasised, however, that the Russian embargo that has been in place since 2014 is not the first that Poland

has had to face since its accession to the European Union in 2004; in October 2005, Russia imposed an embargo on Polish meat. The stated reason for imposing this embargo was the alleged falsification of transit documents, although Polish investigators later concluded that the meat in question had not even come from Poland. After talks at the ministerial level failed to lift the embargo, Poland began to block EU-Russia negotiations of a new agreement on partnership and cooperation. Poland did not respond with any economic sanctions, but tried to use its political influence to block Russia in various international bodies such as the EU and WTO.

Bilateral relations (including trade relations) started to change when a new political party, Civic Platform, came to power in November 2007. The new Polish government tried to restore good Polish-Russian relations. Prime Minister Donald Tusk stated that Poland was not opposed to Russia's accession to the OECD, which ultimately led to the lifting of the embargo in December 2007. There were other misunderstandings, however. In 2011, Russia imposed an embargo on Polish vegetables due to findings of disease elsewhere in the EU. Warsaw had to confirm to Russia that Poland only certifies its own agricultural products, and does not issue certificates for re-exported products. This embargo only lasted for about a month (*Rosja w końcu znosi embargo...*, 2011).

On 1 August 2014, in response to Western sanctions against Russia, Russian authorities imposed embargos on agricultural products from Western countries (including the EU and therefore Poland). Initially, certain fruits (for example apples, pears, cherries and plums) as well as vegetables from the brassica family (cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, etc.) were embargoed (*Pierwszy kwartał...*, 2014). According to data published by the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Poland became the world's top apple exporter in 2014 after surpassing China. In the 2012–2013 season, Poland exported 1.2 million tonnes of apples worth EUR 438 million. Russia was the largest destination, importing 0.67 million tonnes worth EUR 256 million and representing 56% of Poland's overall apple exports (*Minister Sikorski promotes Polish apples*, 2014). Polish farmers exported significant volumes of agricultural products to Russia; in addition to apples, Russia was also the first destination for Polish fruit exports in general, accounting for 70% of total Polish exports for this food category in 2013.

The Polish Ministry of Economy reacted very quickly to the embargo and on 6 August 2014 launched a campaign to promote Polish agricultural products on alternative foreign markets. Significant resources were dedicated to promoting apples and other agricultural products in India, Indonesia and the Balkan countries during the first six months of the sanctions.

On 7 August 2014, Russia added meat, fish, cheese and milk to its countersanctions, and expanded the embargo to all vegetables and fruits (excluding alcoholic products). On 11 August 2014, Russia introduced the last extension of the embargo, including all dairy products (*Pierwszy kwartał...*, 2014). This also had a visible impact on Poland's cheese exports, of which the Russian market had accounted for 10%.

One week later, the European Commission announced an exceptional support measure for EU producers of perishable fruit and vegetables. Overall, the EU spent EUR 125 million to withdraw the oversupply of certain perishable fruits and vegetables, namely tomatoes, carrots, white cabbage, peppers, cauliflowers, cucumbers, gherkins, mushrooms, apples, pears, red fruits, table grapes and kiwis (*The European Commission announces...*, 2014).

On 6 October 2014, the Plant Health Inspectorate of the Russian Federation introduced a ban on the re-exportation of products having a vegetable origin. This new ban ended the Polish business re-exporting exotic fruits like oranges, mandarins and dates to Russia (*Pierwszy kwartał...*, 2014). The Russian embargo has had a negative influence on Polish exports, but for the time being a partial solution has been found. First of all, Polish agricultural products have been promoted intensively for domestic consumption. An example is the "Jem bo polskie" ["I eat it because it's Polish"] promotion campaign launched on 1 October 2014 by the Polish Trade and Distribution Organisation (POHiD), which ran through the end of the year. The major supermarket chains in Poland such as Auchan Polska, Carrefour Polska, Galec (Leclerc), Jeronimo Martins Polska, Lidl Polska, Kaufland Polska Markety, Metro Group/Makro Cash&Carry, Schiever Polska, Selgros Polska, Tesco Polska and Żabka Polska

took part in this promotion, the major goal of which was to promote Polish vegetables and fruits, especially apples. The campaign had a budget of PLN 20 million and aimed to increase exports of Polish products within the internationally operating companies taking part in the campaign (*Jem bo polskie*, 2014). Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski promoted Polish apples abroad as well; during an informal meeting of EU foreign ministers in late August 2014 in Milan, for example, Sikorski handed out apples to other ministers and high-level EU representatives, as well as to journalists (*Minister Sikorski promotes Polish apples*, 2014), stating that “these are Polish apples; Mr Putin says they’re poisonous”, which was also reported in the international press (*EU ministers call for new sanctions...*, 2014).

Poles also started to support domestic farmers on their own. Polish journalist and editor-in-chief of the daily *Puls Biznesu* Grzegorz Nawacki started the “Jedz jabłko na złość Putina” [“Eat an apple in spite of Putin”] campaign on the day the Russian embargo came into force, and encouraged Poles to publish photos of themselves online eating apples (*En Pologne, boire du cidre...*, 2014). According to an Interactive Institute for Market Research (IIBR) survey, almost one in three Poles (32% of respondents) bought an apple because of this during the first month of the campaign (*Wymierny sukces jabłek...*, 2014). Probably a longer-lasting effect of the campaign was the popularisation of Polish cider, which had not been consumed very often in Poland before the embargo. According to the Listonic application, which allows people to make lists of what they plan to buy online, intentions to buy apples rose by 11% during the first month of the campaign, while intentions to buy cider increased by 136% in the same period (*En Pologne, boire du cidre...*, 2014). At the beginning of November 2014, domestic consumption of cider for the year was already 8.5 million litres, compared to 2 million litres for all of 2013 – an impressive increase.

It is worth mentioning that the most “spectacular” manner of enforcing the sanctions introduced by Russia was the policy of destroying agricultural products coming from the European Union. This practice was initiated and widely publicised in the Russian media in August 2015, but lasted only a few days. Russian society strongly opposed destroying food, and believed that strained relations with the West could not justify such reckless behaviour. The propaganda action of destroying agricultural products coming from the West turned out to be a total failure and was discontinued the same month (August).

## 5. Polish-Ukrainian economic relations before and after the crisis

Despite the direct proximity of Poland and Ukraine, and their common border of more than 500 km, Polish-Ukrainian economic relations cannot be viewed as crucial from the Polish perspective. In 2013, Ukraine was Poland’s 8th-largest export destination and its 21st-largest importer. A serious obstacle to developing stable economic relations in the last few years has been the fact that strong fluctuations are discernible in both imports to and exports from Ukraine. In 2009, as a result of the economic crisis and Russian-Ukrainian gas impasse, economic turnover between Poland and Ukraine plunged almost 50% from nearly USD 8.8 billion in 2008 to USD 4.6 billion. The 2010–2013 period saw Polish exports to Ukraine recover, while imports from Ukraine increased in 2010 and 2011 but started to decrease again in 2012 and 2013 (*Wymiana handlowa Polski z Ukrainą*, 2014).

The current economic situation in Ukraine has had a serious impact on Polish-Ukrainian economic relations. Since the beginning of the crisis, Polish exports have decreased sharply. In January–September 2014, exports fell by 25% compared to 2013, whereas imports from Ukraine – thanks to the devaluation of the Ukrainian hryvnia – increased by almost 12%, although economic data from 2015 clearly show that this increase in imports was only a short-term trend. The fact is that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in Donbas is damaging Ukraine’s economic potential and as a consequence also Polish-Ukrainian economic relations. In January–June 2015, Polish exports to Ukraine (calculated in



EUR) dropped by 11% and imports from this country fell by 26% compared to the same period in 2014 (*Obroty handlu zagranicznego ogółem i według krajów I - VI 2015 r.*, 2015).

The situation of Polish Foreign Direct Investments in Ukraine fared better than trade relations. Over the first nine months of 2014, Polish FDI decreased by only 0.5%, while the overall level of FDI in Ukraine decreased by almost 18% (*Kto i gdzie inwestuje*, 2015). This proves that despite unfavourable circumstances Polish investors are ready to stay in Ukraine longer than international investors generally.

## 6. Relations in the sphere of energy

According to statistics published by Eurostat in 2013, Poland is 25.8% dependent on foreign energy. This means that Poland is much less dependent on energy imports than the EU-28 average, which according to Eurostat was 53.2% in 2013.

Poland is also less dependent on foreign energy supplies than other countries of the Visegrad Group. As Eurostat statistics from 2013, show, the Czech Republic's foreign energy dependence is 27.9%, Hungary's is 52.3% and Slovakia's is 59.6%.

Less comfortable is Poland's situation as regards gas imports. The EU-28 imported 65.3% of its gas needs in 2013, whereas Poland had to import almost three-fourths (74.2%) of its gas needs from abroad. Nevertheless, this is less than the Czech Republic, which imports all of its gas from abroad, and Slovakia which has a very small domestic supply (95.6% imports), but slightly more than Hungary's 72.1%.<sup>93</sup>

The real problem in the case of Poland is its dependence on a single supplier. 80% of gas imports to Poland in 2012 came from the Russian Federation (including a portion from Central Asia but which travelled across Russian territory). Poland's gas demand increased between 2000 and 2012 by an average of 2.6% per year. In 2012, the share of natural gas as a portion of the country's total primary energy supply was 14%.

Poland is also dependent on Russian oil imports. Domestic production in 2012 was only able to cover 3.8% of Poland's needs, while Russia is responsible for approximately 96% of total Polish oil imports.

Moscow suspends gas supplies to its neighbours quite regularly. The latest case dates from 2014, when Russia halted the gas supply to Ukraine. In addition to the military conflict, Russia and Ukraine are also in a gas conflict. Experience from earlier gas supply interruptions to Ukraine (in 2006 and 2009) shows that Poland receives less gas when Moscow cuts off Ukraine from its gas supply. During the interruption in January 2006, the supply to Poland fell by 14%, although this is less than was the case for Hungary (40%), Austria, Slovakia and Romania (around one-third) or France (between 25% and 30%; *Polityka energetyczna i bezpieczeństwa...*, 2011). According to Polish gas transmission operator Gaz-System, during the second Ukrainian-Russian gas crisis in January 2009, supplies to Poland fell by 11% (Dopke, 2009).

Gas stress tests conducted by the European Union in autumn 2014 showed that Poland, like other East European member states, is vulnerable to longer interruptions in gas supplies from the Russian Federation. Poland has not yet been able to eliminate this vulnerability because Warsaw's investments in improving energy security undertaken since the last gas crisis in 2009 are not yet sufficient (*Gazu! - idzie zima!...*, 2014).

When energy relations with Ukraine are considered, it must be emphasised that, as a transit country for gas resources imported from Russia, Ukraine is a key energy partner for Poland. This means that every conflict between Ukraine and Russia over gas is a potential threat to the security of Poland's

<sup>93</sup> Energy dependence data are available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/graph.do?tab=graph&plugin=1&ocode=tsd cc310&language=en&toolbox=data> (accessed 29 April 2015).

supply of this energy resource. The 2009 energy crisis caused a 33% reduction in the supply of gas flowing from Russia to Poland across the territory of Ukraine.

Over the years, Poland and Ukraine have been trying – but without spectacular success – to develop mutual cooperation in the energy sphere to ensure that the flow of energy will be less dependent on Russian natural energy resources. One of the most prominent examples is the idea of constructing a pipeline on the Odessa–Brody–Płock–Gdańsk route to transport oil from the Black Sea across Ukrainian territory to Poland. Unfortunately, only the Ukrainian part of the pipeline has been completed, and was never extended to Poland due to a lack of political support in both countries as well as opposition from Russian authorities.

The Russian-Ukrainian energy crises in 2006 and 2009, as well as the current conflict over Crimea and war in Donbas, have provided a strong incentive for Poland and the European Union to change their attitude towards Ukraine with respect to energy. This new attitude considers the necessity of developing interconnections and reverse flows with Ukraine that would allow energy resources to be sent from the EU to Ukraine, as well as the need to invest in modernising Ukraine's energy system and transit routes. Poland would also like to see Ukraine's inclusion in the Energy Union, an initiative launched in response to the Russian-Ukrainian crisis.

## 7. Energy Union – a Polish and EU response to the Ukrainian-Russian conflict?

Russia's aggression in Ukraine and annexation of the Crimean Peninsula reminded Europeans (especially those in Central Europe) that among other issues (diplomatic relations, sanctions and military security) they need to reconsider their energy dependence on the Russian Federation and make energy security policies a priority. Donald Tusk, who at the time was still the Poland's prime minister, launched the idea of creating an Energy Union with an article in the British daily *The Financial Times* on 21 April 2014 (*Comment l'Europe peut...*, 2014). Tusk's proposal included a mechanism within which EU member states would negotiate gas prices with Russia collectively, and a newly created energy agency (or other European body or company) would be responsible for these common gas purchases. In addition, the Energy Union was intended to increase solidarity among member states with respect to the energy sector and to enhance Europe's energy security. Tusk proposed support for energy infrastructure projects and for increasing the storage capability of energy sources. The Polish proposal also envisaged the total use of domestic non-renewable energy sources like coal and shale gas, and a strengthening of the existing Energy Community (Tusk, 2014). Only one day after presenting the idea, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs revealed its *Roadmap towards an Energy Union for Europe: Non-paper addressing the EU's energy dependency challenges (Roadmap towards an Energy Union for Europe...*, 2014), where the concept of the Energy Union is explained in more detail.

Poland was able to garner international support for its Energy Union proposal. During his June 2014 visit to Warsaw commemorating the 25th anniversary of the historic elections in Poland, Barack Obama said that he was in favour of creating an Energy Union and ready to supply American LNG to Europe (*Obama tente de rassurer...*, 2014), and French President François Hollande called the Energy Union a Polish-French project (*Unia energetyczna zyskuje zwolenników...*, 2014). On the other hand, German Minister of Foreign Affairs Frank-Walter Steinmeier opposed common gas purchases during an energy summit on 28 May 2014 (*Steinmeier ruft Europa zu Geschlossenheit auf*, 2014). This position was confirmed at the beginning of 2015, when the German government excluded common gas purchases at the EU level, but the Germans also stated that they support the further development of LNG terminals in Europe and deeper integration of the internal European energy market (*Energieunion: Bundesregierung lehnt...*, 2015).

The idea of an Energy Union has been taken up by the European Commission. The new president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, has ranked the Energy Union second among his top

five priorities. Juncker wants to reform European energy policy, and at the core of his new proposal is the creation of a European Energy Union. Juncker believes that Europe needs to pool its resources, combine its infrastructure and unite its negotiating power vis-à-vis third countries. The energy sources have to be diversified and the foreign energy dependence of several EU member states has to be reduced.

As the initiator of the Energy Union proposal, Poland is naturally supportive of the fact that energy policy is a top EU priority, but the question is how the Energy Union will be implemented in detail. After Donald Tusk left the Polish government to become president of the European Council, his successor, Ewa Kopacz, said at the beginning of February 2015 that she wanted the European Commission to come up with an ambitious plan for the EU Energy Union. PM Kopacz underscored the importance of common goals and EU solidarity when it comes to energy supply issues, and emphasised the significance of transparency in the European energy market (*Poland expects EU...*, 2015).

In February 2015, the European Commission published a communication entitled *A Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy*. This document is viewed in Poland as a joint response by EU member states to the *Roadmap towards an Energy Union for Europe: Non-paper addressing the EU's energy dependency challenges* – the proposal prepared by the Polish government in April 2014. The February 2015 European Commission communication met with a cooler response in Poland, however.<sup>94</sup>

The majority of representatives of government, business and journalistic circles regard the European Commission document as passable from the Polish point of view. The greatest dissatisfaction articulated by Poles concerns two issues that could be especially important in shaping more balanced energy relations between Poland and Russia: the EU's readiness to create a common gas purchasing mechanism for the entire EU, and launching mechanisms for greater engagement by the European Commission in negotiating and overseeing contracts to be signed with partners from third countries. In both cases, many EU countries are reluctant, as they do not feel a need to speak with one voice on the issue of energy. Certain representatives of the Polish government claim that joint gas purchases are opposed by Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Great Britain, and some believe that this is due to a reluctance to transfer energy security competencies from the national level to the EU level, while others believe that these states do not wish to relinquish the favourable financial terms they have managed to negotiate for themselves and which would be more difficult to secure if aggregated purchases were made for the European Union as a whole or even just for a region (Łada et al., 2015). Another argument is that some member states are simply not taking into consideration the complex situation faced by those countries which acceded to the European Union in or after 2004, most of which are dependent on a single external energy source. This is because the older EU member states are in a completely different position, with more diversified sources of energy.

## 8. New ways of providing energy security

To provide energy security, Poland is striving to implement various energy projects, especially by building LNG terminals and developing regional cooperation. An LNG terminal is being constructed in Świnoujście, on the Baltic Sea close to the German border. Construction costs are estimated at PLN 3 billion. The main goal of building an LNG terminal is to diversify Poland's gas import routes and as a consequence to strengthen Poland's negotiating position vis-à-vis its main gas supplier, Russia. According to

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<sup>94</sup> For more on this topic, see: T. Bielecki *Do unii energetycznej – z oporami* [Towards energy union – but with some opposition], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 February 2015. Available at [http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,17485080,Do\\_unii\\_energetycznej\\_\\_\\_z\\_oporami.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,17485080,Do_unii_energetycznej___z_oporami.html) (accessed 29 May 2015); K. Szymański, *Unia klimatyczna zamiast energetycznej*, [Climate Union instead of Energy Union] *Rzeczpospolita*, 22 March 2015, available at <http://www.rp.pl/artukul/1188061.html> (accessed 29 May 2015).

representatives of the Polish energy sector, the LNG terminal in Świnoujście will play a very important role in safeguarding gas supplies to Poland in the event of another crisis in relations with Russia. Even if Russia decides to cut off gas supplies for a certain period of time, Poland will be able to make up much of the deficit by increasing supplies of liquefied natural gas accordingly. Poland currently imports approximately 10 billion cubic metres of gas from Russia each year (Derski, 2014). The launch of the Świnoujście terminal, which will initially be able to hold up to 5 billion cubic metres of gas and will eventually have a storage capacity of as much as 7.5 billion cubic metres, can significantly reduce Poland's reliance on Russian imports and consequently can help reduce gas prices. Some experts have pointed out, however, that while such a scenario could arise, this is not necessarily a foregone conclusion. Furthermore, the price of the gas to be imported to the Świnoujście terminal remains unknown, and the necessary liquefaction, transport and regasification will incur costs as well. When all these costs are taken into account, the price of liquefied natural gas may not be very competitive compared to the price offered by the Russian supplier, and the resulting negotiating leverage may not be so substantial. The most important thing, however, is that Poland has great potential for growth in terms of diversifying its energy supply. This is still a success of sorts, bearing in mind the burdens of the past and how closely the country is connected to Russia via gas and oil pipelines.

Another approach to improving energy security is regional energy integration among Central and Eastern European countries. In this case, the decisive argument in favour of cooperation is a similar level of development of the energy sector to Poland's, and similar or even greater challenges posed by a lack of diversification in gas and crude oil imports. Moreover, Poland – like other countries of the former Communist bloc – is struggling with the problem of concluding (alongside ordinary trade agreements) intergovernmental agreements with Russia, under which the state guarantees the purchase of raw materials at a defined price. Representatives of Lithuania, for example, have declared their readiness for such cooperation. Rokas Masiulis, Lithuania's energy minister, emphasises that Poland is crucial for his country and other Baltic states in the process of synchronising their energy systems with those of other EU countries and in the creation of a common European market (Jakóbiak, 2015). Currently, both countries are planning a gas interconnector (GIPL). This infrastructure project would link the isolated Baltic states and Finland to the European gas market (Ibid.).

Also, with respect to electricity, Poland and Lithuania are working on a closer interconnection. The LitPol Link, a new power interconnection between Lithuania and Poland, is expected to be finished by the end of 2015. In the context of this new infrastructure, representatives of the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding in April 2015 on the implementation of common trading principles.

In addition, Poland is working to integrate its energy market more closely with the other Visegrad states. An example is the project to build a gas pipeline between Poland and the Czech Republic (*Interkonektor Polska-Czechy*, undated). Also, Slovakia and Poland are working on a new interconnector for gas (*Rozpoczęto realizację...*, 2015). What is planned is a 164-km two-way flow gas pipeline with a maximum annual capacity of 4.7 billion cubic metres from Poland to Slovakia and 5.7 billion cubic metres from Slovakia to Poland. The pipeline is expected to be operational by 2020 as stated by the Polish Energy Regulatory Office (URE). The investment is part of the North-South Gas Corridor initiated by the Visegrad Group. The project has also received the status of a "Project of Common Interest" (PCI) from the European Commission, as well as possible financing from the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF; *Blżej powstania polsko-słowackiego...*, 2014).

With respect to policy towards external suppliers, regional cooperation could bring tangible benefits for all countries involved. Unfortunately from the perspective of representatives of the Polish energy sector and some government officials, such cooperation is unlikely to take place beyond the aforementioned planned construction of new gas interconnectors between Poland and Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Lithuania, and the electrical energy connection with Lithuania. What is more, regional interests are tending to diverge, as Hungary's current energy policy demonstrates. Budapest has forged closer energy ties with Russia, which has promised to provide it with a loan to finance the construction of new power units at the Paks Nuclear Power Plant to replace older reactor blocks.

## 9. Conclusions

Trade relations with Russia and Ukraine have visibly changed over the last two years. Economic turnover has decreased sharply in both cases. The main factors influencing Polish-Russian trade relations have included a decrease in gas and oil prices, the sanctions imposed on Russia and the countersanctions imposed by Russia on the EU and other Western countries. In the case of relations with Ukraine, the plunge had been caused by the economic crisis – the conflict in Donbas has damaged Ukraine's economic potential, which consequently has also undermined Polish-Ukrainian trade relations.

The Russian countersanctions have had a particularly negative impact on Polish exports to Russia, especially in the agricultural sector, but thanks to quick responses by both European and Polish authorities, as well as actions of support undertaken by citizens, the negative consequences for Polish farmers have been greatly reduced. Polish agricultural products have been intensively promoted for domestic consumption, and a campaign to promote them on foreign markets has also been launched (for example, in India, Indonesia, and the Balkan countries). As a consequence, while Polish exports to Russia have indeed fallen, 2014 witnessed a boom in Poland's global exports, which has cushioned the overall economic (and political) impact of the Russian countersanctions.

The sanctions imposed on Russia are provoking different reactions around the European community. Although the EU has long managed to stay united in its support for maintaining these sanctions, voices can be heard making the argument that keeping them in place is not the best way to resolve the current crisis. This is not the point of view to which the Polish government subscribe, however. On the contrary, Poland sees the sanctions as an appropriate tool to be used at the current stage of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. As Poland's minister of foreign affairs has stated, "sanctions are the only language which Russia understands regarding the conflict", emphasising that "Russia's readiness to implement the understanding of the Minsk protocol has to be constantly observed and further steps must depend on this will". Such a policy seems to have garnered support from the majority of Polish society. According to an opinion poll conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs and the Bertelsmann Foundation in February 2015, more than 40% of Poles agree that the sanctions imposed on Russia should be strengthened and over one-third (35%) claim that sanctions should be kept at the current level. Only 6% of Poles want the sanctions to be eased.

The current crisis in relations with Russia has also had a serious impact on energy policy. Poland has used the crisis as an opportunity to remind certain EU partners to prioritise the problem of energy dependence on the Russian Federation within the EU's energy policy. Thus, in April 2014 the Polish government proposed the creation of an Energy Union, with energy security as one of its pillars. The idea was taken up by the European Commission, which in February 2015 presented its own proposal, the final goal of which is to unify the energy markets of European Union countries. From the Polish perspective, it is especially important to make sure that the creation of an Energy Union will help to diversify Poland's gas import sources (i.e. to lessen Poland's dependence on Russia), and that it will eventually lead to launching common mechanisms for dealing with energy providers from outside the EU in order to prevent them from abusing their quasi-monopolistic position.

There have been several domestic policy responses in the area of energy, of which the construction of an LNG terminal and planned gas interconnectors with several neighbouring countries have the greatest potential to make the Polish gas market more immune to Russian interference. Nevertheless, the diversification of the Polish energy market is still, at best, a job half done.

The recent turbulence in Poland's economic relations with Russia and Ukraine does not allow one to fully assess how these relations will evolve in future, but certain predictions are worth mentioning. It seems that the current crisis is making the Polish economy more independent of trade with Russia, and

is motivating Polish producers to enter new markets. The trend of the Russian market playing a diminishing role may persist in the long-term, especially if Poland succeeds in diversifying its gas import routes. With respect to economic relations between Poland and Ukraine – definitely undervalued for two countries that share a 500-km common border and together have 80 million consumers – they will only realise their full potential when the Ukrainian domestic economy recovers. And this could take a long time.

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# SLOVAKIA

# Slovakia's response to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict: Domestic socio-political aspects, parties' stances, public opinion

GRIGORIJ MESEŽNIKOV – OLGA GYÁRFÁŠOVÁ

## 1. Introduction

In Slovakia, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict of 2014–2015 has sparked a strong internal response, revealing a certain degree of ambivalence. On the one hand, the official position of the Slovak Republic as a state was in conformity with the EU and NATO line. Slovakia condemned the pseudo-referendum on Crimea and the subsequent annexation of the Crimean Peninsula by the Russian Federation (*MZV: Slovensko referendum...*, 2014; *NR SR: Parlament odsúdil...*, 2014), and it joined the sanctions regime that the EU has imposed on Russia in several waves. Slovakia also declared its political support for Ukraine, and undertook practical steps to help the Ukrainian state cope with pressure from Russia, especially in the area of energy (for instance, it provided a reverse gas flow). On the other hand, the positions articulated by Prime Minister Robert Fico on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict have differed from the official position of the state, the views of the population on the causes and course of the conflict have manifested signs of ambivalence, and the public discourse has been marked by stark differences of interpretation regarding events around Ukraine.

In Slovakia, the formation of citizens' views and politicians' stances towards Russia has been influenced by the ideological legacy of representatives of the 19th-century national intellectual elite, members of inter-war leftist intellectual circles, and Slovak Communists in the post-war period (1948–1989).

After the fall of the Communist regime, the pro-Russian role was played by certain political parties (nationalist and leftist), as well as by certain social organisations, radical movements and groups – mainly anti-Western, anti-European and isolationist.

The opposite pole included diverse segments of the pro-European and pro-Western portion of Slovak society – representatives of centre-right political parties, NGOs, independent analytical centres, the liberally and democratically oriented intelligentsia that have perpetuated the values associated with Czechoslovak dissident movement Charter 77, and to a certain extent the legacy of the 1968 Prague Spring as a symbol of resistance against Soviet hegemony.

While proponents of the first stream of opinion have emphasised particularly the ethno-national and linguistic elements, i.e. the affinity of Russians and Slovaks as Slavic nations (omitting Ukrainians from these considerations, however), representatives of the second line of opinion have mostly underscored the value dimension: freedom, democracy, human rights, the right of nations to determine their own destiny without interference from outside, etc.

In analysing the attitudes of social actors towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and identifying the factors that have contributed to their formation, one needs to take into account the considerable asymmetry between the relevance of factors related to attitudes towards Russia on one hand and Ukraine on the other. While Russia as a state, Russian history, and the Russian language and culture

have been continuously present in Slovakia both on the level of practical politics and discursive thinking at least since the mid-19th century, and even in a formative way (including everything that had initially belonged to Tsarist Russia and was then “passed on” to Soviet Russia after 1917, and later to the Soviet Union – until 1992), Ukraine and everything this country could be related to has been represented poorly in the public discourse in Slovakia, almost marginally. On the level of practical politics, Ukraine came to be present in this discourse only after the establishment of bilateral relations between Slovakia and the independent Ukrainian state in 1993.

## 2. Russophilia in Slovakia: Historical, cultural and socio-economic contexts

A relatively coherent idea about what the character of Slovaks’ relationship with Russia should be was provided by Ľudovít Štúr, the 19th-century Slovak national activist and thinker, in his work *Slovanstvo a svet budúcnosti* (“The Slavdom and the World of the Future”), published in Russia in 1867 in the Russian language. Štúr was a cult figure considered to be formative with respect to the Slovak nation’s linguistic and cultural identity. The reasons for the persistent perception of Štúr as a constituent part of the pantheon of Slovak national heroes in contemporary Slovakia (one of the highest state awards is named after Štúr) are related to the fact that he was the codifier of the modern Slovak language and is generally seen as a passionate defender of Slovak national aspirations under the Hungarian Monarchy.

In the above-mentioned work, Štúr grappled with the ultimate sense of history of the Slavs and the Slovaks. He came to the conclusion that the optimal and only meaningful option for all Slavs who did not have their own independent statehood in the 19th century, including the Slovaks, would be unification with Russia, and thus their de facto dissolution within the Russian nation (with Russian as the official language), as well as the conversion of all Slavs to Orthodox Christianity. He stated that “Slavs wanted in their souls to attach to Russia, the only independent, organised Slavic state – to their world leader” (Štúr, p. 96). Štúr believed that the reason that Slavs should join Russia “is based mainly on the creative power of the Russian people and their ability to hold everything they have created”. He went on: “people in Russia constitute unity with the Tsar, and this is the country’s main strength” (Ibid., p. 106).

In the first half of the 20th century, Štúr’s Russophile legacy was revived by the left-leaning intellectual (literary) group DAV, whose members (especially Ladislav Novomeský) propagated Slovakia’s inclination towards Soviet Russia. This school of thought found a political umbrella for its activities in the Slovak Communist political-ideological camp in the period before the Second World War. It expressed itself in its most radical form at the end of the war by flirting with the idea of the “Sovietisation of Slovakia”, i.e. the incorporation of Slovakia into the USSR as a separate Soviet republic.

The relationship with Russia and views on cooperation between Slovaks and Russians were affected by the social experience of Slovakia’s population after the Second World War. In February 1948, Communists who enjoyed the direct support of Moscow took power in Czechoslovakia and established an undemocratic government. The Communist regime functioned in Slovakia in conditions of delayed modernisation. The equalisation of the socio-economic disparities that existed between the Czech and Slovak parts of their common state, the process of Slovakia’s industrialisation and urbanisation, Slovakia’s technological achievements in agriculture, the building of developed state education and health systems – all these and certain other elements of modernisation under Communist rule in Slovakia created the preconditions for a less critical perception of the undemocratic nature of a regime installed and supported from the outside. The process of “normalisation” (i.e. cadre purges and the removal of the Prague Spring’s reformist legacy) after the Soviet invasion in August 1968 coincided chronologically with the federalisation of the Czechoslovak state, which also influenced the population’s perception of socio-political developments. The period of Soviet occupation overlapped with the period during

which Slovakia's national emancipation ambitions were realised, which led to a softening of opposition to the regime and occupation, and created a more favourable environment for a less critical or even positive perception of the Soviet Union (Russia).

### 3. Political actors' stances

#### 3.1. Prime Minister Robert Fico and the Smer-SD party

Robert Fico, the prime minister and chairman of the Smer-SD party, is the prominent politician who has contributed most to the ambivalent perception of the Slovak Republic's stance on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Although Slovakia's official position has not differed from that of the EU, and Slovakia has taken important practical steps in support of Ukraine, the stances presented by Fico in his public speeches have often diverged from the state's official line. It is worth noting that this is not the first time that Robert Fico as prime minister has taken positions in foreign policy that are not fully consistent with the line of the government he heads. Such cases have always been situations where Russia was a direct or indirect actor and the Smer-SD leader presented stances that were close to Russia's positions. This occurred during the Russian-Georgian War (2008), the Russian-Ukrainian gas dispute (2008–2009), and the planned deployment of a US missile defence system in Europe (2007–2008).

Fico's statements on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict have been marked by:

- the use of softer characterisations of Russian policy (he has never talked about "aggression" or "occupation"; usually he uses the phrase "violation of principles of international law" in the context of Russian policy in Crimea),
- disputing Russia's direct political and military involvement in Ukraine (for example, through formulations which make it evident that he considers the whole affair to be an internal conflict in Ukraine),
- asserting that it was not Slovakia that caused the conflict, and therefore that Slovakia should not in any way participate in activities that could be harmful to it (for example, in economic sanctions; Fico has put forward various arguments against sanctions, and has never mentioned any argument in favour of their implementation).

With respect to Ukraine, in addition to general formulations of support for the country's efforts to move closer to the EU, Fico has pointed out the serious internal challenges that this country faces, discussing them with a great deal of criticism and doubt as to the ability of the Ukrainian leadership to resolve them, while the context of Russian aggression against Ukraine has simply been absent in Fico's observations. The Slovak prime minister has not mentioned the values or moral-political aspects of the struggle by the democratic portion of Ukrainian society for reforms and a European future. Fico's statements could contribute to creating the impression that Ukraine's current leadership expects the EU to pay for Ukraine's obligations rather than Ukraine doing so on its own.

During the Russian occupation of Crimea, Fico, who was then running as a candidate in the presidential elections, tried to avoid expressing his position publicly, despite the fact that he had been asked to do so by opposition parties and the media. He finally commented publicly on events in Crimea for the first time in early March 2014 during a televised debate among the presidential candidates. Fico stated that what had happened in Crimea had been "a violation of international law", but he did not explicitly condemn the state which committed this violation nor did he mention Russia by name. He called for a rational approach and above all for the defence of "Slovakia's own national interests", which, as his formulations have indicated, were focused on maintaining the position of the Slovak automotive industry on the Russian market and ensuring the stability of the gas flow from Russia – either for Slovakia's own consumption or for transit to Europe (*Vofby: Hľadme na...*, 2014).

Later, the Slovak prime minister characterised developments in Ukraine as a “geopolitical battle between the United States and the Russian Federation ... in which the European Union managed to engage itself, and many small countries are now suffering from these geopolitical fights and conflicts” (Fico: *EÚ je pre Ukrajinu...*, 2014). He also characterised the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as “a global propaganda war” and criticised the EU for listening only to the “voice of Ukraine”, while “nobody is interested in hearing the voice of the other side” (TA3: *V prípade Ukrajiny...*, 2014).

When the EU announced the introduction of economic sanctions against Russia in response to the annexation of Crimea, Fico opposed the very idea of such sanctions, claiming that their impact would be catastrophic for the Slovak economy. In April 2014, he stated that a “secret analysis” of a likely scenario in which the EU would impose economic sanctions on Russia indicated that these sanctions would have a “brutal” impact on Slovakia (*Premiér: Ekonomické sankcie...*, 2014). He said that sanctions would cause GDP growth in Slovakia to decrease from an estimated 3.1% to just 1% in 2015, and therefore the country would allegedly lose its ability to raise its standard of living (RTVS: *Rozpočet slovenskej armády...*, 2014).

Smer-SD’s leader has spoken much more frequently and in particular much more critically about Ukraine than about Russia. He has expressed his doubts about Ukraine as a “strong partner” (Fico: *Obáva sa...*, 2014). He has argued that it was wrong when “the European Union began to take on the responsibility for the Ukrainian economy. ... Kyiv is counting on that as it owes a lot of money to the Russian Federation; now it is taking out loans from the EU and will not have to repay them.” Fico has said that “if the EU has its own reserves, it can [give money to Ukraine], but we will not contribute... They should not expect grilled chickens to fall to them from heaven” (Fico: *SR nebude...*, 2014).

The attitudes of Smer-SD representatives (individual members of the national parliament and the European Parliament) who have commented on events around the Ukrainian conflict have been largely critical of Ukraine (if not openly anti-Ukrainian). Some of them have expressed opinions clearly in favour of Russia, and none have taken a position that could be considered pro-Ukrainian. Immediately after the results of Crimea’s pseudo-referendum on independence were announced, Smer-SD MEP Monika Flašíková-Beňová said that “non-recognition of the Crimean referendum by the United States and other countries is not right” (*Smer: Neuznanie referenda...*, 2014). Statements by Ľuboš Blaha, Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee for European Affairs (Smer-SD), have been marked by a clear pro-Russian and openly anti-Ukrainian posture. He has claimed that “Russia is not an enemy” and that “economic sanctions are not the solution” (*Blaha: Rusko nie je...*, 2014). Commenting on events in Donbas, Blaha has expressed himself categorically and straightforwardly (Hanus – Majchrák, 2014): “Ukraine is fighting in the East against its own citizens. I cannot be in solidarity with a country that is physically eliminating its own citizens. It is a battle of Ukrainians with Ukrainians; there was no real invasion by Russia. Russia did not attack Ukraine.”

### **3.2. Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS)**

In some respects, the views expressed by individual prominent Smer-SD representatives are in accordance with the line of argumentation presented by the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS), which has taken a clear pro-Russian and anti-Ukrainian position on the conflict. Based on materials and documents published on the party’s official website (either written by Slovak authors or re-published from foreign sources), one comes to the conclusion that the KSS considers the revolution on Maidan Square to have been an illegal coup d’état inspired and directed by the West (particularly the United States), that “fascist forces” have come to power in Kyiv, that the Russian-speaking people living in Donbas have had to take up arms in order to defend their rights, and that the Ukrainian Army has killed civilians. The party has condemned the introduction of economic sanctions against Russia, and has characterised criticism of the Russian policy towards Ukraine as part of an information war that the West is waging against Russia and its citizens.

### 3.3. President Andrej Kiska

Slovak President Andrej Kiska has counterbalanced Prime Minister Fico's stances. During his electoral campaign, Kiska indicated that he was concerned by events in Ukraine, and in particular by the actions of Russia, which at the time had already occupied Crimea militarily. After assuming the presidency, Kiska emphasised the need to strengthen security cooperation between the V4 countries and NATO, and to maintain unity within the EU. In July 2014, he spoke in favour of strengthening the sanctions against Russia as a common EU response (Zsilleová, 2014). Commenting on discussions about the sanctions, Kiska said that the country's trade interests must not take precedence over freedom and democracy, and that the democratic world had no choice but to penalise those who violate human rights or international law (*Prezident: Obchodné záujmy...*, 2014). At the NATO summit in Newport (Wales), Kiska said that "Russia through its behaviour is endangering security in Europe" and that "Russian soldiers are fighting in Eastern Ukraine" (*Kiska: Slovensko zvýši...*, 2014). The Slovak president characterised Ukraine's pro-European orientation as "an expression of the free choice of the country and its citizens" (*Prezident: Kisku pozval...*, 2014). He expressed concerns about the fact that due to certain statements made by Prime Minister Fico the Western allies had begun to have doubts about the course of Slovakia's foreign policy (*RTVS: Kisku sa na summite...*, 2014).

Unlike Prime Minister Fico, who has often made use of any opportunity to recommend softening or even lifting the sanctions against Russia, Kiska has urged Western countries, especially EU member states, to continue with the sanctions regime. In an interview for *The Wall Street Journal* in February 2015, he said (*The Wall Street Journal: EÚ musí...*, 2015): "Without Russia's support, the conflict in Ukraine would never have started, and it is our duty as democratic nations to take a clear stand. ... It is extremely important for the EU to stick to a single position in order to ensure that Russia cannot exploit differences between EU countries and break our internal unity."

President Kiska has demonstrated his posture towards the situation in Ukraine by personally participating in the commemorative events marking the first anniversary of the revolution on the Maidan alongside the leaders of several European countries. During his stay in Kyiv, Slovakia's president said that "anyone who had not been subjected to Russian propaganda could not have any doubt about Russia's involvement in the war in Eastern Ukraine". Upon reviewing the evidence of Russian aggression in Ukraine, he spoke of his "feeling of indignation", contending that "a smaller country must defend itself against a giant country", and that "conflict could have been staved off if the giant country had not contributed to stirring it up". According to Kiska, the revolution on the Maidan manifested the will of people in Ukraine who wanted to join Europe and did not want to live with oligarchs (*Kiska: Kto neuveril Rusom...*, 2015).

### 3.4. Opposition centre-right parties

The opposition centre-right parties have taken a largely clear and consistent position on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Such a posture was expected due to the manner in which these parties define their priorities in the foreign policy and security sphere, on issues of European integration, in world politics and with respect to relations between Slovakia and other countries.

Their positions have been characterised by:

- disagreement with Russia's moves (the occupation and annexation of Crimea, support for separatists in Donbas, the participation of Russian troops in the fighting in Eastern Ukraine),
- approval of the introduction of sanctions on Russia, a request addressed to the EU to speak with one voice on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict,
- criticism of Prime Minister Fico's opinions regarding the overall situation in Ukraine,
- support for the idea of strengthening Slovakia's defence capabilities in the context of the conflict in cooperation with NATO partners,
- support for Ukraine's efforts to join the EU and NATO.



#### 3.4.1. Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ-DS)

SDKÚ-DS is the party that has commented most frequently on events around the Ukraine conflict out of all political parties in Slovakia. It strongly condemned the bloodshed on the Maidan in February 2014, and in early March 2014 MP Ivan Štefanec said that Russia should receive a vigorous Western response to its actions, and characterised what was happening in Crimea as an annexation, not a struggle for independence (*Frešo: EÚ by mala...*, 2014). He also requested that Slovakia protest against Russia's aggression towards Ukraine and said he would recall Slovakia's ambassador from Moscow (*Štefanec: SR by mala...*, 2014). SDKÚ-DS characterised Russia's policy towards Ukraine as "aggression", fully supported the introduction of EU economic sanctions against Russia, and has insisted on their observance and extension. The party also spoke in favour of strengthening cooperation between Slovakia and its NATO allies in order to ensure an effective defence against possible Eastern aggression. SDKÚ-DS has supported Ukraine's participation in the European integration process and has defined stability in Ukraine as "Slovakia's number one geopolitical priority" (*SDKÚ-DS: Stabilná Ukrajina...*, 2014).

#### 3.4.2. Most-Híd (Bridge)

The views of the party Most-Híd (Bridge) on the conflict in Ukraine have been presented mostly by František Šebej, the chairman of parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee, known for his strong pro-Western and pro-Atlanticist views and his critical attitude towards the policies of the Russian Federation's current leadership. Šebej characterised the situation in Ukraine in the spring of 2014 as a threat to peace, while calling the "threat to the Russian-speaking minority" in Ukraine, which Russia had consistently underscored, a "Russian propagandist myth". He also characterised Russia's argument justifying its approach in Ukraine as one reminiscent of Hitler's Germany before the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia (*Šebej: Na Ukrajine...*, 2014). Most-Híd approved of the introduction of EU sanctions against Russia and insisted that they be observed meticulously. Šebej called Prime Minister Fico's claims that the conflict in Ukraine was a kind of dispute between the US and Russia "a conspiratorial delusion that is unbefitting of any democratic or informed politician" (*Šebej: O Ukrajine by sa malo...*, 2014).

#### 3.4.3. Sieť (Network)

The views of the newly established party Sieť ("Network") on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict have been mostly presented by Martin Fedor, who was previously a member of the SDKÚ-DS parliamentary caucus (in 2003–2006, he served as Slovakia's defence minister). Subsequently, as an independent MP and then as a member of Sieť, he has pointed out that the main reason for the conflict in Ukraine was Russia's attempt to prevent Ukraine's movement in the direction of the EU and thus away from Putin's Eurasian Union project. Fedor has said that the interests of Slovakia in the context of the situation in Ukraine were not essentially different from those of the Baltic states and Poland, and that he believed government politicians led by Fico were the ones spreading lies and misleading information (Fedor, 2014). Fedor has argued that Fico, by contending that Ukraine should not join NATO, had tended towards Russia's interests rather than Slovakia's (*Fedor: Fico sa výrokmi...*, 2014).

#### 3.4.4. Freedom and Solidarity (SaS)

After the invasion of Crimea by Russian troops, the party Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) declared that an armed conflict was the worst possible solution, while the basic principle would be that "war should be avoided". In the first phase of the conflict, the party claimed that such a solution should include "guarantees of civil rights for citizens of Russian origin on Ukrainian territory where they form homogeneous communities" (*Ukrajina: Princíp riešenia...*, 2014). SaS has subsequently condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea, characterised Russia's actions as violations of international law and supported the EU-imposed sanctions on Russia. In September 2014, SaS vice-chairman Ľubomír Galcko said that the "verbal tricks played by Prime Minister Fico" were harmful to "Slovakia's image in the eyes of foreign partners" (*SaS: Podporia zaradenie...*, 2014). In May 2015, SaS Chairman Richard

Sulík characterised current relations between Ukraine and Russia as “de facto war”, and demanded that Slovakia offer its infrastructure to NATO troops in response to the growing security concerns (SaS: *Slovensko by malo...*, 2014).

#### 3.4.5. Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)

From the very beginning, the Christian Democratic Movement’s leaders expressed solidarity with the activities of Ukrainian citizens protesting against the undemocratic practices of President Yanukovich. In early March 2014, KDH Chairman Ján Figel’ said that he expected the Slovak government to take concrete steps to effectively help and support the legitimate interests of Ukraine. According to Figel’, Ukraine was in a difficult situation and needs “broad assistance and a clear European prospect. ... The people of Ukraine want to live in just conditions with the prospect of a decent life, overall development and respect for human rights” (*KDH: Očakáva od vlády...*, 2014). In March 2015, Former Minister of Defence, Interior, and Justice Ivan Šimko, a member of the KDH, pointed out that Russia was conducting a hybrid war not only against Ukraine, but on “a much larger territory of the modern world” and that “Slovakia is on the front line of this hybrid conflict and must defend itself” (Šimko, 2015).

#### 3.4.6. NOVA

The extra-parliamentary party NOVA has expressed unequivocal support for Ukraine in the conflict with Russia. Party Chairman Daniel Lipšic, an MP, former KDH vice-chairman and former interior minister, called upon the Slovak government to support EU sanctions against Russia and demanded that Prime Minister Fico not cast these sanctions into doubt. Lipšic has also argued that the EU should send Russia a clear signal on its common position, and Slovakia should strengthen its own defences within NATO (*NOVA: Vyzývka vládu...*, 2014).

## 4. Media, the non-governmental sector, public intellectuals

### 4.1. Media

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has generated numerous reactions in the Slovak media. In commenting on the conflict and its diverse circumstances, including responses in Slovakia, individual periodicals and authors have positioned themselves in accordance with certain lines of opinion, often strictly opposing one another. Among the mainstream serious media (with the exception of the daily *Pravda*), the prevalent tone has been critical of Russia’s aggressive policy towards Ukraine, while fringe outlets have made efforts to justify or directly support Russia’s policy.

Among the mainstream print media, a clear position condemning Russia’s policy, criticising Prime Minister Fico and supporting Ukraine in its attempts to defend its sovereignty and to orient itself towards Europe has been taken by the daily *Sme* [We] (commentators Peter Schutz and Marius Kopcsay; freelance writers Juraj Mesík, Michal Havran and Michal Hvorecký), the daily *Denník N* [Daily N] (commentators Mirek Toda, Peter Morvay, Tomáš Galis and Roman Pataj; freelance writers Milan M. Šimečka and Fedor Gál) and the weekly *.týždeň* [Week] (commentators Peter Schutz, Štefan Hríb and Andrej Bán; freelance writers Peter Zajac and Fedor Gál). The content and pathos of the articles by these authors have been in accordance with the long-term values espoused by these periodicals (support for a pro-Western Slovak foreign policy orientation, support for socio-economic reforms, Atlanticism, a preference for the values of liberal democracy, open society and civic principles).

In the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the daily *Hospodárske noviny* [Economic Newspaper] has published contributions written by its commentators, whose views on this conflict have differed quite significantly: while Peter Tkačenko has criticised Russian policy, Dag Daniš has expressed a considerable dose of understanding for it, as well as for positions taken by Prime Minister Fico.

The daily *Pravda* has published articles written by its commentator Boris Latta which could be described as covertly pro-Russian and casting doubt on Ukraine, its political elite and its chances of acquiring a European prospect.

A clear pro-Russian stance and an extremely critical tone towards the West (the EU, US and NATO) and Ukraine have been typical of articles published in the pro-government bi-weekly periodical *Slovenský rozhľad* [Slovak Outlook], which is close to the party Smer-SD. The authors of these articles have enthusiastically supported Prime Minister Fico's opposition to EU actions, and have approved of all of his activities aimed at strengthening cooperation with Russia. The website *Slovo* [Word] (formerly the weekly *Slovo/Nové slovo*) has taken part in the discussion on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as a media outlet publishing contributions with pro-Russian, anti-Ukrainian, anti-American and anti-Western content. Similarly toned articles on the issue have been published by the bi-weekly *Literárny týždenník* [Literary Weekly] and the monthly *Extra S*. The authors who have published on various aspects of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and Slovakia's response to it in the above-mentioned periodicals include Eduard Chmelár, Branislav Fábry, Dušan Konček, Gabriela Rothmayerová, František Škvrnda, Martin Dugas and Ľubomír Šteško. The contents of the contributions by these authors have been in line with these periodicals' overall orientation, which has long been characterised by criticism of the pro-Western line of Slovakia's foreign policy, opposition to liberal socio-economic reforms, etatism, disapproval of NATO activities, criticism of various aspects of European integration and EU policies, anti-Americanism, nationalism and evident inclinations towards the policies of Russia's current leadership.

*Bojovník* [The Warrior], a bi-weekly periodical of the Slovak Union of Antifascist Fighters, has published materials taken directly from Russian sources that spread the Russian narrative about a struggle against "Ukrainian fascism" and openly support separatist rebels in Donbas.

The monthly *Zem a vek* [Earth and Age], a conspiratorially minded periodical that publishes materials about global domination by the US and Zionism – a typical anti-Semitic media outlet – has taken a stance on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict which is close to the interpretational scheme of Russian propaganda. Articles published in this magazine are characterised by systematic resistance to the values of liberal democracy and by *a priori* criticism of the West, the EU and NATO, as well as by a positive view of the current political regime in Russia, and therefore its position on the conflict between Ukraine and Russia is not surprising. The magazine openly supported the separatist rebellion in Donbas, and at the beginning of 2015 it announced a petition for Slovakia's withdrawal from NATO.

In February 2015, Juraj Smatana, a civic activist, published a list of 42 Slovak- and Czech-language websites which spread pro-Russian content and openly pro-Russian propaganda. The list includes websites known for their support of a conspiratorial interpretation of the social reality. According to Smatana, the content of these pro-Russian websites was in many cases a mixture of truths, half-truths and obvious lies (Šnidl, 2015).

#### **4.2. Think tanks and NGOs**

Evaluations of the diverse contexts of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and events in Ukraine in 2014–2015 have been offered by independent analytical centres operating in Slovakia (think tanks). Experts working in these NGOs have presented their perspectives in op-eds and commentary for print and electronic media, as well as in speeches at various conferences and discussion events. These are the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (SFPA; Alexander Duleba), the Center for European and North Atlantic Affairs (CENAA; Robert Ondrejcsák and Tomáš Čížik), the Slovak Atlantic Commission (SAK; Jaroslav Naď and Mario Nicolini), the Central European Policy Institute (CEPI; Milan Nič and Marián Majer) and the Institute for Public Affairs (IVO; Grigorij Mesežnikov). All of these think tanks are known for their support for a pro-Western (pro-European and pro-Atlantic) line in Slovak foreign policy, and the opinions of their experts are characterised by criticism of Russia's foreign policy.

During the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, several Slovak non-governmental organisations and civic initiatives have significantly intensified their activities. Ukrainian-Slovak Initiative (Lyudmila Ver-

bická, president), established in 2014, has focused on organising public actions in support of Ukraine's struggle for independence. It has raised funds to support the Ukrainian population living in the regions affected by the conflict, provided for delivery of humanitarian aid, and organised stays in Slovakia for children from these Ukrainian regions. The NGOs People in Peril, Milan Šimečka Foundation and Open Society Foundation have organised public discussions in Bratislava on the situation in Ukraine with the participation of Ukrainian experts and activists. In November 2014, representatives of 22 NGOs issued a statement calling on Slovak civic organisations, municipalities and individuals to join a programme of assistance to Ukraine (*Vyhlasenie slovenských MVO: Pripravujeme program na pomoc Ukrajine* [Declaration of Slovak NGOs: We Are Preparing a Programme to Assist Ukraine]).<sup>95</sup>

On the opposite pole, activities supporting the Russian state and its proxies in Donbas have been promoted by Slovensko-ruská spoločnosť [Slovak-Russian Society] led by former dissident and KDH chairman Ján Čarnogurský. The group entered the public debate assertively and presented positions touching upon stances taken by Slovakia's political representatives (for instance, it criticised President Andrej Kiska for some of his statements and decisions). The views of the organisation's leader, Ján Čarnogurský, included:

- the perception of Russia as a permanent strategic ally of Slovakia,
- the view that Slovakia was "manoeuvred into NATO through lies and coercion" so that its territory could be used as a platform against Russia (Čarnogurský, 11 March 2015),
- beliefs about the inappropriateness of NATO enlargement eastward,
- the idea that Russia must defend itself against the West, which is alienating itself from Russia and is seeking to weaken it,
- the idea that Russia cannot pursue policies identical to those of Western countries; "It has always gone wrong in Russia when Russia has begun to pursue pro-Western policies" (Čarnogurský, 9 July 2014),
- the belief that Russia is presently becoming a defender of the traditional values and morality that are at risk in the West.

At the beginning of the critical events in Ukraine, Čarnogurský stated that developments in this country "reveal the evil fruits of NATO enlargement to the east" because Russia, fearing that after Ukraine joins the EU it will also accede to NATO, is resolutely opposed the conclusion of an Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU (Čarnogurský, 31 January 2014). He has characterised the political changes after Euromaidan as "an unconstitutional coup d'état", which subsequently triggered the secession of Crimea, Donetsk and Luhansk. In his view, "the Ukrainian parliament was raped" and Ukraine was brought into the crisis by the fact that its government "pulled it to the West" (Čarnogurský, 2 May 2014).

A tool of pro-Russian activities has been the initiative Pokojní bojovníci [Peaceful Warriors], whose members have participated in various anti-Ukrainian and anti-Western public events, including demonstrations against the deployment of NATO bases on Slovak territory and in support of illegal separatist republics formed in the occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

### 4.3. Common statements by opinion leaders

The constituent parts of the public debate on the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and Slovakia's response to it have been the views presented in joint statements issued by opinion leaders of groups with similar value orientations. In the second half of 2014, two different – and de facto competing – opinion groups were formed in Slovakia and tried to reach the general public and political elites through open letters, statements and appeals.

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<sup>95</sup> <http://www.changenet.sk/?section=kampane&x=790375>

The first group was composed of persons opposing Russia's aggression and expressing their support for Ukraine. The statements they published urged Slovak politicians to adhere strictly to the officially defined priorities of the country's foreign policy following from its membership in the EU and NATO. Members of the other group demanded a more "balanced" approach; they refused to label Russia as an aggressor, and some of these personalities engaged in public activities (demonstrations, rallies) directed against the policies of NATO and the West.

Between September 2014 and June 2015, the first opinion group issued a total of seven joint statements addressed to the broad public. In September 2014, it published the appeal *Nevisíme vo vzduchoprázdné* [We Are Not Hanging in a Vacuum], in which it called upon the Slovak government and parliament not to cast into doubt Slovakia's international standing in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.<sup>96</sup> In September 2014, members of this group also signed the appeal *Zastavme Putina!* [Stop Putin!], which was initiated in Prague by a group of Czech public personalities; the document was signed by more than 5,000 people in the two countries.<sup>97</sup> In *Otvorený list prezidentovi Andrejovi Kiskovi* [Open Letter to President Andrej Kiska] in February 2015, 35 people asked the head of state not to attend Moscow's commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe like other Western politicians.<sup>98</sup> In March 2015, a group of Slovak intellectuals together with their Czech colleagues published *Slovenská a česká výzva svetovým lídrom* [Slovak and Czech Appeal to World Leaders], which appealed to Barack Obama, Angela Merkel, David Cameron, François Hollande, Donald Tusk and Jean-Claude Juncker, to prevent a recurrence of the Munich betrayal in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war, and to support Ukraine in its confrontation with Russia's open aggression.<sup>99</sup> In May 2015, members of this group signed the appeal *Zastavme Nočných vlkov!* [Stop the Night Wolves!], in which they requested that Slovak authorities prevent members of the Russian biker gang "Night Wolves" from entering Slovak territory.<sup>100</sup> In June 2015, they published the open letter *Nechceme vymeniť európsku úniu za Rusko!* [We Do Not Want to Exchange the European Union for Russia!], in which they criticised Prime Minister Fico, who had gone to Moscow for talks with Russian officials, including President Putin, after the EU had imposed sanctions on the Russian Federation because of its aggression against Ukraine.<sup>101</sup> In June 2015, a number of personalities in Czech and Slovak public life published *Otvorenú výzvu pracovníkom Rozhlasu a televízie Slovenska a Českej televízie* [Open Appeal to the Staff of Slovak Radio and Television and of Czech Television], in which they demanded that the leadership of both public media institutions enable Czech and Slovak viewers to watch a TV documentary film aired by Russian TV channel Rossiya 24, in which the facts surrounding the August 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia by Soviet troops are distorted and manipulated.<sup>102</sup>

In 2015, members of the group with opposing views published two joint statements addressing the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. In March 2015, they issued the appeal *Rešpektujte hlas mierumilovných ľudí* [Respect the Voice of Peace-Loving People], calling on President Kiska to attend Moscow's commemoration of the end of the Second World War in Europe (in reaction to the letter calling on the President Kiska to boycott the event).<sup>103</sup> In May 2015, they announced the initiative *Zjednotení za mier* [United for Peace], which was joined by a number of personalities in the Czech Republic;<sup>104</sup> the document was signed by more than 3,500 people, mostly living in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic.

96 <http://www.changenet.sk/?section=kampane&x=785515>

97 <http://www.sme.sk/c/7381265/vyzvu-zastavme-putina-podpisali-cesi-aj-slovaci.html>

98 <http://www.sme.sk/c/7655602/osobnosti-kiskovi-odmietnite-pozvanie-od-putina.html?ref=trz>

99 <http://dennik.tyzen.sk/stefan-hrib/2015/03/16/slovenska-a-ceska-vyzva-svetovym-lidrom/>

100 <https://dennikn.sk/111437/desiatky-osobnosti-vyzyvaju-zastavme-nočných-vlkov/>

101 <http://www.changenet.sk/?section=kampane&x=816244>

102 <http://www.support-ukraine.org/signatories-appeal-to-radio-and-television-of-slovakia-and-czech-television/>

103 <http://www.changenet.sk/?section=kampane&x=793498>

104 <http://www.zjednoteniamier.sk/>

## 5. Public opinion

There are no systematic public opinion surveys which would enable us to construct a comprehensive picture of how the Slovak public perceives Russia and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Therefore, we have to rely on fragmented data and narrowly designed public opinion surveys.

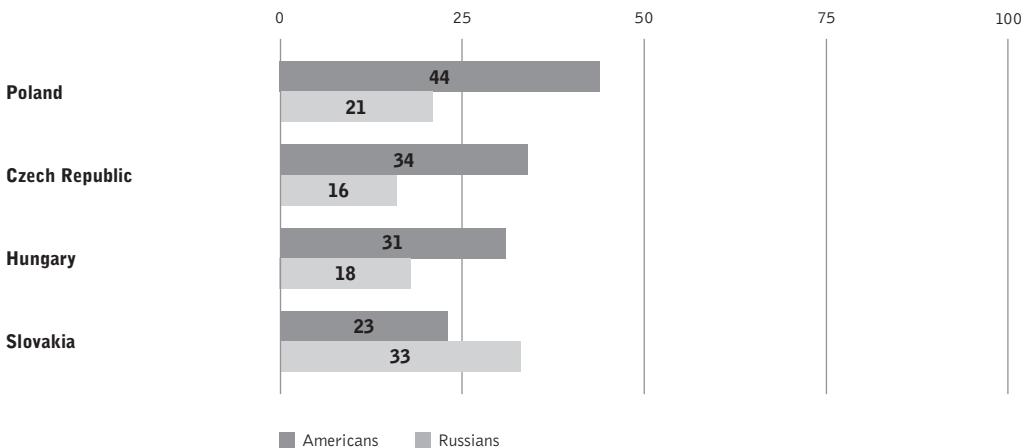
Firstly, we will look at the public perception of Russia, and secondly at how the recent Ukrainian-Russian crisis is seen by citizens.

### 5.1. The public perception of Russia

Various aspects of the perception of developments in Russia can be followed in the GMF annual survey *Transatlantic Trends*.<sup>105</sup> For example, in 2007 the Slovak public, unlike the European (especially Polish) public, did not perceive developments in Russia (the weakening of democracy, the suppression of freedom of speech, Russia's behaviour towards its neighbours) with greater concern. The only exception was energy security – an expected, pragmatic worry. In 2009, concerns in relation to Russia as an energy provider were expressed by 72% of respondents in Slovakia (2 years ago it was comparatively less, just 53%). Compared to other EU countries, the energy issue has been perceived with greater sensitivity and has reflected Slovakia's energy dependence on Russia, echoing the gas crisis in January 2009. However, a broader understanding of Russia's political role and violations of democratic rules have not been present in public opinion.

Views of Russia in the comparative perspective of the Visegrad Four (V4) countries can be illustrated by a survey conducted in 2011.<sup>106</sup> We posed questions about nine specific nations which included the three other Visegrad countries, the strongest and closest European allies (the Germans, English, French and Austrians), and the superpowers (the Americans and Russians).

**Graph 1. What do you think, to what extent could we trust the following nations and rely on them (responses “definitely” + “rather trust” on a five-point scale, in %)?**



Source: IVF 2011.

<sup>105</sup> The series of *Transatlantic Trends* surveys has been conducted annually since 2002 by the German Marshall Fund of the US. Slovakia was included in the survey from 2004 until 2013; for more details see: <http://trends.gmfus.org/>.

<sup>106</sup> The surveys were conducted on a representative sample of the adult population (c. 1,000 respondents) in each of the V4 countries by professional polling agencies in fall 2011. For more details, see Gyárfášová 2013.

A closer look (see Graph 1) at the trust expressed vis-à-vis Russians and Americans reveals that Russians are trusted comparatively less in three countries (the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary), while the exception is Slovakia, where the lower rating is given to Americans. Slovaks' greater affinity towards Russia and its greater distrust of the US have also been identified by other international comparative surveys, including *Transatlantic Trends*. Russia's low rating in the eyes of the Poles, Czechs and Hungarians reflects above all these countries' historical experience with 40 years of Soviet dictatorship over their national affairs. The lukewarm position of Slovaks towards this legacy has been explained many times; among other factors, it is due to the delayed modernisation which brought more prosperity to Slovakia mainly in 1960s and 1970s, so the rejection of the regime in power at the time was not as severe as in the Czech part of the former Czechoslovakia.

Another view on the mental map of the Slovak public is offered by two ISSP surveys conducted in 1996 and 2014. Respondents were asked (via open-ended questions) which countries/nations they saw as the closest and which might pose a threat. Not surprisingly, in both years the Czech Republic was identified as the culturally closest country, and in 2014 this was the view of more than 75% of respondents. All other countries lagged far behind: second place was Poland with only 12%, followed by Hungary with just 5%. Russia was identified by 3% of respondents, although in 1996 the figure for Russia was 4% (Bahna, 2015).

Compared with views on cultural proximity, however, rather dramatic changes occurred in the perception of potentially dangerous countries. While in 1996 Hungary was perceived as the greatest threat with 40% of respondents saying that Hungary posed a risk for Slovakia, in 2014 only 5% identified Slovakia's southern neighbour in this context. This is a fundamental change which may be related to the current positive relations between the two countries' political representatives and apparently indicates a more permanent retreat of the tensions and friction in bilateral Slovak-Hungarian relations that were so typical in the 1990s.

Russia retained its position as the country identified by the second-greatest number of respondents as posing a potential threat to Slovakia. However, whereas in 1996 Russia was identified by 34% of respondents, in 2014 this figure was "only" 24% (Bahna, 2015). These results raise some embarrassment in respect of the real geopolitical situation: in the mid-1990s, Russia was perceived as a state "on its knees", internally weakened, without any serious geopolitical ambitions, and looking to the West with a "friendly face". In autumn 2014, Putin's Russia represented a source of concern not only for Ukraine, but for Russia's other neighbours as well, and its undemocratic expansionist policies were disconcerting in the democratic community. Nevertheless, the public perception of Russia in Slovakia is more favourable today than 10 years ago, and the perception of Russia as a potential threat has diminished.

## 5.2. Public attitudes towards the Russian-Ukrainian crisis

The discourse about the Russian-Ukrainian crisis and the very interpretation of events in Ukraine has taken place mainly at the political level, and we know very little about the views of the public since the outbreak of the conflict. There are only two data sources available: a survey conducted by the Institute for Public Affairs (IVO) in cooperation with the daily *Sme* in June 2014 (Bútorová, 2014), and a survey conducted by the Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association (Duleba, 2014) in autumn 2014.

The findings of the IVO-*Sme* survey show that the Slovak public voice is clear when it comes to the right of Ukrainians to decide on the fate of their country: an overwhelming majority – up to 83% of respondents – agreed with the view that "Ukrainians should decide on their future democratically, and Russia should not interfere in it", while the opposing view was expressed by only 8% of respondents.

This clarity was diminished somewhat when the question was asked differently – along the lines of a cynical *Realpolitik* attitude: "Ukraine is part of the Russian sphere of influence, and Russia has the right to intervene there." Here, two-thirds of respondents (64%) did not agree, but 19% did, while 18% could not answer.

With respect to the conflict, the public perception of Slovakia's membership in NATO is more relevant as well. Although 58% of the Slovak public believes that NATO membership is a guarantee of security for the country, there is a clear reluctance among citizens to strengthen NATO's military presence in Slovakia in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and thus we see some ambiguity here: on the one hand, the public clearly reject Russia's interference in the affairs of Ukraine, while on the other hand a significant segment of the public is ambivalent with regard to Slovakia's obligations under NATO membership. This confirms that even after a decade of NATO membership the mentality of "security consumers" still prevails.

Ambiguity and inconsistency of views on the part of the public when it comes to complex international issues is quite understandable. Foreign policy and international relations are at the periphery of ordinary peoples' interests; they are preoccupied by the concerns of everyday life. This was confirmed by a short survey conducted in September 2014 by the FOCUS polling agency for *Hospodárske noviny*, an economic daily. According to the survey's findings, more than half of the Slovak population had no idea what was happening in Ukraine and nearly half of respondents considered sanctions against Russia improper (*U nás je zaujímavý plyn...*, 2014), demonstrating that people are more interested in their own "full fridge" than anything else. These results mirror the political discourse, which is mainly pragmatic and focused on "national interests".

Based on the survey findings but also on experts' knowledge going beyond these data, we cannot say that the Slovak public clearly support Putin's Russia. However, we can confirm that the Slovak public have traditionally had a relatively greater affinity towards Russia than any of their neighbours have. The Slovak public do not share the Poles' distrust of Russia following from rich negative historical experience, or the Czechs' sceptical mistrust of Russia. Rather, the Slovak public view is characterised by ambivalence and the prioritisation of its own pragmatically understood short-sighted interests over more value-based positions. As for the country's geopolitical stance, the majority of Slovaks would love to find a balanced position between the West and Russia.

We can conclude that pro-Russian sentiment in Slovakia is more reflective of a certain "geopolitical carelessness" and lack of awareness of what constitutes a security threat to Slovakia than active support for Putin's policies. People tend to search for conditions that ensure that their interests and comfort are not compromised.

## 6. Conclusions

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has become an important event in the context of which the positions of political and civil society actors in Slovakia in the areas of foreign and security policy, European integration and relations with individual countries can be tested. It can be said that there is a split on this issue on the Slovak political and opinion scene between those actors who in assessing the various contexts and circumstances of this conflict have been critical of Russia and supportive of Ukraine (President A. Kiska, opposition centre-right parties, independent analytical centres and NGOs, representatives of liberally oriented intellectuals) and those actors who have had openly pro-Russian positions (KSS, some civic initiatives and individuals) or ambivalent positions leaning towards Russia and critical of Ukraine (Smer-SD).

The greatest paradox in this is the fact that the stances of centre-right opposition parties have been characterised by a high degree of accord with the Slovak Republic's official foreign policy line, implemented by the Slovak government as an EU and NATO member state, while the opinions presented by representatives of the ruling Smer-SD party, including its leader, Prime Minister Robert Fico, have often diverged from this line.



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# Slovakia's foreign policy towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

ALEXANDER DULEBA

## 1. Introduction

Analysis of Slovakia's foreign policy towards the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict under the government led by Prime Minister Robert Fico (in office since 2012) shows that this government has sent ambivalent messages regarding the conflict. Slovakia's Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs under Minister Miroslav Lajčák is one of the strongest promoters among EU member states of Ukraine's European integration, while at the same time Prime Minister Fico is one of the strongest opponents among EU leaders of EU sanctions against Russia. In this chapter, we argue that the Fico government's Eastern policy, which might seem irrational at first sight, does indeed have a logical explanation if one views it in the context of Slovakia's previous foreign policy concepts vis-à-vis Russia and Ukraine since 1993, including Slovakia's historical perception of both Russia and Ukraine in its foreign policy identity.

## 2. Russia and Ukraine in Slovakia's foreign policy

### 2.1. Russia and Ukraine in Slovakia's foreign policy identity: the historical context

Russia plays a special role in the political-historical identity of the Slovak national elite. There are of course differences between political groupings with different ideological preferences, but the image of the Soviet Union and/or imperial tsarist Russia is not so much directly linked to the image of "post-Communist Russia" in Slovak political discourse as it is in the case of neighbouring Poland or the Baltic states. Slovaks' past negative experiences with Russian imperialism are neither particularly dramatic nor particularly numerous, especially from the perspective of the history of their national emancipation. For this reason, the historical image of Russia in Slovakia is connected more with the so-called "Slavic idea" and/or the idea of "Slavic Brotherhood" than with "Russian imperialism". In fact, pan-Slavism was born in Slovakia and the Czech lands of the former Habsburg Monarchy, and formed the basic mental framework for the political thinking of the Slovak "revival elite" in the 19th century. Russia was viewed by the first generation of the Slovak national elite as a Slavic nation that could only support Slavs and/or its "ethnic brethren" in Central Europe (Duleba, 1999). As a result of national oppression after the revolutionary period in the 1840s, Slovaks showed little enthusiasm to fight for the interests of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy during the First World War. Many Czechs and Slovaks recruited into the Austro-Hungarian Army defected on the front and formed the Czechoslovak legions in Russia, Italy and France. The largest legion (numbering some 39,000 soldiers) was formed in Russia. The story of the Czechoslovak legion in Russia at the end of the First World War deserves particular attention, as the Czechs and Slovaks for the first time in their history were forced to fight against the Russians for their national freedom.

Following the agreement between the Czechoslovak National Council in exile (Masaryk, Beneš, Štefánik) and the Russian provisional government formed after the February 1917 revolution in Rus-

sia, the Czechoslovak legion became part of the Russian Army. After the Bolsheviks' coup in November 1917, followed by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with the Central Powers, the Czechoslovak legion was supposed to travel across Siberia to Vladivostok and then by ship to France and Italy, where it would be committed to combat. The Bolshevik government approved the evacuation through Siberia with the stipulation that the Czechoslovak units give up their weapons. Refusing the order to disarm, the legionnaires clashed with the Red Army. Because Czechoslovak troops then constituted the strongest and best-organised force between European Russia and the Pacific coast, they were able to take control of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, a move necessary to safeguard their departure. Due to their presence along this strategic railroad, the legionnaires became an important element in the Russian Civil War and frequently clashed with Soviet troops (Masaryk, 1925).

The experience of the legionnaires did not remove pan-Slavic sentiments from traditional Czech and Slovak thinking, however. In fact, they had deserted the Austro-Hungarian Army with the intent to join the Russian Army and to continue fighting against the Central Powers. They unwillingly took part in the Russian Civil War fighting against the Red Army, but at the same time they fought together with the White Army. Inter-war Czechoslovakia accepted a lot of White émigrés and Prague became one of the world centres of White emigration from tsarist Russia, including the Ukrainians who had struggled for an independent Ukraine in 1918–1919 (Tejchmanová, 1993).

The Slovaks were never as satisfied as the Czechs with the Czechoslovak state created in 1918, because they felt dominated by the numerically superior Czech nationals. Slovak nationalists struggled diligently throughout the 1920s for greater Slovak autonomy, and in the following decade they succeeded in obtaining constitutional changes granting more autonomy to Slovakia (Sidor, 1943). Unlike tsarist Russia, Soviet Russia – being isolated from European affairs – had been focused on its own problems and could not become a viable card in the Slovaks' efforts to secure greater autonomy. This is why the external orientation of Slovak nationalism was directed towards Germany, which made efforts to achieve a change in the *status quo* of post-war Europe. The Slovak National Party – the main political force in Slovakia until the end of the First World War which had placed great stock in Russia – was replaced in this role by the Slovak People's Party established in 1918 by a Catholic faction led by priest Andrej Hlinka (Bartlová, 1997). The backing of Slovak political separatism by Nazi Germany was among the main reasons for the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and the creation of the satellite Slovak state in 1939.

The story of the fascist clerical Slovak state during the Second World War was rather an expression of anti-Czech sentiment in Slovakia caused by Prague centralism within the First Czechoslovak Republic, as well as extraordinary international circumstances, than the culmination of a broad national consensus in Slovakia. This became clear when Slovak troops again refused to fight against the Soviets; a large number of Slovak soldiers followed the example of their forebears in the First World War and deserted to the Soviet Army. Due to mass desertions, Slovak troops were not able to fight and the Wehrmacht decided to pull them out of the Eastern front. Moreover, the Slovak National Uprising broke out against the fascist regime at home and Nazi Germany as well in 1944–1945 (Lettrich, 1993). Many Czechs and Slovaks, both civilian and military, were openly Russophile in attitude – certainly pro-Soviet if not pro-communist. Such attitudes were strengthened when Czechoslovakia was betrayed by France and the United Kingdom at Munich in 1938 and again when the Soviet Army liberated most of the country in 1945. The Slovak people generally did not welcome the Red Army as communist occupiers, but rather as their Slavic Brothers coming to liberate Slovakia. The reality after the Second World War, however, did not correspond to Slovak national aspirations.

After the collapse of the communist regimes in 1989, the national political forces which emerged in Central and Eastern Europe derived their legitimacy from the political message of the first generation of national "revival" elite in the 19th century. Czechs had lost their "Russian illusion" from the Slavic Revival in the 19th century mostly as late as after 1968, but Slovak nationalists did not, as the Czechoslovak state was not "their own". Moreover, the former unitary state of communist Czechoslovakia had become a federal state with Slovakia as a federal republic only after 1968. From the standpoint of the "nationalist scheme" of Slovak history, one could hardly find a negative Slovak experience with

Russia in the past. This is something that makes the Slovak perception of Russia unique in the Central European region, especially compared with modern Polish or Baltic historical views of Russia.

Modern Slovak nationalism draws directly on the message of Ľudovít Štúr's "revivalist generation" seeking a new national identity for the new independent Slovak state. Due to the fascist character of the wartime Slovak state (1939–1945) which was rejected by the majority of the Slovak population, there is no other acceptable historical or ideological background for modern Slovak nationalism. The policy process and security debates in Slovakia since 1993 have also been determined by the fact that Slovak-Hungarian relations have direct domestic political implications. Slovakia's nationalist-oriented political forces (especially the Slovak National Party, formally re-established in 1990, albeit ideologically fundamentally different from the historical SNS) perceive Russia as a "desired" power in Central Europe, a Russia which is able and willing to counterbalance the German-Hungarian influence in the region, if referring to their "historical terms" (Tesař, 1995). This is the background for their efforts to revive the pan-Slavic idea and/or "special relationship" with Russia, etc. "Slavic solidarity" and/or "special relations with Russia" was one of the key arguments used by opponents of Slovakia's NATO membership during the so-called "NATO versus neutrality" debate in Slovakia in the 1990s (Bútorá – Šebej, 1998), and it has been revived in the Slovak public discourse in the context of the current Russian-Ukrainian crisis.

To sum up, the main current of Slovak nationalism has traditionally been pro-Russian. By contrast, Ukrainian nationalism has quite different historical features, being traditionally anti-Russian, which makes it similar to Polish nationalism. This is another reason for Slovakia's historical "coolness" towards Ukraine and Ukrainians. It follows the logic of historical events that Slovaks view Ukraine mainly from the Russian perspective. It took more than a decade after the collapse of communism for both the Slovak political establishment and the general public to cease to perceive the entire post-Soviet space predominantly as "Russia". This traditional stereotype provided a negative mental framework for Slovak-Ukrainian relations after both nations became independent in the early 1990s.

Moreover, the modern perception of Ukraine by Slovaks has been affected by myths from the past portraying Ukrainians as *Banderovtsi*, which became synonymous with "bandits". This historical image, which was supported by both Soviet historiography and communist propaganda, strongly influenced Slovaks' perception of Ukraine and Ukrainians after the Second World War. The myth relates to the activities of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) on the territory of Slovakia towards the end of the Second World War and thereafter. The UPA, founded in 1942, fought against both the armies of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in hopes of establishing an independent Ukraine. Ukrainian partisans controlled most of Western Ukraine until the 1950s and were also active in south-eastern Poland and north-eastern Slovakia. In accordance with Soviet and official Czechoslovak propaganda, Slovaks viewed Ukrainian partisans as bandits instead of fighters for an independent Ukraine (Bajcura, 1967; Potichnyj, 1987).

Taking the history of Slovak and Ukrainian nationalism together, it is hard to find examples of common interests and cooperation in the past. On the other hand, unlike Polish-Ukrainian relations, there are also no historical conflicts which could be a source of national animosity or conflict in the future. Rather, Slovaks and Ukrainians are historically indifferent to each other.

## **2.2. Three concepts of a modern Slovak foreign policy towards Russia and Ukraine**

Slovakia's approach towards Russia and Ukraine since 1993, when it achieved independence and started formulating its own foreign policy, is rather an evolving concept. Slovak governments since 1993 have shaped their policies towards Russia and Ukraine according to pragmatic considerations driven by domestic developments and a changing international environment. Differing domestic and foreign policy priorities have led different Slovak governments to different concepts of their relations with the East European countries.

Slovakia has had nine governments and eleven foreign ministers over the last twenty-three years, but only four prime ministers. Vladimír Mečiar, Mikuláš Dzurinda, Robert Fico and Iveta Radičová

formed governments with diverse political programmes, including the country's foreign policy.<sup>107</sup> When it comes to the relationship with Russia and Ukraine and their role in the projection of Slovakia's national interests on the international scene, Mečiar, Dzurinda/Radičová and Fico approached relations with Slovakia's Eastern neighbours from different political perspectives.

### *2.2.1. Strategic rapprochement with Russia under Vladimír Mečiar (1993–1998)*

In terms of Slovakia's economic interests, the Soviet Union and Russia played an important role within the former Czechoslovakia. The military industrial production of Czechoslovakia – geared mostly towards the Soviet Union and, later, Russia – was concentrated on the territory of Slovakia, playing a dominant role in the country's economy. More than 30% (according to various sources between 30% and 40%) of Slovak industrial capacity was oriented towards the Soviet Union in terms of both import dependence on the supply of parts and the marketing of the final product exports. Economic circles connected with the military industrial complex in Slovakia rejected the Czechoslovak federal government's programme to convert the military industry already in the late 1980s (Stigel, 1993). Representatives of this part of the Slovak economy became supporters of the division of Czechoslovakia, as they believed they could manage their economic interests better within an independent state. In this way, the intellectual and political arguments for Slovak separatism were supplemented with an economic impetus, which became one of the decisive factors leading to the division of Czechoslovakia.

The Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) led by Vladimír Mečiar became the strongest political force in Slovakia in the 1990s thanks also to the fact that it came to be the main representative of the interests of precisely the military branch of Slovak industry. HZDS won the parliamentary elections in 1992 and managed the process of the division of Czechoslovakia with the leading political force in the Czech Republic, the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), led by Václav Klaus. Mečiar's government endeavoured to develop "special economic relations" with Russia in order to sustain the interests of the Slovak military industry. In 1993–1995, a strategic vision was formulated in Slovakia which implied that Slovakia should become a geo-economic bridge between the West and the East. According to this vision, the closer relations were between Slovakia and Russia, the more important Slovakia would become for the West. Russia greatly appreciated the Slovak government's pragmatic approach to bilateral cooperation, and rendered its support to the Mečiar government, including through lower prices on energy resources (Duleba, 1996).

All Slovak governments since 1993, including the third Mečiar government (1994–1998), declared that their main foreign policy goal was integration into Western structures (NATO and the EU). However, due to its authoritarian style of domestic politics, the Mečiar government disqualified Slovakia from the first round of NATO enlargement and from the opening of negotiations on EU accession in the late 1990s. Mečiar's egregious statement "if they don't want us in the West, we shall turn East" well illustrated his approach to coping with the strategic dilemma of the country's foreign policy (Wolf, 1993, p. 2). Unlike the US and the EU, Russia supported the then Slovak government politically against the West in defence of its "specific form of democracy". Reciprocally, Mečiar demonstrated sympathy for Russia's criticism of NATO's eastward expansion. Moreover, after 1995 Mečiar understood that Slovakia under his rule would not become a member of either NATO or the EU. Relations with Russia became a foreign policy priority for his cabinet and were considered an alternative to Slovakia's Euro-Atlantic integration (Duleba, 1997).

Ukraine was not visible on the radar of the Slovak political elite at the beginning of the 1990s, as it was not a sufficiently relevant external actor to pursue a Slovak national agenda within Czechoslovakia. The "Moscow card" could be and was used politically by the Slovak elite in the Czechoslovak domestic agenda while a "Kyiv card" could not have been. Therefore, despite the fact that both

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**107** There is continuity when it comes to foreign policy concepts between the government led by Radičová (July 2010–April 2012) and Dzurinda in the two subsequent periods of 1998–2002 and 2002–2006. Dzurinda also served as foreign minister in Radičová's government. Both were leading representatives of the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ), the party which was the strongest force in the governing coalitions led by Dzurinda and Radičová.

Ukraine and Slovakia became new independent states, the different international conditions surrounding their respective processes of acquiring independence prevented a platform of common interests from emerging (Duleba, 2000).

The Slovak attitude towards Ukraine during the Mečiar period (1993–1998) might be characterised as an “indifferent neighbourhood”. Then Slovak Deputy Prime Minister Sergej Kozlík expressed it realistically at the end of a Slovak-Ukrainian governmental meeting in June 1995: “Ukraine is a gate to the Russian market for us and its transit capabilities for Slovak goods must be increased ten times at least.” (Duleba, 1996). In other words, relations with Ukraine were considered to be important for Slovakia not in their own right, but because of the importance for Slovakia of relations with Russia. One can discern some positive changes in Slovak attitudes towards Ukraine after 1995 under the Mečiar government. These were connected partially with the coming understanding that for Slovakia Ukraine was not only a “gate to the Russian market” but also a partner worthy of attention in its own right. This may be highlighted by understanding the fact that the “gate” would remain closed if bilateral Slovak-Ukrainian political ties did not improve. On the other hand, Mečiar’s growing attention to Ukraine and his government’s attempt to revitalise bilateral relations in 1995–1996 was part of his “turning to the East” strategy after the “democracy dispute” with the West.

In the end, Mečiar’s policy led Slovakia into an international deadlock, but Mečiar’s authoritarian style undermined his political and public support at home and led to the emergence of a united political front of opposition forces that won the 1998 elections.

#### 2.2.2. *Prioritising relations with Ukraine under Mikuláš Dzurinda (1998–2006)*

The government led by Mikuláš Dzurinda, which came to power after the 1998 parliamentary elections, completely changed the parameters of Slovakia’s foreign policy, including relations with Russia. The “Medium-Term Concept of Slovak Foreign Policy”, which further developed the foreign policy programme of Dzurinda’s government, declared (*Priority...*, 2000): “Foreign policy towards Russia should be entirely coordinated with the EU approach, while in the security sphere Slovak-Russian mutual cooperation must continue to be determined by the nature of ties between the Russian Federation and NATO.” Official government materials under Prime Minister Dzurinda dealing with Russia contain two basic components: firstly, a declaration of the desire for “correct”, “balanced”, “partner-like” and “mutually advantageous” relations with Russia; and secondly, a statement that Russia remains an important economic partner for Slovakia, particularly with regard to imports of strategic energy resources. Apart from the business-like approach to mutual relations under the second Dzurinda government, both sides recognised that they differed on a number of important international issues, and on the assessment of developments in the “common neighbourhood” in particular. They differed significantly in their view of the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine and of the political regime in Belarus under President Lukashenko. Dzurinda’s government became an active supporter of political changes in Ukraine and of civil society in Belarus. At the official level, both Russia and Slovakia referred several times to profound differences on these issues (*Kukan...*, 2006).

In relations with Ukraine, Dzurinda’s government proclaimed a will to change the attitudes and practices of the Mečiar years, but quite to the contrary the first two years of Dzurinda’s government (1998–2000) could be characterised as the most problematic years in the modern Slovak-Ukrainian relationship since the beginning of the 1990s. Both countries were competing within the UN for the chairmanship of the 52nd General Assembly in 1997, which was followed by competition for a seat on the UN Security Council representing the Central European group of countries in 1999. Another misunderstanding in bilateral ties was connected with Slovakia’s support for Gazprom’s plan to construct a new natural gas pipeline – the so-called Yamal 2 – bypassing the territory of Ukraine via Poland and Slovakia. In addition, Dzurinda’s government decided to introduce a visa regime for Ukrainian citizens in 2000, arguing that Slovakia must bring its visa policy in line with EU regulations, a step that Ukraine considered “premature” referring to Poland and Hungary. For its part, the Ukrainian government decided to respond by denouncing the readmission treaty with Slovakia, etc.

The problems that emerged in the 1998–2000 period refuted the perception on both sides in previous years that an “indifferent neighbourhood” was an adequate approach to the bilateral relationship. Slovak-Ukrainian relations witnessed intense bilateral contacts at a high level in 2001 in an extent that was incomparable with the practice of previous years. Both sides agreed to liberalise the visa regime, Ukraine stopped the process of denouncing the readmission treaty with Slovakia, the two countries reached an accord on cooperation in the transit of crude oil from the Caspian basin to the EU and Central European markets, etc. Thus, 2001 might be characterised as a new beginning in the modern Slovak-Ukrainian relationship.

A new phase in Slovak-Ukrainian relations started in 2004, when the second Dzurinda cabinet introduced the formulation of its “post-accession” priorities in Slovak foreign policy. In his March 2004 presentation at the annual review conference on Slovak foreign policy, Dzurinda for the first time declared publicly that Ukraine and the Western Balkans were new foreign policy priorities for Slovakia after its admission to Euro-Atlantic structures. Dzurinda declared that “Slovakia has the ambition to become an advocate of Ukraine and countries of the Western Balkans in the EU and NATO, and to help them in pursuing reforms and the development of civil society”. He repeated these words at the Prime Ministerial Conference of the Vilnius and Visegrad Democracies: “Towards a Wider Europe: the new agenda”, which was held in Bratislava on 19 March 2004 (*Vystúpenie...*, 2004).

The “Proposal for Slovakia’s Assistance to Ukraine in the Implementation of the Objectives of the EU-Ukraine Action Plan” should be considered a key step towards the fulfilment of Slovakia’s new foreign policy priorities vis-à-vis Ukraine. It included more than 40 specific activities through which Slovak governmental and non-governmental organisations could provide expert assistance to their Ukrainian partners in implementing the EU-Ukraine Action Plan. The Ukrainian government, eager to become an EU member, considered the fulfilment of the Action Plan’s goals a foreign policy priority. Taking into account the Slovak Republic’s “best practices” principle in legislation and institutional reform during the EU integration process, Slovak institutions shared their know-how with their Ukrainian counterparts. The goal was to fulfil the EU-Ukraine Action Plan, which was supposed to result in a new EU-Ukraine treaty (*Slovensko...*, 2005). At a meeting with EU countries’ ambassadors to Ukraine, then Prime Minister Yuriy Yekhanurov expressed appreciation for the Slovak Republic’s proposal, saying (Tretecký, 2006): “Several countries have offered assistance to Ukraine in implementing the Action Plan. Slovakia’s proposal is the best, though.”

Even though Slovakia approach towards Ukraine under the Dzurinda government differed from that of Russia, the latter accepted Bratislava as the venue for a summit between Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush in February 2005. It appears that the second Dzurinda government managed to succeed in making Slovakia a bridge between the West and the East to an even greater extent than Mečiar had desired.

### *2.2.3. A double-track policy by Robert Fico (2006–2010, and since 2012)*

The new left-oriented government elected in 2006 and led by Robert Fico declared that it would pursue continuity in the area of foreign policy. Nevertheless, Fico’s government approached relations with its Eastern neighbours by emphasising aspects of foreign policy that its predecessor had not. First of all, it committed itself to intensifying the economic dimension of Slovak foreign policy (*Programové...*, 2006). Prime Minister Fico specified that the economic dimension of Slovak foreign policy would concern mainly the further development of Slovakia’s relations with Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe. He believed relations with Russia would be stimulated because the new cabinet would provide significantly more support to the economic dimension of foreign policy including countries such as Russia, Ukraine, and China (Duleba, 2008). Based on an analysis of this attitude towards the development of relations with Russia, the think tank European Council for Foreign Relations included Slovakia in the group of EU member states designated as “Friendly Pragmatists” in relations with Russia (Leonard – Popescu, 2007).

The Slovak government’s emphasis on a pragmatic economic approach towards its Eastern neighbours did not prevent the gas crisis in January 2009, however, as the delivery of Russian natural gas to



Slovakia via Ukraine was fully stopped for the first time since the transit pipeline was put into operation in 1972. In January 2009, circa 1,000 Slovak companies had to halt production for almost two weeks. According to an official estimate by the Slovak Ministry of Economy, total economic losses amounted to more than EUR 1 billion (Duleba, 2009). The gas crisis of January 2009 compelled Fico's government to approach the issue of energy security much more seriously, including looking for alternative ways to secure the supply of natural gas to Slovakia. At the same time, the crisis strongly affected Fico's perception of Ukraine, as he believed that the Ukrainian government led by Yulia Tymoshenko could help Slovakia to minimise the economic damage resulting from the gas crisis, although it did not (*Ukrajina...*, 2009).

There are two principal similarities between the approaches to Russia pursued by Mečiar and Fico. Both emphasised developing pragmatic economic relations with Russia, and both exhibited a certain sympathy for Russia's positions on a number of issues on the European and international security agenda. Fico paid his first official visit to Russia on 4 May 2007. Before and during the talks with Putin, he heralded his understanding of Russia's concerns with regard to the then anticipated deployment of elements of the US National Missile Defense (NMD) in the Czech Republic and Poland, and stressed that he personally would never have agreed to such deployments on the territory of the Slovak Republic. The president of Russia greatly appreciated the Slovak prime minister's position on the issue of NMD. Both sides also agreed on the resolution of Kosovo's final status. Fico informed Putin of the resolution passed by the National Council of the Slovak Republic (the parliament) rejecting the option of a unilateral solution for Kosovo's status. He added, however, that "the Slovak Republic will not be more Serbian than the Serbs themselves" (*Informácia...*, 2007).

It is important to note that the NMD position articulated by Fico in Moscow did not enjoy sufficient support back home, including in the Slovak government. The gap between his statements and the policy of the Slovak Foreign Ministry and then Slovak President Ivan Gašparovič was obvious, since Slovakia, as a NATO member state, had endorsed the Bucharest Summit Declaration of April 2007 – before the prime minister's visit to Moscow. Article 37 of that Declaration approved the deployment of American NMD in Europe as a contribution to the security of all members of the alliance. The statements of Fico also provoked critical reactions from the Czech and Polish governments (*Topolánek...*, 2007). In addition, unlike most Western leaders, Fico considered Russia's military aggression against Georgia in 2008 as having been provoked by irresponsible policies on the part of then Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. In short, when it came to certain key issues of the international security agenda which caused tensions between the majority of NATO and EU countries on one side and Russia on the other, Fico articulated a position close to or identical with that of Russia.

Despite Fico's growing personal cold-hearted approach towards Ukraine, especially after the gas crisis of 2009, his government followed the policy lines on Ukraine drawn by the Dzurinda government. Moreover, if one compares the intensity of bilateral contacts and Slovakia's support for Ukraine's European integration, including the activities of the Slovak Embassy in Kyiv as the NATO Contact Point Embassy during 2007–2009, one could conclude that Slovakia's political approach towards Ukraine under the Fico government, i.e. assisting it to come closer to the EU, was even more active than that of its predecessor (*Správa...*, 2007). This is what justifies the characterisation of Slovakia's Eastern policy under the Fico government as a double-track approach.

Slovakia welcomed the Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative launched in 2009 as a logical outcome of European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) developments since 2004 which supported Slovakia's constant argument that the EU should make a distinction between its Eastern and Southern neighbours. Its Eastern neighbours should be offered both special treatment and the prospect of EU membership. Slovak foreign policy supported the EU signing Association Agreements including DCFTA with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia on one hand, while calling for good relations with Russia on the other. In 2013, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák initiated two meetings of the Friends of Ukraine Group created by foreign ministers of certain EU member states in order to promote the signing of the Association Agreement with Ukraine at the Vilnius summit in November of that year (*Na podnet...*, 2013). Throughout the events that have taken place in Ukraine since then,

Slovakia has expressed its support for the new Maidan government, the territorial integrity of Ukraine and its course of European integration. Slovak diplomats have emphasised that Slovakia is ready to share with Ukraine its experience of transformation through building stable democratic institutions, implementing economic and social reforms, and harmonisation with European legislation as required under the Association Agreement. At the same time, Slovak foreign policy under PM Fico has begun to place greater emphasis on the Russian aspect of EU policy towards East European countries. It points out that the EaP should not become an anti-Russian project; rather, it should be viewed as “very good preparation for the future unification of all parts of Europe in one European project” (*Vystúpenie...*, 2008).

To sum up, Slovakia’s Eastern policy in the course of the last two decades shows an oscillation between support for democratic change in the Eastern Partnership countries, including their European integration, and “pragmatic” economic cooperation with Russia, including “zero conflict relations” between the EU/NATO and Russia. However, the events in Ukraine and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict of 2014 have shown that pursuing both policies at the same time is very difficult to manage. Nevertheless, the current Fico government continues to follow the double-track line. Whereas the centre-right governments led by Mikuláš Dzurinda (2002–2006) and Iveta Radičová (2010–2012) preferred the EU’s value-based approach to the region, even at the cost of possible conflicts with Russia, the centre-left governments led by Fico (2006–2010, and since 2012) have favoured “pragmatic” zero-conflict relations between NATO/EU and Russia, even if this means the possible failure of Eastern Partnership countries to move closer to the EU.

### 3. Slovakia’s approach towards the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict

#### 3.1. The ambivalent voice of official Slovakia

The events in Ukraine starting in November 2013, including Russia’s aggression against Ukraine in 2014, have not changed the Slovak government’s pragmatic approach towards Russia and Ukraine. The Fico government has continued to advance its ambivalent double-track policy of trying to maintain good relations with both countries. Slovak foreign policy has been following a course of providing support for Ukraine’s European integration, whereas Prime Minister Fico has cast doubt on it. The Slovak government has signed off on all measures adopted by the EU and NATO, including the economic sanctions on Russia for its aggression against Ukraine, while Prime Minister Fico has deprecated them. On one hand, during the country’s V4 presidency (July 2014 – June 2015) Slovak diplomats managed to implement an important agreement on the division of roles among the V4 countries in supporting reforms in Ukraine. On the other hand, Ambassador of Ukraine to Slovakia Oleh Havashi had to respond to Prime Minister Fico’s statements on Ukraine pointing out that “a good neighbour cannot speak like this” (*Ukrajinský...*, 2014).

The anti-sanctions rhetoric typified by Prime Minister Fico is not the only strand in Slovakia’s governmental view of the Ukrainian crisis, however. Ivan Gašparovič, who was the country’s president until June 2014 and was elected with the support of Fico’s ruling Smer-SD party, was the first Slovak official to declare publicly that the EU should respond to Russia’s aggression by offering Ukraine a clear prospect of EU membership (*Speech by the President...*, 2014). Deputy Prime Minister Lajčák, in his speech at the October 2014 “East European crisis: scenarios and EU response” conference, stressed the need to seek a diplomatic solution to the crisis, although when elaborating on a further upgrade to the Eastern Partnership he pointed out that the EU should open discussions on the prospect of EU membership for partner countries (*Speech by Deputy...*, 2014). The strongest criticism of Fico’s anti-sanctions rhetoric, however, has come from newly elected President Andrej Kiska, who defeated the prime minister in the presidential elections in March 2014. Kiska was elected on the back of a cam-

paign that clearly stressed condemnation of Russia's annexation of Crimea, support for democratic change in Ukraine and the need for EU/NATO solidarity vis-à-vis Russia's aggression. In his inaugural speech, President Kiska said (*Slovakia. A New ...*, 2014): "I will continue in the tradition of previous presidents who were always strong supporters of Euro-Atlantic cooperation."

### 3.2. Slovakia versus EU and NATO policy

As stated above, Prime Minister Fico has been one of the most outspoken EU leaders in opposing economic sanctions against Russia as a result of the Ukrainian crisis, not least because of the impact on Slovakia's own economy. Commenting on the conclusion of the EU summit in May 2014 acknowledging the ongoing preparatory work of the Commission and EEAS on targeted measures against Russia, he said that tougher sanctions would be "suicidal" and "nonsensical" (*Fico...*, 2014).

Nonetheless, Fico and Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign and European Affairs Minister Miroslav Lajčák have stressed that Slovakia has conducted itself as a responsible EU member in respect of the Ukrainian crisis, including its policy towards Russia. The prime minister has also pointed to the conflicting stances of other member states, citing the example of France, which despite talk of solidarity and pursuant to its own economic interests has not cancelled outright the sale of military vessels to Russia. He has also noted the apparent contradiction in the EU's efforts to prevent a potential energy crisis in Ukraine, while a "German, French and Italian company" had signed a deal with Russia's Gazprom on the construction of South Stream, the gas transmission line that would bypass Ukraine (*PM...*, 2014). It should be noted that no respective comments came from Prime Minister Fico in September 2014 when French President Hollande announced that France would postpone delivery of Mistral vessels to Russia and respectively in December 2014 when Gazprom announced that it was cancelling construction of South Stream.

In theory, the imposition of economic sanctions on Russia by the EU and a reciprocal approach by Russia would threaten Slovak exports to Russia worth EUR 2.5 billion, which represents a 4% share of Slovakia's total exports of EUR 64.3 billion in 2013. The loss of the Russian market would not have compelling consequences for the Slovak economy; however, it would impact certain large Slovak companies that are also important employers, e.g. KIA Motors Žilina (automobile production), Tatravagónka Poprad (rail trucks) and others whose production activities depend essentially on exports to Russia. A trade war with Russia would also undermine the supply of service parts to the Slovak military, as it uses weapon systems mostly of Russian provenience.

In reality, the analysis of the Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic published on 18 February 2015 concludes that the EU economic sanctions on Russia introduced in July 2014 have had a negligible impact on the Slovak economy thus far, and led to a reduction in Slovakia's bilateral trade with Russia of circa 16% in both exports and imports from Russia in 2014 compared to 2013. The analysis also says that Slovak agricultural producers lost circa EUR 8 million due to a retaliatory Russian ban on agricultural imports from the EU (*Sankcie...*, 2015). Against the National Bank of Slovakia's estimates of Slovakia's GDP growth of 3.2% in 2015 and 3.8% in 2016 (*NBS...*, 2015), PM Fico's dramatic anti-sanctions rhetoric can hardly be explained in economic terms.

When faced with criticism from NATO on Slovakia's failure to meet the country's membership commitment in the area of defence spending (Slovakia promised 2% of GDP in 2004 when it became a NATO member, but the reality in 2014 was circa 1%), especially in view of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine, Prime Minister Fico said Slovakia would not increase its defence spending (*Slovakia nurtures...*, 2014). Nevertheless, in May 2015 the Slovak government approved a gradual alteration of its aviation forces. Under the plan, the Ministry of Defence would invest in (purchasing or leasing) new helicopters, fighters, and transport aircraft with the aim to replace existing Russian equipment. According to publically available information, the Slovak Army should obtain Black Hawk helicopters and Spartan transport aircraft from the US, as well as Swedish Grippen fighters (*Vláda...*, 2015). It has been the case several times in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis that PM Fico's public statements have not corresponded to what his government was in fact doing.

### 3.3. Reverse flow of gas

In April 2014, the Slovak government reached a deal with its Ukrainian counterpart that was trying to secure alternative gas supplies when Gazprom raised its prices to levels that Ukraine refused to pay. The Slovak government did not, however, go as far as to accede to Ukraine's push for the use of the main transit pipelines on Slovak territory with free capacity exceeding 30 billion cubic metres (bcm) of gas per year that would give Ukraine access to larger volumes of gas, arguing that this would violate Slovakia's transit contract with Gazprom (*Slovakia reaches...*, 2014). Nevertheless, an alternative technical solution was found involving upgrading the previously unused pipeline from Slovakia's Vojany power station, near the border with the western Ukrainian town of Uzhhorod. The technical solution was necessary in order not to violate the contract between Eustream, a.s. and Gazprom, which stipulates that the only company which can issue shifting codes at the Uzhhorod dispatching centre on the main transit pipelines at the Slovak-Ukrainian border is Gazprom. The new interconnector from Vojany to the Ukrainian border, including a new metering station, was put into operation on 2 September 2014 with annual capacity of 10 bcm. Two months later, its capacity was increased to 11.4 bcm per year, and finally to more than 14.5 bcm per year starting on 1 March 2015 (*Robert Fico: Sme...*, 2015).

Even though Russia has responded by reducing the delivery of gas to Slovakia, Deputy Prime Minister Lajčák has refuted assertions that the government might stop the reverse gas flow to Ukraine. At the Foreign Affairs Council of the EU held in Luxemburg in October 2014, he said (*Lajčák...*, 2014): "Our reverse flow has already saved Ukraine approximately half a billion USD, as confirmed by a high representative of the Ukrainian government. We are continuing with practical assistance to Ukraine through the reverse flow despite a 50% reduction in the gas supply for Slovakia. This is our concrete contribution to the discussion on how to help Ukraine to survive this winter."

Following a statement by Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk on 30 December 2014, Ukraine saved almost USD 1 billion in 2014 thanks to the reverse flows of gas from Europe due to the difference between Russian and European gas prices. Gas supply to Ukraine has been diversified – Ukraine has switched 60% of its gas supply from Russia to the European Union (*Arseniy...*, 2014). The Vojany interconnector put into operation in September 2014 plays an important role in Ukraine's energy security, especially in the context of the full stoppage of gas supplies from Russia to Ukraine as of June 2014. In the end, the reverse flow of gas from Slovakia to Ukraine is a business project, but it nevertheless represents a strategic contribution on the part of Slovakia to Ukraine's energy security.

### 3.4. Slovakia's assistance to Ukraine

One of the main achievements of Slovakia Visegrad Group presidency (July 2014 – June 2015) was an agreement among the V4 countries coordinating the Group's assistance to Ukraine. The agreement was achieved at a meeting of deputy foreign ministers in Lviv in October 2014 and reconfirmed by V4 foreign ministers at a meeting with their Ukrainian counterpart in Kyiv in December 2014. The V4 countries agreed on their specific roles with respect to the sectorial focus of their assistance to Ukraine in its reform process related to the implementation of the Association Agreement with the EU. Slovakia took on a leadership role in the fields of energy security and security sector reform (Czech Republic – education and civil society, Hungary – SME and implementation of DCFTA, and Poland – public administration reform, including decentralisation; *P. Burian...*, 2014). Slovakia's bilateral assistance to Ukraine in the form of development projects, technical assistance and humanitarian aid funded from both governmental sources and public collections organised by Slovak NGOs in 2014 amounted to circa EUR 900,000.<sup>108</sup>

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**108** Data were provided by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic in response to the author's request.

## 4. Conclusions

The current Slovak government under Prime Minister Robert Fico is following a double-track approach towards Russia and Ukraine, i.e. it aims at maintaining good relations with both countries regardless of the fact that they are engaged in a conflict. It supports the Eastern Partnership initiative, including Ukraine's European integration, but with a preference that it should not become an anti-Russian project. Slovakia's Eastern "pragmatism" represented by the current Fico government feeds the development of an EU policy towards Eastern Europe which includes mainly prospects for trade liberalisation with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The problem faced by Slovakia's ruling pragmatists is that the map of Slovakia's interests in Eastern Europe as they see them does not correspond fully to the map of the EU's Eastern Partnership. They welcome the conclusion of DCFTA with Ukraine and support any move that might lead the EU to conclude FTA deals with Russia and Belarus. They do not consider political conditionality, which is a part of any comprehensive EU trade deal with third countries, to be a factor that should prevent the EU from doing pragmatic business with Russia or Belarus. Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are among Slovakia's main foreign trading partners. Russia is the first here (with bilateral trade turnover of EUR 8.7 billion in 2013), followed by Ukraine (EUR 1.1 billion) and Belarus (EUR 100 million; *Statistical...*, 2014).<sup>109</sup> Thus far, Slovakia's other Eastern neighbours do not play an important role in either the country's foreign trade or its foreign policy.

Even if we assume that Prime Minister Fico is genuine in sharing the Russian narrative of the crisis, the fact is that his government and he personally have thus far agreed to all restrictive measures against Russia adopted by the EU Council. Moreover, in accommodating Ukraine's desire for reverse flows of natural gas, Fico's government undertook a clearly anti-Russian move by eliminating Russia's leverage on Ukraine in this area. This contradiction between PM Fico's public statements and certain decisions in the matter of the crisis might be explained, first, by the traditional foreign policy identity of Slovak nationalism in which Russia is portrayed via the historical schism of "Slavic Brotherhood" and, second, by domestic political considerations.

Prime Minister Fico lost the presidential election campaign to independent candidate Andrej Kiska in March 2014, including a debate on Slovakia's policy towards the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. In order to mobilise his party electorate (circa 35% of eligible voters according to recent public opinion polls) before the next parliamentary elections scheduled for March 2016, he needs to clearly profile his political agenda against President Kiska and the parliamentary opposition, including the narrative of the crisis, which has become a key topic in Slovakia's public discourse. Therefore, regardless of what he personally thinks about the nature of the crisis, the logic of the domestic political battle is pushing him to tell Smer-SD voters what they want to hear rather than to challenge their views. Being a centre-left "pragmatist" who measures and/or sells to the public the rationale of his political activities by means of a number of social and economic benefits delivered to Slovak citizens by his government, Prime Minister Fico will never give preference to foreign trade with Russia (6.8% of Slovakia's total foreign trade in 2013) at the expense of foreign trade with other EU member states (85% of Slovakia's total foreign trade in 2013). In other words, whatever Prime Minister Fico says on the matter of the crisis, it is highly unlikely that Slovakia under his government will spoil the common EU policy.

In the realm of foreign policy, the Slovak government will continue to pursue its double-track Eastern policy: first, it will aim to minimise the conflict between the EU/NATO and Russia, supporting any measures that might lead to a diplomatic solution to the crisis, a lifting of the sanctions, and a reopening of prospects for trade liberalisation between the EU and Russia or possibly the Eurasian Union, and second, it will provide support to Ukraine in implementing AA/DCFTA with the EU. Although the two policy lines might seem incompatible, this is and will be Slovakia's policy on the

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**109** Slovakia's bilateral trade turnover with other Eastern Partnership countries is rather negligible: Moldova – EUR 70 million, Azerbaijan – EUR 70 million, Georgia – EUR 6 million, Armenia – EUR 5 million.

crisis under Fico's government. If the EU and NATO are brought into a higher level of confrontation with Russia owing to further escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, and a critical mass, i.e. a clear majority of EU and NATO member states, are able to achieve a common position and policy towards the crisis, then Fico's government will adapt itself to such a reality. In sum, Slovakia under Fico's government will be neither a major driver of EU/NATO policy on the crisis nor an obstructor if a common policy is in place.

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# Economics and energy in Slovak-Russian relations in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict

JURAJ MESÍK

## 1. Introduction

In spite of similar historical experiences, the response of Visegrad countries to Russian aggression in Ukraine was strikingly divided (Forbrig, 2015): “Despite a shared history as Soviet satellites, still fresh transition experience, deep understanding of Eastern Europe and Russia, and geographic proximity to the conflict, this region has been surprisingly divided. This casts considerable doubt on Central Europe’s oft-declared ambition to act as an internal EU advocate of a stable and democratic neighbourhood to the East.” Some journalists and analysts describe this divided response to the war in Ukraine as “the end of Visegrad cooperation” (Šimečka, 2015), echoing widespread rhetoric in 2003 suggesting that the European Union was “the first victim of the Iraq War”.

The energy dependence of Slovakia as well as certain other EU countries on Russia is hardly a new discovery. Quite to the contrary, it has been identified as a major security risk ever since the fall of communism and the Soviet empire. Unlike initial heavy dependence on trade with the former Soviet Union, energy dependence was never truly mitigated by the concerted efforts of Slovak political elites. Like democratic governments in Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and elsewhere, successive Slovak governments – including clearly pro-Western ones – failed to design and implement meaningful, comprehensive and effective strategies leading towards a radical reduction in Slovakia’s dependence on Russian natural gas, oil and nuclear technology. This failure occurred despite clear evidence that Gazprom had been systematically and repeatedly used and abused as the Kremlin’s political weapon (Gyarmati, 2015): “After a first gas crisis erupted in 2006, which was provoked by Russian supply cuts to Ukraine and interrupted gas transit to the EU, European countries tried to decrease their dependence on Russian gas, but these efforts have been insufficient by far. Driven by the wishful thinking that Russia would still be a reliable partner, these measures were implemented half-heartedly.”

This chapter provides a broader overview of Slovakia’s economic and energy relations and dependencies with Russia, and tries to help to improve our understanding of whether and how they could influence the Slovak government’s response to Russia’s aggression, annexation of Crimea, and war in Donbas. In addition to current realities, it provides some ideas about the broader context and consequences of the V4 – Russia – Ukraine energy and trade triangle, and makes several recommendations concerning meaningful policy priorities.

## 2. How significant a trading partner is Russia to Slovakia?

The economic links between Slovakia and Russia are an important part of the political rhetoric of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, and, as a vocal aspect of pro-Russian propaganda in Slovakia, they have significant impact on perceptions among a portion of the public. Twenty-five years ago when communism was collapsing, the Soviet Union was a leading trading partner for all Visegrad countries including Slovakia – at the time a constituent part of Czechoslovakia. While Czechoslovakia and

later Slovakia and the Czech Republic undertook a massive Westward shift in their trade relations and detached themselves from their dependency on trade with Russia, the one last remaining dependency, carefully nourished by Slovak and Russian political elites, remained until recently the near total dependency on imports of Russian natural gas, oil and nuclear technology and fuel.

Basic information about Russia’s recent position in Slovakia’s international trade is provided by Table 1.

**Table 1. Export and import profile of the Slovak Republic, 2013**

Breakdown in economy’s total exports		Breakdown in economy’s total imports	
Agricultural products	5.9	Agricultural products	7.6
Fuels and mining products	8.0	Fuels and mining products	16.6
Manufactures	85.8	Manufactures	75.6
By main destination		By main destination	
<b>1. European Union (28)</b>	<b>82.9</b>	<b>1. European Union (28)</b>	<b>52.5</b>
<b>2. Russian Federation</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>2. Russian Federation</b>	<b>10.0</b>
3. China	2.5	3. Korea	8.6
4. United States	1.8	4. China	7.3
5. Switzerland	1.6	5. Vietnam	2.1

**Source:** World Trade Organization, <http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFView.aspx?Language=E&Country=SK>

More specifically, Slovakia’s main export goods to Russia in 2012 were transport vehicles and other machinery, representing 81.7%, followed by other industrial products (7.3%), general market goods (5.8%) and chemical products (3.5%). On the imports side, 90% were mineral fuels and lubricants followed by other raw materials (4.9%), machinery (2.4%), and chemicals (1.1%) (Foreign, 2012, p. 21).

In 2014, however, Russia’s share in Slovakia’s exports dropped by EUR 470 million – almost one-fifth of its value in 2013 – to 3.2% of total Slovak exports (Economy, 2015b, pp. 8–9). A similarly significant (but much larger in absolute terms) 20% drop was also recorded on the side of imports from Russia to Slovakia totalling EUR 1.225 billion. Thus, Russia’s share in Slovakia’s imports declined to 8.2%, roughly equivalent to China’s 7.7% share and South Korea’s 7.3% share. The decline in imports from Russia in 2014 is almost exactly the same as the decline in imports of mineral fuels to Slovakia, which was 19.6%. The decline in the value of Slovak imports from Russia can be almost fully attributed to the decline in global oil and natural gas prices during the second half of 2014 in combination with a decline in energy consumption due to the warm winter of 2014–2015. On the exports side, a large majority of the drop occurred in Slovakia’s main export article – automobiles. Their export to Russia declined by 21% from January to November 2014 (Xinhua, 2015). For comparison, Slovak car exports to Ukraine went down even more, by 84%. This drop does not reflect sanctions, but simply a decline in the purchasing power of the Russian population due to the devaluation of the rouble and the impoverishment of the Russian population.

How Slovakia’s trade relations with Russia compare to those of other Visegrad countries is a relevant question if we want to analyse the degree to which trade relations may help us to understand these countries’ differing responses to Russia’s aggression in Ukraine. The World Trade Organization’s (WTO) 2013 statistical data provide a broad picture of the trade and economic links between the Visegrad countries and their trading partners.<sup>110</sup> For all of the V4 countries, trade with other EU

<sup>110</sup> All following statistics reflect the trade reality in 2013 and are from the World Trade Organization’s statistics available at <http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFReporter.aspx?Language=E>.

member states is vastly dominant: 82.9% of Slovakia’s exports and 52.5% of its imports are to/from other EU countries. In the case of the Czech Republic, the respective figures are 81% of exports and 65.7% of imports; in the case of Hungary they are 77% and 71.6%; and in Poland they are 74.3% and 57.4%.

A comparison with other Visegrad countries and a selection of non-Visegrad countries (see Table 2) shows Russia’s relatively modest position as a destination for Slovak exports – 4.0%, but also for Czech (3.7%), Hungarian (3.1%) and Polish (5.4%) exports. Russia’s position as a source of imported goods is much stronger: 10% of Slovakia’s imports come from Russia, as well as 5.6% of the Czech Republic’s, 8.7% of Hungary’s and 12.5% of Poland’s.

**Table 2. Comparison of the share of trade between selected countries, the EU and Russia, 2013**

	EU share of trade (%)		Russia’s share of trade (%)	
	Exports	Imports	Exports	Imports
<b>Poland</b>	74.3	57.4	5.4	12.5
<b>Czech Republic</b>	81.0	65.7	3.7	5.6
<b>Slovakia</b>	82.9	52.5	4.0	10.0
<b>Hungary</b>	77.0	71.6	3.1	8.7
<b>Ukraine</b>	26.5	35.1	23.8	30.2
<b>Bulgaria</b>	59.9	59.6	2.6	18.5
<b>Romania</b>	69.6	75.7	2.8	4.3
<b>Serbia</b>	62.7	61.9	7.3	9.3

**Source:** World Trade Organization, <http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFHome.aspx?Language=E>

A comparison of V4 trade relations shows, rather surprisingly, that Russia is a far more important trading partner for Poland – the only consistent critic and opponent of Putin’s Russia among the V4 countries – than for the other three countries. Following Poland are Slovakia and Hungary, and the Czech Republic is the least dependent on trade with Russia.

Like the other V4 countries, Slovakia exports significantly less to Russia than it imports, which leads to significant and chronic trade deficits. Imports from Russia to Slovakia are worth around 2.5 times as much as exports from Slovakia to Russia. In the case of Hungary, the ratio is 2.8, and in case of Poland it is 2.3. The Czech Republic has the most balanced trade with Russia, with an import-export ratio of “only” 1.5.

The most recent trade data provided by the Slovak Ministry of Economy for 2013 and 2014 show a significant annual decrease in Slovakia’s trade and trade deficit with Russia. To a great degree, this decline in imports and the trade deficit reflects the fall in crude oil and natural gas prices in the second half of 2014; the decline in exports may also reflect to some degree the sanctions adopted by the EU in response to the annexation of Crimea and the countersanctions adopted by Russia. According to a document published by the Slovak Ministry of Economy in February 2015, the EU’s economic sanctions contributed to an overall decline in Slovakia’s bilateral trade with Russia in 2014 of approximately 16% in both exports and imports (Economy, 2015a).

In 2013, Slovakia’s imports from Russia were worth EUR 6.139 billion and exports EUR 2.547 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of EUR 3.592 billion, second only to Slovakia’s trade deficit with South Korea. In 2014, imports from Russia were reduced to EUR 4.913 billion, exports to EUR 2.077 bil-

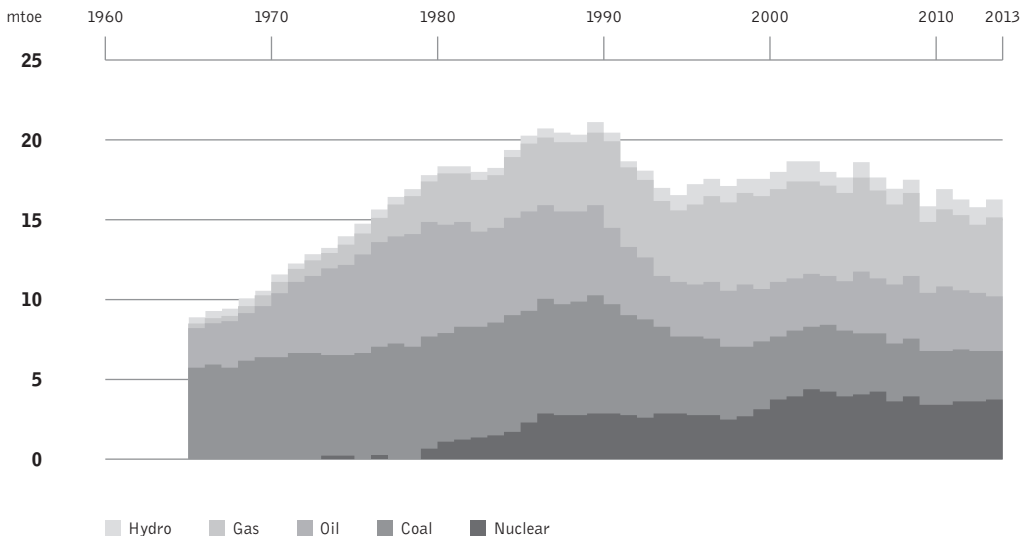
lion and the trade deficit decreased by EUR 756 million to EUR 2.836 billion – the third-largest after Slovakia’s trade deficits with South Korea and China.<sup>111</sup> The decline in Slovakia’s trade deficit with Russia by three-quarters of a billion is certainly a welcome development. We may reasonably assume that overall trade with Russia may be even more balanced in 2015, assuming low crude oil and natural gas prices are sustained over the second half of 2015. If EU countries could improve their ability to negotiate the prices of natural gas purchased from Gazprom, Slovakia’s and, more importantly the EU’s, trade deficit with Russia could be reduced even further.

### 3. Slovakia, Russia and energy

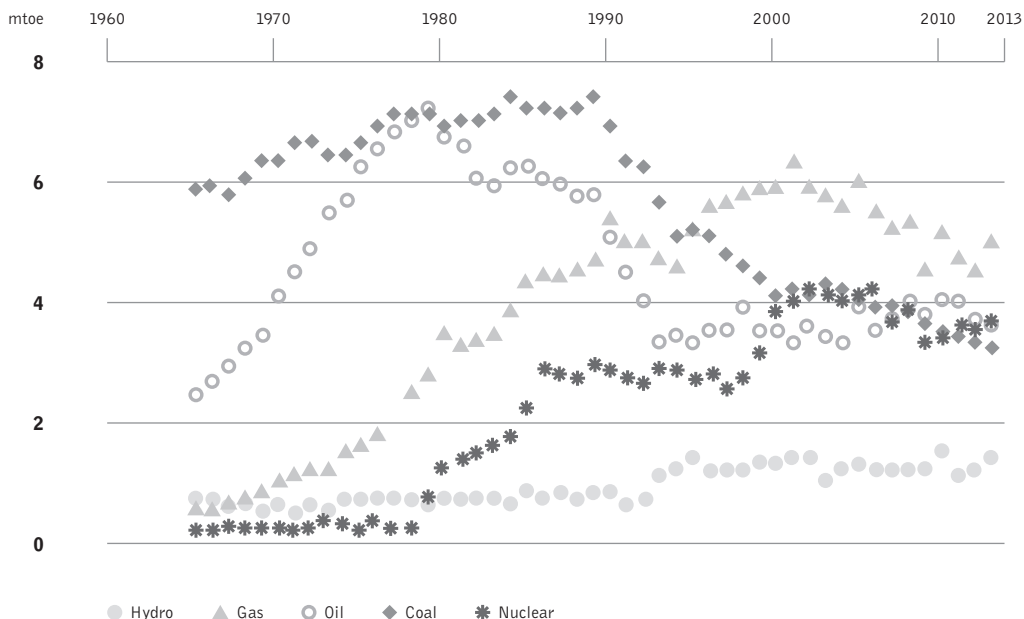
Slovakia is the smallest of the V4 economies and is also the smallest energy consumer among the V4 countries. Energy consumption over the past 25 years in Slovakia has undergone a somewhat similar but not quite identical pattern as in other Visegrad countries. After an initial sharp drop in energy consumption after 1989, overall energy consumption grew slowly until around 2005, and has gradually decreased since. The initial drop in Slovakia is largely attributable – as in all its V4 neighbours – to rapid liberalisation of energy prices, economic restructuring and a reduction in the use of coal.

**Graph 1. Primary energy consumption in Slovakia, 1965–2013**

2013: Total energy consumed increased by 3.8 %



<sup>111</sup> Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, <http://www.mhsr.sk/zahranicny-obchod-2014/142824s>



Source: British Petroleum Statistical Review 2014, chart by mazamascience.com

The split between the different sources of primary energy in Slovakia is shown in Chart 1. With a relatively equal share of coal, nuclear, oil and natural gas in its overall mix, Slovakia is rather different from the Czech Republic and Poland, in both of which coal has a strong position, and is more reminiscent of the situation in Hungary. With a small share of renewable energy in the overall energy mix – albeit the highest among the V4 countries (due to hydropower) – Slovakia is certainly less dependent on Russian gas and oil than Hungary, and thanks to better economic performance it should also be better able to afford the current higher natural gas prices from sources than other Russia. Energy imports from Russia are still rather significant, however, and prior to the diversification of Slovakia’s oil and natural gas transport possibilities we could have spoken confidently about Slovakia’s dependence on Russia, in particular for natural gas and to lesser extent oil.

Slovakia’s oil dependence has been a frequently debated issue since 1989, but it is important to understand that it is the Slovnaft refinery, currently the only oil refinery operating in Slovakia, which is truly dependent on deliveries of Russian oil. A cut in Slovakia’s oil deliveries would cause economic damage to and possibly ruin Slovnaft, but it would not paralyse Slovakia, as the most important products – gasoline and diesel fuels – can be (and actually commonly are) brought to fuel stations in Slovakia from a number of other European refineries. A paralysed Slovnaft would certainly impact Slovakia, however, as it is the country’s third-largest company by turnover (EUR 3.9 billion in 2014)<sup>112</sup> and traditionally also one of its top taxpayers.

For this reason, attention has been paid to ensuring the possibility of alternative oil deliveries to Slovakia should Russia attempt to use crude oil as a tool of blackmail in the same way as it has used natural gas in the past. A technical alternative to oil deliveries from Russia does exist in Slovakia in the form of a connection between the Adria oil pipeline, which brings oil from the Croatian sea terminal

112 <http://www.finstat.sk/analyza-firiem?Sort=sales-desc>

Omisalj, and the Družba pipeline. A 128-km segment of Adria was modernised at a cost of EUR 70 million and put into operation with capacity increased from 3.5 million to 6 million tonnes per annum in February 2015.<sup>113</sup> The connector's capacity is now sufficient to fully cover the oil needs of the Slovnaft refinery (Slovnaft, 2015). It is appropriate to mention, however, that a long-term contract for deliveries of Russian crude oil was signed in December 2014. Under this new contract, which runs until the end of 2029, Russia will deliver 6 million tonnes of oil annually for Slovak consumption and an additional 6 million tonnes for transit through Slovakia.<sup>114</sup>

Another oil pipeline under consideration in Slovakia is the Bratislava–Schwechat pipeline connecting the existing Družba pipeline to the OMV oil refinery in Schwechat, Austria. This 60-km interconnector – 10 km on the Slovak side and 50 km on the Austrian side – with intended capacity of 3.4 million tonnes per year, would primarily enable deliveries of Russian oil to Schwechat, but if needed it could also be used to transport crude from Austria to Slovnaft.<sup>115</sup> The project is the subject of strong criticism on environmental grounds, as it would cross the most significant water table in the Central Danube region, and its future is therefore very uncertain.

From the energy security perspective, natural gas is much more sensitive than oil, as repeatedly demonstrated by Gazprom's blackmailing actions. Unlike crude oil and oil-based fuels, it is impossible to distribute natural gas by mobile tankers and its delivery to consumers is fully dependent on pipe infrastructure, pumps and pressure stations. Until the Nord Stream pipeline was put into operation in 2011, around 80% of all Russian gas exports to the EU passed through Ukraine. Before the "gas crisis" of 2009, Slovakia's natural gas distribution system was unidirectional and fully dependent on Russian gas. Slovakia was not the only country in this situation, however; the "wake up call" of the natural gas crisis of 2006 (Parliament, 2006) was largely ignored by European authorities despite the fact that in January 2006 Russian gas deliveries dropped in at least 13 European countries. The lukewarm response of Mikuláš Dzurinda's second government (2002–2006) in Slovakia as well as those of other EU governments to the 2006 "wake up call" may be partly explained by the rather short duration of the shutdown, as an agreement between Russia and Ukraine was reached relatively quickly after gas deliveries had been halted.

The second Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis was more dramatic and generated a stronger, albeit still insufficient, response in Slovakia and the EU. On 7 January 2009, Gazprom stopped the flow of gas through Ukraine and deliveries were halted for 13 days. In response to the situation, Slovakia became the only country in the EU to declare a state of emergency. This occurred on 6 January 2009, and the state of emergency lasted until 23 January 2009 (ČTK, 2009). During the state of emergency, consumption of natural gas by industry was restricted in order to maintain sufficient supplies for the population. Of the V4 countries, Slovakia was by far the least prepared: Hungary (as well as Austria and Romania) had enough gas in storage to cover consumption for 60 days, Poland for 45 days, the Czech Republic for 40 days, but Slovakia for just 13 days (Mesík, 2009). The Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Austria were also able to access Russian natural gas via the Yamal pipeline bypassing Ukraine through Belarus, and to increase gas imports from Norway; due to missing infrastructure, Slovakia did not have this option.<sup>116</sup>

The 2009 gas crisis finally served as the overdue "wake-up call" to Slovak authorities, as well as to authorities in certain other EU countries. In November 2011, facilities enabling the reverse flow of natural gas in the west-to-east direction were completed in Slovakia, and Eustream is now capable of supplying more gas daily than peak consumption of gas in Slovakia during the winter months (Eustream, 2011): "This means that the country is no longer dependent on the route from the east and so if the gas crisis is repeated, Slovakia can be supplied sufficiently from the west of Europe." Eustream can currently deliver around 39 million cubic metres of gas from the Czech Republic and an additional 18 million cubic metres

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**113** <http://spectator.sme.sk/c/20053456/fico-and-orban-open-reconstructed-adria-pipeline.html>

**114** Ministry of Economy of the Slovak Republic, [www.economy.gov.sk/sankcie-medzi-the-EU-a-ru-/145459s](http://www.economy.gov.sk/sankcie-medzi-the-EU-a-ru-/145459s)

**115** For more details, see: <http://www.transpetrol.sk/en/planned-projects/>

**116** For more details, see <http://www.changenet.sk/?section=forum&x=411768>

on a daily basis – significantly more than the maximal peak consumption of gas recorded in Slovakia’s history, which was 47 million cubic metres daily in December 2001.<sup>117</sup>

Securing the possibility of reverse flow was certainly an important factor enabling the Slovak government to take a firm position in the winter of 2014–2015, when Slovakia – more precisely Eustream – played a crucial role in enabling Ukraine to “survive” despite cuts in supplies of Russian natural gas to Ukraine.

Shortly after the annexation of Crimea, as it became absolutely clear that natural gas would once again be used by the Kremlin as a political weapon against Ukraine, a deal was signed between Slovakia and Ukraine on the reverse flow of natural gas from Slovakia to Ukraine.<sup>118</sup> The technical solution was found in the form of an existing pipeline between an unused gas power plant in Vojany, Slovakia, and the Ukrainian city of Uzhhorod, which was equipped with metering and other features needed for delivery of gas to Ukraine. The reverse flow was put into operation on 2 September 2014 with annual capacity of 10 billion cubic metres: the capacity was increased to more than 14.5 billion in March 2015. This is a very significant amount, as in 2013 Ukraine imported 27.7 billion cubic metres from Russia. Economic data from 2014 suggest that in future Ukraine may need to import around 20 billion cubic metres: if these figures prove correct, 75% of Ukraine’s import needs can be supplied via the Vojany-Uzhhorod pipeline. While most of the gas delivered to Ukraine via this pipeline is in fact of Russian origin, the excess reverse flow capacity from the Czech Republic and Austria discussed above also makes it possible to import Norwegian gas to Ukraine.

The reverse flow enabled Ukraine to secure a sufficient amount of natural gas at a much better price than that offered by Gazprom. According to Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Ukraine saved almost USD 1 billion in 2014 alone thanks to reverse flows from Europe due to the difference between the Gazprom and European gas prices.<sup>119</sup> It also enabled President Poroshenko to declare that by 2015 Ukraine would stop buying gas from Russia.<sup>120</sup> According to energy expert Karel Hirman, by June 2015 Ukraine had saved around USD 3 billion thanks to the reverse flow from Slovakia (Tóda, 2015). Yet the “idyllic” picture of the reverse flow deal between Ukraine and Slovakia was spoiled in June 2015 by Ukraine’s appeal to the EU over an “illegal” Slovak-Gazprom pipeline contract. Referring to an analysis by law firm Wikborg Rein, the Ukrainian government appealed to EU authorities suggesting that the current gas contract between Eustream and Gazprom violates EU law, as it prevents reverse flow to Ukraine via the main pipeline (Lewis, 2015). According to several Slovak experts and analysts, this move is not appropriate as it casts an unnecessary shadow over the constructive relationships between Slovakia and Ukraine on the issue of gas cooperation, and there is no real need to use the main pipeline for reverse flow as Vojany-Uzhhorod provides more than is needed by Ukraine (Tóda, 2015).

The two most recent developments in natural gas supply and infrastructure in Slovakia are preparations for building a new interconnector between the Polish and Slovak gas networks, and the “Eastring” pipeline, which would connect the Slovak, Hungarian, Romanian and Bulgarian gas networks. Preparatory work for the Slovak-Polish connector just received financial support of EUR 4.6 million from the EU’s Connecting Europe Facility. The 164-km two-way gas pipeline will connect the compressor station in Veľké Kapušany, Slovakia, with a Polish gas node in Strachocin, and will improve energy security in South- and Central Eastern Europe.<sup>121</sup>

“Eastring” is a new gas pipeline proposed by Eustream which would complete the north-south trans-European connection between Slovakia, Hungary, Ukraine, Romania and Bulgaria. After its completion,

**117** *Preventívny akčný plán (zemný plyn)*. Ministry of Economy of Slovak republic, May 2013, available at [www.mhsr.sk/preventivny-akcny-plan--zemny-plyn-/141048s](http://www.mhsr.sk/preventivny-akcny-plan--zemny-plyn-/141048s)

**118** *Slovakia reaches reverse gas flow deal with Ukraine*. Reuters, 22 April 2014, <http://www.rthe.com/article/2014/04/26/ukraine-crisis-slovakia-gas-idUSL6N0NI0HU20140426>

**119** *Arseniy Yatsenyuk: One of the Kremlin’s political ideas was the economic blockade of Ukraine*. Governmental portal, 30 December 2014, available at [http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/en/publish/article?art\\_id=247853281&cat\\_id=244314975](http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/en/publish/article?art_id=247853281&cat_id=244314975).

**120** *Ukraine strikes 3.2 bcm reverse gas flow deal with Slovakia*. RT, 28 April 2014, available at <http://rt.com/business/155272-ukraine-slovakia-reverse-gas/>

**121** <http://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/7846270/slovensko-polsky-plynovod-ziskal-financnu-podporu-theEU.html#ixzz3cSRmEVXu>

the countries on this pipeline could choose whether they want to buy gas from Russia, Norway, or, for example, Azerbaijan. A declaration by Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia adopted at the Eastern Partnership summit in Riga in May 2015 was an important step towards bringing this idea to fruition (Hirman, 2015a). From Eustream’s perspective, Eastring appears to be a matter of survival, as it may keep gas transit through Slovakia on the map even if Russia ultimately makes good on recent threats to completely stop gas transit to the EU via Ukraine. As Eustream is an important source of state revenues, the Slovak government’s support for Eastring is logical. From the Ukrainian perspective, however, the idea could be perceived as part of Russia’s strategy to bypass Ukraine (Badida, 2015).

It is also worth noting that while the security of the gas supply from Russia was finally addressed in a serious manner after the 2009 gas crisis by diversifying supply pipelines, there is also a trend towards declining consumption of natural gas – as well as oil – in both Slovakia and the EU as a whole, as Charts 1 and 2 illustrate. Slovakia’s gas consumption peaked in the early 2000s and the decline in the gas consumption has accelerated in recent years. Whereas in 2013 natural gas consumption in Slovakia declined by only 2% compared to 2012, 2014 saw a much more significant decline of 14%.<sup>122</sup> The respected *British Petroleum Statistical Review of World Energy* published in June 2015 cites an even sharper decline in Slovak natural gas consumption of 30.6%, which does not seem realistic, however (BP, 2015, p. 23). Overall EU gas consumption declined in 2014 by an impressive 11.6% compared to 2013.

The overall drop in the consumption of natural gas in Slovakia as well as in the EU can be explained by several factors, such as high gas prices between 2005 and 2014, the economic crisis of 2009 and beyond, a series of mild winters due to global warming, and to some degree also active energy conservation measures in the housing sector around Europe. The high costs of natural gas heating in Slovakia – in particular in rural areas and small towns – have led to a wave of disconnections from the gas network and a shift back to solid fuels, wood and biomass in particular.

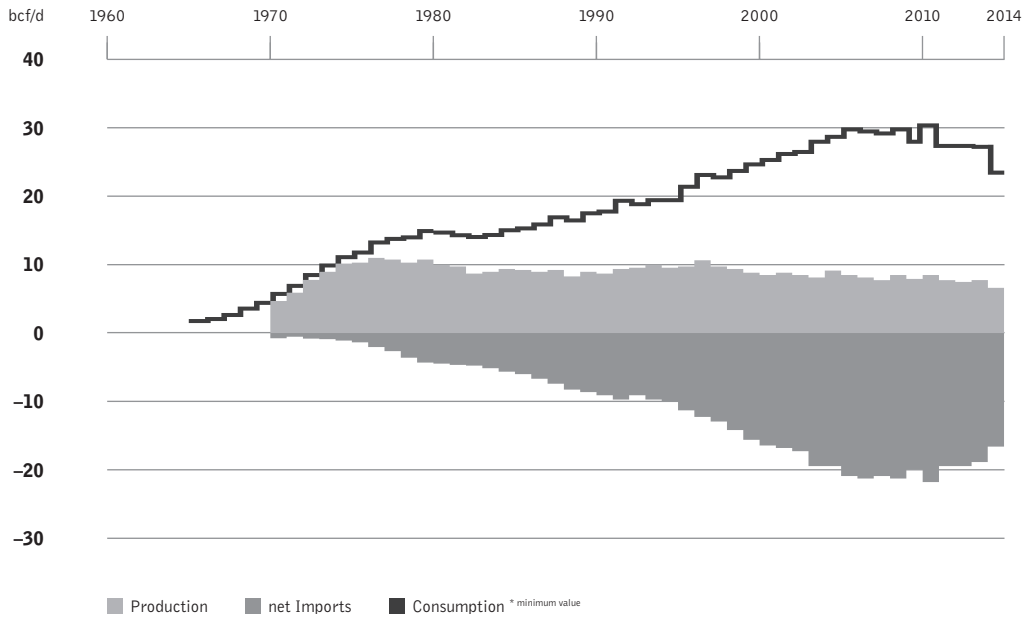
**Graph 2: Eurozone natural gas consumption and net imports, 1960–2014**

2014 imports decreased by 11.9 %



<sup>122</sup> <http://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/7655038/spotreba-plynu-na-slovensku-vlani-klesla-o-sedminu.html>





Source: British Petroleum Statistical Review 2014, chart by mazamascience.com

Despite the high prices of natural gas relative to the average income of Slovakia’s residents, out of 920,000 family houses in Slovakia only around 33% have proper thermal insulation. In particular older houses tend to be poorly insulated. If all old houses in Slovakia were properly insulated, imports of natural gas could be cut by at least 30%. “Up to 40% of all energy consumed in the EU is consumed by buildings, whether for heating or cooling: these are the greatest potential savings”, says Slovak MEP Vladimír Maňka.<sup>123</sup> Yet despite this long-known reality, energy conservation in buildings has been far from a top priority for any Slovak government and remains marginal. New buildings are being built in Slovakia with an energy standard far below current technical and economic possibilities, and legislation requiring low energy and passive standards is being postponed.

Of the four Visegrad countries, Slovakia has the highest share of renewables in its energy mix. This, however, is due to a mountainous landscape with good conditions for the use of traditional hydropower. When it comes to modern renewables such as solar power and wind energy, Slovakia is far behind all its neighbours and at the very tail of Europe. The installed capacity of Slovakia’s 3 (three) wind farms is 4 (four) MW. In the Czech Republic, installed capacity is 81 times more with 326 MW. In Hungary it is 539 MW and in Poland it is 800 times more with 3,140 MW. Even in poor Ukraine, installed wind generation capacity is 533 MW – 133 times higher than in far richer Slovakia (Mesík, 2014c). The official justification for this anti-wind energy policy is the alleged instability that wind energy would introduce into Slovakia’s electricity grid. This is pure nonsense, however, as articulated by Slovak MEP Ivan Štefanec: “The technological justification used by administrators does not hold. No relevant study exists that would prove it, and countries with similar infrastructure have not encountered such problems.”<sup>124</sup> The reason for not allowing the development of wind energy

123 <http://www.theEUropean.com/slovakia/2015/06/10/vladimir-manka-az-40-percent-vsetkych-energiiv-the-EUropejskej-unii-ide-do-budov/>

124 <http://www.theEUropean.com/slovakia/2015/06/10/the-EUropejsky-parlament-vyzval-clenske-staty-na-zvysenie-energetickej-bezpecnosti/>

in Slovakia is clearly political in nature, and may be linked to the strong pro-nuclear energy lobby in Slovakia, which fears that the "Austrian path" of using a higher proportion of renewable electricity would quickly alleviate the need to build more nuclear reactors in Slovakia. Building more nuclear reactors is the Slovak government's current response to its energy security challenges – despite the fact that all Slovak reactors are of Russian design and use Russian fuel, thus adding to Slovakia's unilateral dependence on Russia.

Considering all the above, it is rather clear that while Slovakia buys a huge share of primary energy sources – e.g. crude oil, natural gas as well as nuclear fuel – from Russia, the country could and should quickly diversify its energy supplies, lest the Kremlin try to use its "Gazprom weapon" again. This means that dependence on Russian gas and crude oil is not the main reason for the pro-Putin positions taken by Prime Minister Fico, nor does the overall trade relationship with Russia justify it. The true reasons for Fico's "love affair" with Putin's Russia appear to be of a rather different nature.

## 4. European Energy Union

Partly as a response to Russian energy blackmail and partly in connection with other factors such as the need to respond to the climate crisis, the European Commission introduced the European Energy Union as one of its 10 priorities for 2015. On 25 February, the EEU was formally unveiled under the headline "Making energy more secure, affordable and sustainable" by European Commission Vice-President Maroš Šefčovič (Slovakia).

The EEU defines five related policy areas of action:

1. Supply security
2. A fully integrated internal energy market
3. Energy efficiency
4. Emissions reduction
5. Research and innovation

The EEU's objectives are to pool resources, to connect existing energy networks by means of inter-connectors, to negotiate with non-EU partners in one voice and to diversify Europe's energy sources "so Europe can swiftly switch to other supply channels if the financial or political cost of importing from the East becomes too high".<sup>125</sup> Additional no-less-important objectives are to help EU countries become less dependent on energy imports, to reduce energy use by 27% or more by 2030, to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by 40% or more by 2030, and to become a global leader in the use of renewable energy as well as to combat global warming.

In May 2015, Vice-President Šefčovič started his Energy Union Tour of member states, with each visit including a presentation on the benefits of the EEU for the visited country. The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary had been visited by the summer of 2015. In the document "Assessment of country performance and opportunities from the Energy Union",<sup>126</sup> the following two challenges for Slovakia's energy sector are listed: firstly, Slovakia continues to import 100% of its natural gas from Russia, although its gas infrastructure allows for diversification of both sources and routes; secondly, Slovakia lags behind the EU and other countries in public investments in research and innovation in the areas of energy, environment and low-carbon technologies.

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<sup>125</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/energy/priorities/energy-union/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/energy/priorities/energy-union/index_en.htm)

<sup>126</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/energy/priorities/energy-union/docs/slovakia-benefits\\_of\\_the\\_energy\\_union\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/energy/priorities/energy-union/docs/slovakia-benefits_of_the_energy_union_en.pdf)

This assessment can only be viewed as extremely superficial and “kind”, as it does not mention many other failures of Slovakia’s energy policies and modernisation, such as the very high energy intensity of the Slovak economy (the document mentions that it is the fifth-highest in the EU, but dilutes the message by stating that the country is on track to meet its 2020 energy efficiency targets, failing to mention that these targets were set well below those of the older member states). Other weaknesses include slow and insufficient progress in increasing energy efficiency in buildings, and shamefully low utilisation of wind and solar energy even compared to other V4 countries. Thus, the “assessment” provided so far by the Energy Union can be considered a quick diagnostic tool, but should not be taken as a realistic description of the energy situation in Slovakia.

It is too soon to make any judgements about the European Energy Union, except that its goals and ambitions are in the right direction, and, if implemented with sufficient speed, will increase the EU’s energy security. They are hardly sufficient to have a significant effect in slowing down climate change, however. The EEU is the result of a political compromise between member states, not the result of scientific knowledge in the field of climate change. It includes built-in contradictions such as making energy “affordable” to citizens and businesses, which when translated to common language means “cheap”. Unfortunately there is ample evidence that people, including Europeans, tend to waste whatever can be wasted cheaply, and, in line with the Jevons paradox, any increase in the energy efficiency of a particular appliance, be it a TV, refrigerator or car, leads to greater use of the given appliance – or more units of the appliance bought – so that the resulting energy consumption is steady or may even increase. The idea of “affordability” is extremely popular politically, however, as it fits into the general narrative of endless growth in the consumption of limited natural resources, while painting this narrative as green and socially just. The notion of affordability also implicitly eliminates from consideration any thoughts about a European carbon tax, which would directly push all consumers to reduce energy consumption in order to save money. It opens the door to emissions trading schemes, which are prone to corruption (Slovakia’s “Interblue scandal” of 2008 is a flagrant example of massive and unpunished abuse of emissions trading schemes<sup>127</sup>). More importantly, however, it is an inefficient tool for tackling climate change, as the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol adopted in 1995 aptly illustrates.

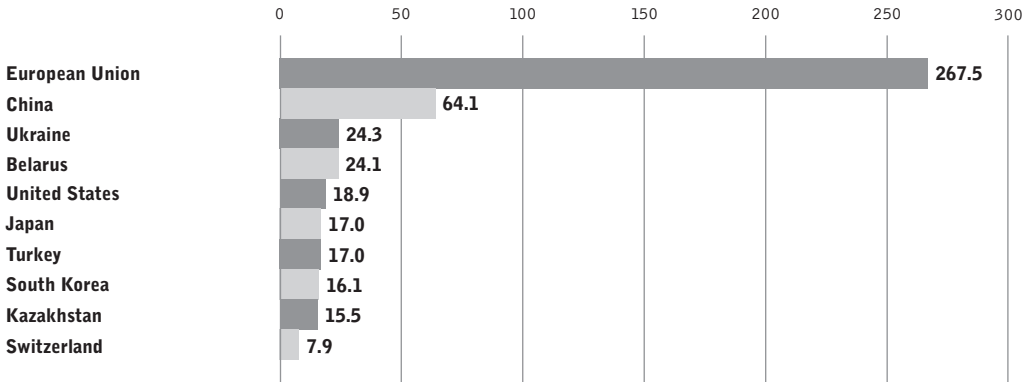
## 5. Europe, Russia and energy

So far, we have discussed the trade and energy dependence of Slovakia, and to lesser degree of the EU, on Russia. Let us now turn the page and have a look at Russia’s economic dependence on EU countries. While Slovakia is a small country representing just 1% of the European Union’s population, the EU as a whole is by far Russia’s largest trading partner – and the one which is impossible to replace simply because there is no other comparable economy in the world, with the exception of the US, that would be able and willing to pay so much for Russia’s main export commodities – crude oil and natural gas. On the other side of the equation, European (including Slovak) purchases of Russian oil and natural gas could be rather quickly and significantly decreased by introducing vigorous energy conservation policies and by diversifying imports of natural gas and oil – provided there is the political will to implement such policies.

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**127** For more about Interblue scandal, see: <http://www.thedaily.sk/attorney-general-closes-interblue-emissions-scandal-case/>

**Graph 3. Russia's top trading partners, 2012 (in € billions)**



Source: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26436291>

With trade worth EUR 267.5 billion (2012<sup>128</sup>), Europe is by far Russia's largest trading partner, followed distantly by China (EUR 61 billion), Ukraine and Belarus (EUR 24 billion each prior to the war), the US (EUR 19 billion) and Japan, Turkey and South Korea (EUR 17 billion each).

The EU 28 countries' imports represented 71% of Russia's oil and natural gas exports in 2012: this figure was even higher in several previous years, as shown in Table 3.

**Table 3. Share of the EU 28 in Russian exports of energy products, 2005–2012, trade in value**

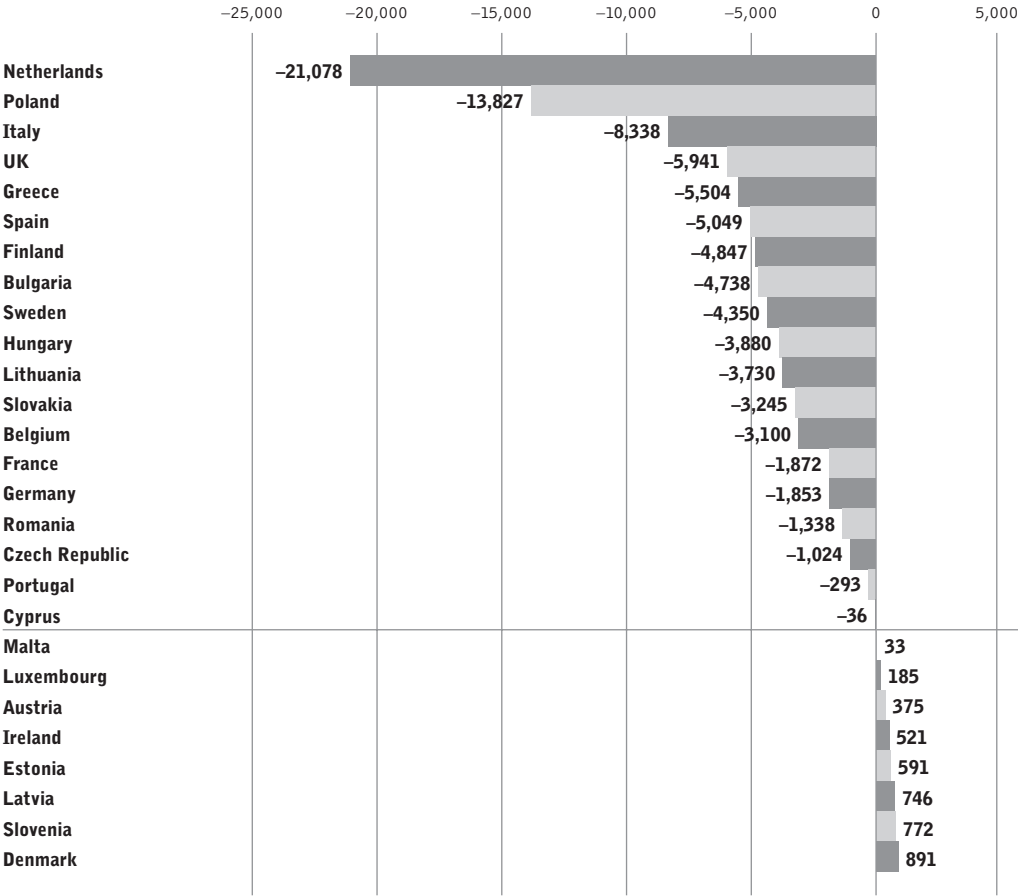
Energy Products	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
<b>270900: Petroleum Oils</b>	80.5 %	81.6 %	76.8 %	77.6 %	76.7 %	75.7 %	72.8 %	70.5 %
<b>27112100: Natural Gas in Gaseous State [1]</b>	77.6 %	82.3 %	81.4 %	80.9 %	92.1 %	77.0 %	71.5 %	70.9 %
<b>2701: Coal</b>	50.1 %	52.9 %	49.4 %	46.7 %	54.1 %	40.8 %	40.8 %	38.0 %
<b>2702: Lignite</b>	53.6 %	87.2 %	81.6 %	43.6 %	31.5 %	20.1 %	16.3 %	8.9 %
<b>2703: Peat</b>	46.1 %	48.3 %	48.7 %	37.8 %	53.3 %	55.5 %	47.0 %	37.8 %
<b>2704: Coke</b>	18.4 %	20.3 %	22.4 %	39.9 %	30.1 %	24.7 %	19.5 %	12.3 %
<b>TOTAL</b>	78.4 %	80.8 %	76.9 %	77.4 %	79.7 %	74.2 %	70.9 %	68.8 %

Source: Eurostat, [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Trade\\_in\\_energy\\_products](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Trade_in_energy_products)

The EU countries paid Russia EUR 163 billion for gas and oil in 2012, and these payments have led to tremendous trade deficits between the EU and Russia: EUR 93 billion in 2011, EUR 92 billion in 2012, EUR 86 billion in 2013. The contribution of individual member states to this huge cash flow from Europe to Russia is shown in Chart 4.

<sup>128</sup> For 2013 data, see: <http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfile/WSDBCountryPFView.aspx?Language=E&Country=RU>

**Graph 4. EU countries' trade balance with Russia, 2012 (in € millions)**



A negative figure shows more imports than exports

Source: BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26436291>

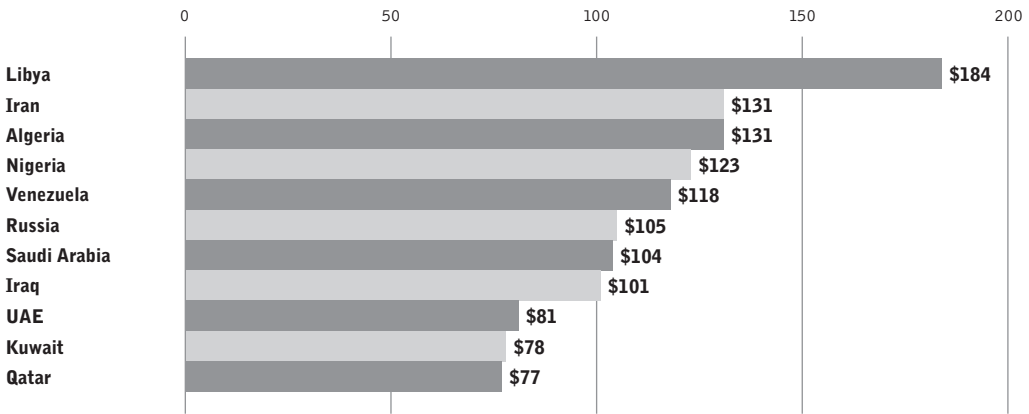
Slovakia’s trade deficit with Russia was EUR 3.2 billion in 2013. Hungary contributed another EUR 3.9 billion and the Czech Republic, with the most balanced trade, EUR 1 billion. As shocking as it may be, Poland – one of the main critics of Russian aggression in Ukraine – was the second-largest European financier of the Kremlin with a trade deficit EUR 13.8 billion. And the Netherlands – home to 193 of 298 victims of flight MH17 shot down by a Russian Buk missile in July 2014 – supported Russia with a trade deficit of EUR 21 billion in 2012. Among themselves, the V4 countries supported the Russian economy – and the militarisation of Russia – with almost EUR 22 billion in just one year.

Figures illustrating the EU’s trade deficit with Russia are nothing new. They have been well known to European analysts and politicians for many years. Neither rational arguments, nor the “gas crisis” of 2009, nor even the annexation of Crimea and Russian aggression in Donbas have moved European governments to act in a truly decisive manner towards embarking on a radical programme of energy conservation in housing and the building sector, in transport and the whole economy (Mesík, 2014a).

The rapid and massive militarisation of Russia was enabled exclusively by a windfall of European money paid for oil and gas purchases and catalysed by high oil prices in particular between 2005 and summer 2014, when oil prices fell by around 50%. When Putin’s Russia invaded Crimea and Donbas in the spring of 2014, the Brent price was over USD 100 per barrel for the third consecutive year.<sup>129</sup> The long oil and gas bonanza financed by Europe contributed to Putin’s misguided aggression in Ukraine, just as similar conditions had encouraged his predecessor, Leonid Brezhnev, to invade Afghanistan in 1979 during a period of high oil prices which were sustained for several years by the Iran-Iraq War.<sup>130</sup>

Brezhnev invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, when the price of oil in current dollars reached USD 100 per barrel, the Soviet petro-state seemed to be victorious and the West in crisis. When in 1985 oil prices collapsed, the Russian march to the Indian Ocean was over (Mesík, 2014b). Similar developments can be observed since the summer of 2014, when oil prices started to fall, reaching a minimum of less than USD 50 per barrel during the winter of 2014–2015 and recovering to around USD 60 per barrel by June 2015.

**Graph 5. Oil price needed to maintain oil exporters’ balanced state budgets**



Source: BBC, <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-29643612>

In order to maintain a balanced budget, Russia requires an oil price of over USD 105. With prices below this level, Russia has to combine cuts in expenditures with tapping its monetary reserves accumulated during the previous decade. Because of the twin impact of falling oil prices and Western sanctions, Russia has had to do both. “We have had to abandon a number of programmes and make certain sacrifices,” said Russian Prime Minister Medvedev in January 2015. Russia loses around USD 2 billion in revenues for every dollar drop in the oil price (Bowler, 2015). The price of natural gas – Russia’s other key source of income – is closely correlated with the price of oil, although the relationship is not a linear one, given the fact that a fully developed global natural gas market does not exist due to the physical properties of natural gas.

While Russia may be able to place its oil production on global markets, there is no readily available and solvent market for Russian natural gas other than Europe. In this sense, Russia is more in the hands of the Europeans, than Europe is in the hands of the Russians. The only problem is that Europe has not been able to play its cards effectively – at least not so far. The positions taken by Slovakia and

<sup>129</sup> For the evolution of oil prices over the last 5 years, see: [http://oil-price.net/dashboard.php?lang=en#brent\\_crude\\_price\\_large](http://oil-price.net/dashboard.php?lang=en#brent_crude_price_large)  
<sup>130</sup> For analysis of oil price over longer period, see: <http://www.wtrg.com/prices.htm>

other V4 governments have not been helpful in enabling the EU to play “the gas card” with the Kremlin as aggressively as it could have done.

In response to Western sanctions in May 2014, the Kremlin hastily signed the “gas contract of the century” with China. According to official reports, the new 3200-km “Power of Siberia” gas pipeline, scheduled to be built by 2018, will bring 38 billion cubic metres of natural gas annually from Yakutia to China. The total value of this rather secretive contract was reported to be USD 400 billion. Given the fact that the cost of constructing the pipeline may be around USD 100 billion, it is clear that China would pay a far cheaper price for the gas than Europe.

Moreover, as it turned out later, no real contract was signed in May 2014, but merely a “preliminary protocol”, and the price of gas to be delivered to China was not fixed, but linked to the price of oil. This opens up the possibility for the Chinese to renegotiate an even more advantageous price in future (Latynina, 2015). A closer look at the figures puts the “gas contract of the century” into the context of the real world: 38 billion cubic metres annually is approximately the same amount of natural gas as Ukraine used to import from Russia before the war. It is just 2.5 times the volume of gas transported via reverse flow from Vojany, Slovakia, to Uzhhorod, Ukraine, and just around one-quarter of current European imports of Russian gas at the annual level of around 140 billion cubic metres (Anderson, 2015).

Another game opened by the Kremlin is its recent announcement that Gazprom will discontinue the transport of natural gas via Ukraine on 1 January 2020 when the current transit contract expires. Since Russia dropped the South Stream project in December 2014 following non-compliance with EU rules, the new idea for how to bypass Ukraine is Turkish Stream, which would bring Russian gas to the Greek border via the Black Sea and Turkey. There is no objective need to build more gas pipelines from Russia to the EU, as current capacities are already much higher than needed. The pipelines through Ukraine to Europe and Turkey alone have a capacity of 140 billion cubic metres annually, the Nord Stream pipeline 55 billion, the Yamal pipeline through Belarus and Poland 33 billion, and the Blue Stream pipeline through the Black Sea to Turkey 16 billion. The total capacity of existing gas pipelines is 244 billion cubic metres annually, 100 billion more than needed: in 2014, one-third of Nord Stream’s capacity and 10% of Blue Stream’s capacity was left unused (Hirman, 2015b).

Despite these realities, Gazprom and its Western partners signed a memorandum on doubling Nord Stream’s capacity within the next five years, while in the south Russia is pushing Turkish Stream with a planned annual capacity of 63 billion cubic metres. It is quite apparent that the whole idea merely reflects Moscow’s political desire to blackmail Ukraine. “Russia has no reason to stop transit through Ukraine,” says EU Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič (Nagyová, 2015).

## 6. Conclusions: Searching for policies and future prospects

Slovakia and other EU countries have very strong reasons to balance their trade and energy relations with neo-imperialistic Russia, and also have a number of tools at their disposal to do so. The challenge is not one of reasons and tools, however; it is a lack of political will among European political elites, and ignorance of both the climate and security threats to European societies. To what degree corruption is involved is hard to say, but the example of former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who was rewarded for his role in improving German-Russian relations by job at Gazprom shortly after leaving office (*Gerhard Schröder’s Sellout*, 2005), may be too inspiring and too tempting for many politicians operating in some cases, such as Slovakia, in a much more corrupt environment than that of Germany.

### 6.1. Diversification of energy supplies

Diversification of oil, gas and nuclear fuel supplies has now been mainstreamed as a key policy to bolster the EU’s energy security. In recent years, a number of interconnectors between European oil

and gas pipelines have been completed. Yet Commissioner Šefčovič admits that “stress tests have confirmed that Bulgaria as well as other countries of southeast Europe do not have sufficiently interconnected gas pipelines” (Nagyová, 2015). There are several proposals for how to address the energy resilience of southeast Europe. One is the Eastring gas pipeline, already discussed above.

It is not only individual EU member states, however, but also the EU as a whole that needs to diversify its sources of natural gas and – to a lesser degree – oil. LNG terminals built in Lithuania and Poland are good examples of such an effort, but LNG is expensive and can hardly compete with natural gas transported through pipelines. A potential game changer from the perspective of diversification is the completion of the TANAP pipeline, bringing natural gas from Azerbaijan and Central Asia to Europe via Turkey. TANAP’s planned transport capacity is 31 billion cubic metres in 2026, with possible growth to 60 billion (Today’s, 2015).

**Map 1. Gas pipelines projected to bring Caspian Sea gas to Europe**



Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans-Anatolian\\_gas\\_pipeline#/media/File:TAP\\_TANAP\\_SCP\\_Schah\\_Denis.png](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trans-Anatolian_gas_pipeline#/media/File:TAP_TANAP_SCP_Schah_Denis.png)

**6.2. Balanced trade policy imperative**

Europe needs to address its trade imbalance with Russia and stop financing the militaristic Russian state through trade deficits. An excessive and chronic trade deficit like the one with Russia is economically unhealthy in general, but in the case of Russia insult is added to injury by the fact that profits from EU trade are used directly to build and sustain a military which poses a direct threat to peace in Europe and to the global order established after the Second World War. In 2012, the V4 countries contributed EUR 22 billion to the overall EU-Russia trade deficit of EUR 92 billion.

Balanced trade with Russia is achievable by means of strategic diversification of oil, natural gas and nuclear fuel purchases, through coordinated EU pressure on the pricing of Russian gas, through policies and directives limiting excessive trade deficits and, most strategically and most sustainably, through aggressive energy conservation measures and ambitious energy and climate policies.

**6.3. Energy conservation and climate change policy**

Energy conservation is part of the EU’s “20-20-20”<sup>131</sup> package aimed at reducing energy consumption by 20%, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20%, and increasing renewable energy by 20% compared to 1990 levels by 2020. With regard to greenhouse gas emissions, this means that Slovakia and

<sup>131</sup> For more details, see: [http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/package/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/package/index_en.htm)



the other Visegrad countries need to do almost nothing, because CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in Slovakia dropped so significantly in the early 1990s.

This package – like all EU documents and policies – is the result of a compromise between those countries demanding more ambitious goals and those demanding less ambitious ones. When it comes to climate and energy, it is the sad tradition of the V4 to always side with those demanding as little action as possible. Anti-climate (or more precisely climate-ignorant) policies pushed in particular by the Polish and Czech governments and happily supported by Slovakia's, result from a combination of prevailing economic and cognitive factors.

A key economic factor is the coal mining industry and mining lobby (Economist, 2015): "It costs the state-owned miner, Kompania Weglowa, USD 80 to mine a tonne of coal against a world price of USD 61 for similar grades. A stockpile of 16m tonnes continues to grow, as Poles import much cheaper coal from Russia. Miners have nonetheless reacted furiously to plans to close four of the countries' least efficient mines and to create a new company with nine more viable ones. The authorities, in the run-up to elections this year, quickly retreated." This despite the fact that since 2011 coke-coal prices have fallen from USD 300 per tonne to less than USD 150 per tonne, and thermal coal prices dropped from USD 140 in 2011 to USD 70 in early 2015.

Even in Slovakia with its small coal mining industry, it is politically more convenient to continue to subsidise mine owners than to stop subsidies, which would result in mine closures and unemployment for a few thousand miners. At the same time, subsidies for renewable energy are loudly criticised and renewable energy is framed as a risk for the stability of the electricity grid by advocates of both fossil-fuel and nuclear power stations.

In Slovakia, the geopolitical threat posed by Russia could be used as a strong argument for energy conservation and reductions in gas and oil imports, but this is largely ignored by the ruling Russia-friendly political elites. In Poland, however, with its high sensitivity to the Russian threat, demands to reduce imports of Russian gas and oil may be used by the mining industry lobby as an argument in favour of continuing the country's short-sighted subsidies for domestic coal mining instead of promoting energy conservation.

The 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) to be hosted in Paris in December 2015 provides a unique opportunity for narrowing the cognitive gap among political elites as well as the broad public in Slovakia and the V4. The obvious geopolitical link between European oil and gas imports from Russia and the financing of Russian militarism may add extra weight to arguments calling for much more ambitious European goals in greenhouse gas emissions reduction by scaling back the use of fossil fuels.

As the overall context of this report is the war in Ukraine, it is important to mention the opportunity that Ukraine offers for the EU in the area of greenhouse gas emissions reduction. The energy intensity (i.e. energy consumption per unit of GDP) of the Ukrainian economy is among the highest in the world: in 2003, it was 566 tonnes of oil equivalent (toe) per USD 1 million of GDP, the seventh-highest globally. This is twice as high as Slovakia's energy intensity (273 toe) and more than twice as high as that of the Czech Republic (254 toe), Poland (212 toe) and Hungary (178 toe). The average energy intensity in the EU 28 in 2011 was just above 200 toe.<sup>132</sup> This huge difference between Ukraine and EU countries results partly from the different structure of the economy (industry in particular) and harsher climatic conditions in Ukraine. However, a large part can be attributed to extremely inefficient use of energy.

The communal and housing sectors represent around 40% of total energy consumption in Ukraine. The energy conservation potential in the Ukrainian housing sector as well as in industry is huge, and its realisation would make possible a significant decrease in Ukraine's greenhouse gas emissions as well as a reduction in natural gas imports from Russia. For the EU to achieve more ambitious climate change goals, investing in energy conservation in Ukraine represents an excellent and cost-effective opportunity, true "low-hanging fruit".

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**132** World Resources Institute, <http://www.wri.org/blog/2014/11/6-graphs-explain-world%E2%80%99s-top-10-emitters>

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# Diverging voices, converging policies

JACEK KUCHARCZYK – GRIGORIJ MESEŽNIKOV

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict of 2014–2015, unique in its causes, course and consequences for contemporary Europe, has cast a spotlight on the Central European countries, their political representatives, and their populations. First, the conflict has tested the ability of local political elites, especially those in government, to adequately evaluate the context of key events affecting the situation in Europe and the world, and to take stances in line with their countries' obligations arising from membership in Euro-Atlantic groupings. Second, the conflict has revealed the authentic views of the main political forces in the V4 countries with regard to the foreign and security policy agenda. Third, the conflict has shown how historical heritage in relations between V4 countries on the one hand, and Russia and Ukraine on the other still defines the character of these relations. Fourth, the conflict has provided an opportunity to assess the extent to which Central European politicians' commitment to the principles and standards on which free and democratic societies are built affects their foreign policy positions. Last but not least, the V4 population's response to the conflict has become an important indicator of the state of V4 public opinion concerning both Russia- and Ukraine, as well as the overall foreign policy orientations of Poles, Czechs, Hungarians and Slovaks.

The conflict between Ukraine and Russia began in February 2014 with the invasion of Crimea by Russian troops and the annexation of this part of the sovereign Ukrainian state, followed in April 2014 by Russian attempts to break off regions of Eastern Ukraine using special forces and its local "separatist" clients, which has resulted in the de facto occupation of part of the Donbas region. Ruling elites in the V4 states responded to these events in such a way that has given rise to an interpretational scheme with two basic lines in the V4 countries' approach to the conflict – a "Polish" line and a "Czech-Slovak-Hungarian" line.

The reality is much more complex, however, and while differentiating elements cannot be overlooked completely, the Visegrad countries as a group have neither deviated from the EU common position towards Russia, nor caused any real changes in its trajectory. What contributed significantly to the emergence of the notion of a Czech-Slovak-Hungarian triple block in assessing the different contexts of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict were statements by certain key politicians in the three countries who presented their views in such a manner so as to garner additional capital on the domestic political scene rather than to influence EU policy. When compared to the fairly consistent positions of Poland's political elites – both in government and in opposition – the views of politicians in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary often appeared controversial and inconsistent, which gave rise to a convergent perception of these three countries by observers outside the region.

Miloš Zeman, Robert Fico and Viktor Orbán were especially visible among such politicians. The considerations of each member of this "troika" included his own political ambitions, tactical elements of party competition in domestic politics, his own values background and ideological preferences, his

own particular doctrinal basis for defining the optimal model of social development, and his level of personal knowledge of Russian-Ukrainian relations and their various contexts.

Czech President Miloš Zeman, whose extravagant statements have become legendary, did not concern himself with demonstrating in-depth knowledge of the historical, political, sociocultural, and ethnolinguistic issues that led to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. In his view, Europe should be more concerned about the threat of Islamic terrorism penetrating Europe from the Middle East, and this means Europe needs to work closely with Russia to address these threats rather than putting pressure on Russia and strengthening the sanctions against it as punishment for its aggression in Ukraine.

The situation is more complicated, however, than just the Czech president's peculiar views on the nature of existing security threats in Europe. The Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), which Miloš Zeman used to head, is divided on the issue of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Certain elements in the party which took a de facto pro-Russian stance are supported by a group of business leaders focusing on economic relations with the Russian Federation. As a result, Czech Prime Minister and Social Democratic Party leader Bohuslav Sobotka is forced to constantly manoeuvre in order to avoid losing control of the party, while at the same time maintaining more or less cordial relations with President Zeman.

The situation is somewhat different in Slovakia: the polarity of the positions manifests itself in reverse order. President Andrej Kiska took unambiguously pro-Ukrainian and pro-Western positions, fully supported the introduction of EU sanctions and spoke in favour of strengthening the defence capability of NATO and its members, including the V4 countries. This position served to elevate awareness of the need to strengthen cooperation between the Central European states, Ukraine and the EU in the face of this new Russian challenge to a united Europe.

In contrast to Slovakia's president, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico defined his position on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and on European sanctions against Russia in completely different terms. According to his statements, there are more important factors than European values and the principle of the inviolability of borders to the east of Slovakia (needless to say, Slovakia's own borders are effectively protected as a result of membership in NATO and the EU). The essence of his views on how to react to what is happening in Eastern Ukraine can be generalised as "the economy comes first". The most important thing is to ensure that Slovakia is supplied with Russian gas and oil without interruption, and that cars produced in Slovakia can be freely sold in Russia. It is obvious that this is what underlies Robert Fico's statements on the alleged pointlessness of European sanctions, and his characterisation of Ukraine as a country unable to solve its own internal problems or its difficulties in foreign relations. It is fair to note, however, that Slovakia responded positively to the request by the EU and Ukraine to create the conditions for the reverse flow of gas through its territory to Ukraine, which no doubt helped Ukraine in its confrontation with Russia's gas dictates.

The third member of the putative Czech-Slovak-Hungarian trio is Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, the only governing Central European politician in whose views on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict one can find traces – in addition to so-called pragmatic moments – of a certain theoretical basis. Orbán, a former anti-regime youth leader and active member of the Hungarian democratic revolution of the late 1980s, has become a national conservative leader in the last 15 years. He has intentionally positioned himself and his country in opposition to the European Union, which, in turn, sees elements of authoritarianism in Orbán's policies and has criticised him sharply for this. Speaking at a conference organised by ethnic Hungarians in Romania in 2014, Viktor Orbán said that the liberal-democratic model of the social system has exhausted itself and that it is time to turn to more efficient models, such as Turkey, Singapore, China and Russia.

In apparent contrast to the other three Visegrad countries, Polish politicians, both in government and in opposition, have had little understanding for the policies of Vladimir Putin vis-à-vis Ukraine. While Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski made efforts to mobilise other EU leaders to respond in measure to Russia's aggression and blatant violations of international norms, politicians from the key opposition party, Law and Justice (PiS), criticised the Tusk government for being too soft on Russia and especially for its pre-conflict efforts to improve Polish-Russian rela-

tions. Only two smaller parties, the post-communist Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and the agrarian Polish People's Party (PSL) called for a measure of pragmatism and emphasised the economic costs of sanctioning Russia, although they broadly agreed on the strategic need to support Ukraine's independence and European integration efforts. Here, the only dissenting voices came from the extreme right-wing and populist parties, which were less pro-Russian than anti-Ukrainian and anti-EU (like their counterparts in Central and Western Europe).

The impact of these factors in all V4 countries reveals many common features, but there are important nuances which, in the case of Poland, created the conditions for a broader and stronger consensus among the main political forces on greater vigilance with respect to Russia's policy towards Central Europe. In the case of Slovakia, however, these nuances created the conditions for the persistence of illusions about the policies of the current Russian leadership.

Russia's participation in the division of Poland and the elimination of the independent Polish state in the 18th century, the suppression of the Polish uprisings by the Russian Army in the 19th century, the Polish-Soviet War of 1920, the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and Soviet invasion of Poland alongside Nazi Germany in 1939, the Katyn massacre of Polish army officers, the establishment of totalitarian Communist regimes in Central Europe, the suppression of the Hungarian revolution by the Soviet Army in 1956, the Soviet invasion and occupation of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 – all these events have seriously marked the historical consciousness of Poles, Hungarians, Czechs and Slovaks, which undoubtedly influences politicians' attitudes in defining national foreign policy priorities. At the same time, there are also parts of the public discourse and narratives referring to common elements of Slavic culture and languages, as well as to Slavic reciprocity (the pan-Slavism of the 19th century, particularly in the Czech lands and in Slovakia), to the Soviet Union's role in defeating Nazism and fascism in the Second World War, to the liberation of the Central European countries by the Soviet Army, to the temporal coincidence of certain important social trends (modernisation, industrialisation, urbanisation, in Czechoslovakia federalisation, which was considered to have satisfied Slovaks' ambitions for national emancipation) with the Communist period (i.e. the period of domination by the USSR), all of which created more favourable conditions for a positive or at least non-hostile perception of the USSR/Russia in certain sectors of society.

Relations between the nations of Central Europe and Ukrainians, marked by history, also influence the domestic political debate around attitudes towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (here, the Polish example is quite symptomatic of the multi-layered narrative of Polish-Ukrainian inter-ethnic relations), as well as considerations on the status of those ethnic minorities inside Ukraine that constitute part of the mother "cultural" nation (this relates to a greater extent to Hungary and ethnic Hungarians in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine; to lesser extent to the Czech Republic and ethnic Czechs in Volyn).

The authors of the individual studies analyse the positions of political parties, provide a typology of political actors based on their degree of "friendliness" towards Russian policy or rejection of it. In the Czech Republic, there are "hawks", "multilateralists", "pragmatists" and "friends of Russia", distributed among different parties (with the Communists as main advocates of wild capitalist oligarchic Russia). In Slovakia, there are clear opponents of Russia (concentrated in the centre-right opposition parties), ambiguous opportunists or camouflaged Russia-supporters (mostly members of the ruling "social democratic" party Smer-SD), and passionate advocates of Vladimir Putin (radical nationalists and right-wing extremists). In Hungary, there is the clearly pro-Russian radical and nationalist right-wing Jobbik, while other relevant parties have voiced varying degrees of criticism of or understanding for Russia's policy depending on their power positions (government or opposition), including the ambivalent national conservative Fidesz, and Russia's strongest critic the environmentalist LMP. The picture is somewhat more homogeneous in Poland, where two major parties – the centrist Civic Platform (PO) and the opposition national conservative Law and Justice (PiS) – have expressed strong disapproval of Russia's foreign policy, while certain other political actors (the social-democratic SLD, the agrarian PSL and Janusz Palikot's movement *Twój Ruch*) have demonstrated a certain degree of understanding for Russia's motives without assuming a strongly pro-Russian position.

Peculiar are the trends in public opinion. In the Czech Republic, the proportion of people who perceive Russia as a threat to national security has increased during the Russian-Ukrainian war from about one-third in autumn 2013 to 66% in autumn 2014. At the same time, however, 39% of the population were against the sanctions imposed on Russia by the EU, while 41% were in favour. In Slovakia, the opposite trend in public opinion can be discerned in the long term: according to one opinion poll, Russia remained the second-most-frequently-mentioned country perceived as dangerous, but whereas in 1996 this was reported by 34% of respondents, in 2014 this figure was “only” 24%. According to another survey, approximately half of respondents in Slovakia considered sanctions against Russia incorrect. Opinion polls confirm that the Hungarian population is much less sympathetic towards Russia and Russians than towards the United States and Americans. Should Hungary choose sides, 53% of respondents favoured closer ties with the US, 25% preferred closer ties with Russia, and 22% could not decide. However, data showed that Hungarian respondents are less supportive of any measures against Russia. Only one-third of them (34%) agreed with the statement that Russia should not be allowed to enter Eastern Ukrainian territories. According to surveys in Poland, Russia as a country is perceived negatively. A 2014 survey showed that 81% of Poles have unfavourable opinions about Russia. According to a 2015 survey, 76% of Poles fear a Russian military threat. Most respondents think current European Union sanctions against Russia should be strengthened (42%) or maintained (35%), rather than weakened (6%). At the same time, a large segment of the Polish public would prioritise good relations with Russia over support for Ukraine, and they expect the international community (especially the EU and NATO) to play a major role in confronting Russia’s aggressiveness. All the differences notwithstanding, it seems that the desire of V4 societies to avert a direct confrontation with a resurgent Russia has been the common factor determining the multilateralist approaches pursued by their respective governments, often in contrast to the strong pro- or anti-Russian statements made by many of their leading politicians.

## V4 foreign policy – more convergence than meets the eye

The foreign policy aspect of the responses of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland to the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict should be considered in several contexts: these countries’ membership in the EU and NATO, their common membership in the V4 group, their ruling political elites’ ideas on bilateral relations with the actors in the conflict, and the extent of their support for a European prospect for Ukraine.

Membership in the EU and NATO forms the basic framework that ultimately determines the implementation of the V4 states’ policies towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. V4 countries have had the opportunity to shape this framework alongside their partners and allies. From this point of view, it is interesting to see how they have made use of this opportunity, contributing to shaping a common approach. When the common approach becomes a determining factor for EU and NATO policy towards third countries (in this case towards Russia and Ukraine), its practical implementation in the foreign policies of all member states (including the V4 countries) becomes obligatory, as a test of their commitment to partners and allies. In this case, it is clear that in practical terms in 2014 and 2015 all V4 countries observed the general framework defined by their membership in the EU and NATO, and undertook no actions that would have changed it (despite the fact that certain officials in individual V4 states made statements that were in apparent contradiction to this framework’s basic referential points).

Membership in the V4 format of regional cooperation was not expressed by separate visible efforts on the part of representatives of V4 states to unify their declared positions in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (unlike the case of migration in autumn 2015). The V4 countries’ general compliance with the above-mentioned framework – the common position of the EU and NATO – compensated for the dissonant elements which appeared in the statements of individual officials concerning the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Various communiqués from meetings of V4 government representa-



tives included provisions on the unacceptability of Russia's actions, support for the common EU position on this conflict between two Eastern European countries, and support for Ukraine in its efforts to implement democratic reforms and to maintain a European course.

Practical steps undertaken by Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia in their bilateral relations with Russia and Ukraine in the context of the above-mentioned framework were affected by the notions of their ruling elites concerning the nature and importance of these relations, as well as by the value orientations and personal preferences of individual ruling politicians.

A more detailed analysis shows that Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary have demonstrated certain common features in their attitudes towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which have differentiated them to some extent from Poland.

For many years, Slovakia considered relations with Ukraine and support for this country's European aspirations one of its key foreign policy priorities. Today, certain top officials (such as Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák) are fully identified with this position. Slovak conceptual foreign policy documents have defined relations with the Russian Federation in view of Slovakia's membership in Euro-Atlantic structures. Unlike the previous governments led by Mikuláš Dzurinda and Iveta Radičová, which based Slovak-Russian and Slovak-Ukrainian relations mainly on values, the relationship of the incumbent Slovak government led by Robert Fico to the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict can be defined as a pragmatic "double-track" policy motivated by a desire for a zero-degree confrontation between the West (the EU, NATO) and Russia, and for Slovakia to maintain equally good relations with Ukraine and Russia, despite the fact that they are in a de facto military conflict. This approach apparently contains traces of the concept of foreign policy realism.

Statements by Prime Minister Fico about the "futile" EU economic sanctions against Russia imposed in response to its aggressive policy and about their harmfulness to the Slovak economy have contributed to the perception of Slovakia's position as at least ambivalent (Robert Fico's repeated contention that economic sanctions have had an overwhelmingly negative impact on the Slovak economy seems in the end to have been unsubstantiated). In full compliance with the positions of Slovakia's Western allies, incumbent President Andrej Kiska, his predecessor Ivan Gašparovič, and Minister of Foreign Affairs Miroslav Lajčák have all clearly condemned Russia's aggressive policy. In addition, Slovakia provided Ukraine with a reverse flow of gas and offered other forms of support as well. The paradox of Slovak foreign policy on this issue includes the fact that efforts to implement a "realistic-pragmatic" approach in the spirit of the "double-track" policy did not have any real chance of successful application (despite open declarative support from Prime Minister Robert Fico), while the value line of the EU common approach worked effectively as the main determinant of both the country's overall foreign policy and of specific practical steps involving component issues, including Slovak-Russian and Slovak-Ukrainian relations.

Similarly to the case of Slovakia, ambivalence has also prevailed in the perception of the Czech Republic's foreign policy line with respect to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. This has been associated with the differing views of top state officials on the causes and course of the conflict, as well as with disunity within the ruling Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD). Czech foreign policy is currently defined by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the "European mainstream", which in this particular case means that the country holds the EU common position concerning the actors involved in the Eastern European conflict. The initial Czech position presented by Prime Minister Bohuslav Sobotka stated that "sanctions are not the solution". In line with this position, certain high-ranking representatives of the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs spoke of the need for a balanced approach towards Russia and Ukraine, and even of the need to establish a strategic partnership with Russia in spite of current developments.

Compared to previous electoral cycles, Czech foreign policy today is less pro-active and appears to be more of a "pragmatic" policy than one defined in terms of values. This involves attempts to reformulate the basic tenets of foreign policy in the spirit of a stronger inclination towards defence of "national interests" and "pragmatic solutions" rather than a strict insistence on the values represented by the legacy of November 1989 (freedom, democracy, human rights and open resistance to authoritarian regimes). Proponents of the pro-Western (values-based) line in Czech foreign policy are constrained in their efforts

to implement this line by a rivalry between two wings of the Czech Social Democratic Party, while those politicians who advocate closer cooperation with Russia are openly supported by President Miloš Zeman. It should be noted, however, that in general the Czech Republic has confirmed that it really belongs to the "EU mainstream" and did not deviate from the common European approach towards Russia in its support for the expansion and prolongation of sanctions. The Czech state has provided diverse assistance to Ukraine, and the Czech Parliament (albeit after lengthy proceedings and a sharp debate in September 2015) ratified Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU.

As in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, in Hungary too the statements of certain state officials have been perceived as problematic from the point of view of their compatibility with common EU positions. In addition, however, certain practical political steps were taken (Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to Budapest, the contract signed with Russian state nuclear agency Rosatom to expand the nuclear power plant in Paks) which cast doubt on whether Hungary was still pursuing the common EU line. This raises the question of what Hungary's foreign policy (as well as those of two other V4 countries – the Czech Republic and Slovakia) would look like if the EU were to leave the decision on how to respond to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict to its individual members.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine impacted Hungarian foreign policy at particularly sensitive point in time due to the fact that it occurred when the government, led by Viktor Orbán, was implementing the concept of the Eastern Opening, entailing among other things an intensification of relations with Russia. As a result, Hungary, which on a number of issues had previously pursued a foreign policy line close to that of Germany, found itself contradicting the German position when it declared its priorities for relations with Russia. Hungary continued to develop bilateral economic and cultural relations with Russia even after the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war, but it supported the introduction of sanctions against Russia despite open criticism of them by Viktor Orbán who, like Robert Fico, considered them harmful. Hungary also supported Ukraine's European aspirations and ratified its Association Agreement with the EU. On the other hand, Hungary's suspension of gas supplies to Ukraine after a reverse flow was finally launched sparked speculation as to whether Hungary may be more concerned with maintaining good relations with Russia than with upholding EU values.

On the eve of the Maidan and Ukraine's Revolution of Dignity, Poland's foreign policy towards the countries of the former Soviet Union supported democratic and market reforms in Ukraine within the framework of the EU Eastern Partnership Programme, of which it was a co-initiator (with Sweden). Donald Tusk's government had been trying to improve relations with Russia since 2007, for example through the regional Polish-German-Russian initiative of the so-called Kaliningrad Triangle, and while this Polish "reset" in relations with Russia yielded some tangible successes, such as the introduction of an agreement on local border traffic for the Kaliningrad region, the April 2010 Smolensk air crash cast a shadow over the policy. An initial warming of relations in the immediate aftermath of the crash, which killed Polish President Lech Kaczyński and almost one hundred other officials, was followed by a lack of cooperation by the Russian government verging on intentional obstruction of the investigation, which fuelled conspiracy theories of Russian involvement and Polish government complicity in the tragedy. This led to the reset's gradual decline, and Russia's annexation of Crimea and intervention in Donbas became an opportunity to reaffirm two tenets of the Polish foreign policy, namely that Russia is a problem and Ukraine a (potential) solution.

There were few voices in foreign policy debates that cast doubt on the need to contain Russia and to support Ukraine's Europeanisation efforts. The debate was rather over the means to achieve this end, and here as well a broad consensus developed on the need to adopt a multilateralist approach. Donald Tusk, both as prime minister and later in his capacity as President of the European Council, played an important role in mobilising support among key EU members, especially Germany, for punitive action against Russia and assistance to Ukraine. This activism contrasts Poland's foreign policy with those of the other V4 members, which followed rather than shaped the EU response to the crisis.

At the same time, pro-Russian statements by Slovak, Czech and Hungarian politicians created the perception in Poland of a divergence among the V4 countries with respect to Russia and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. This has led some to propose that Poland should seek closer alliances with the

Baltic states, which broadly shared (it was assumed) Poland’s perspective on the crisis, and that the V4 was no longer relevant for Polish foreign policy. However, Poland’s new president, Andrzej Duda, and the newly victorious Law and Justice (PiS) party vowed during the election campaign to establish a broader “Intermarium” coalition of countries within the EU, encompassing the Baltic states, the V4 group, as well as Romania and Bulgaria. They also placed the blame for the perceived lack of unity within the Visegrad countries on the Tusk government, accusing it of not having exercised sufficient leadership. Time will tell whether Law and Justice will be able to make good on its promises to revitalise V4 cooperation. The starting point would be to recognise that, despite all the pro-Russian statements by certain prominent politicians, the group has managed to maintain a unified position in favour of both EU sanctions and Ukraine’s EU integration through the Association Agreement. Another key condition for Poland to enhance its role within the V4 will be to maintain the previous government’s multilateralist approach and to foster good relations and dialogue with key EU partners, especially Germany.

## A blessing in disguise? The conflict’s impact on V4 trade and energy

A comparison of the individual Visegrad countries’ trade relations with Russia shows a common pattern – imports from this country to the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia highly exceed exports from the V4 states to Russia, i.e. all of the V4 countries face the problem of a trade deficit with Russia. Poland’s economic turnover is the most uneven, with a trade deficit in 2014 of EUR 10.3 billion. In comparison to Poland, the situation in Hungary (with a trade deficit of almost EUR 3.3 billion) and Slovakia (EUR 2.8 billion) looks slightly better, while the Czech Republic has the most balanced turnover with a trade deficit of just under EUR 600 million. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that the overall trade deficit between the V4 countries and Russia has decreased since 2012.

**Table 1. Trade between the Visegrad countries and Russia in 2014 (in millions of EUR)**

Country	January–December 2014			Value index (same period of the previous year = 100.0)	
	Imports	Exports	Balance	Imports	Exports
<b>Hungary</b>	5,422.60	2,125.90	-3,296.70	84	84
<b>Czech Republic</b>	4,703.66	4,105.27	-598.38	80	92
<b>Poland</b>	17,393.30	7,009.20	-10,384.10	91	86
<b>Slovakia</b>	4,915.00	2,076.00	-2,839.00	80	82

**Source:** Statistical offices of the Visegrad countries

A comparison with Visegrad figures for 2013 demonstrates Russia’s relatively modest position as a destination for V4 countries’ goods as a percentage of total exports: Slovakia – 4.0%, Czech Republic – 3.7%, Hungary – 3.1%, and Poland – 5.4%. Russia’s position as a source of imported goods is much stronger: 10% of Slovakia’s imports came from Russia in 2013, as did 5.6% of the Czech Republic’s, 8.7% of Hungary’s and 12.5% of Poland’s (WTO Country Profiles, 2013).

The Visegrad countries export mainly manufactured goods and machinery to Russia. Agricultural products, which have been the target of Russian countersanctions, have been high on the list of Polish exports, while Russia’s import ban on these goods has been less harmful to other Visegrad countries. Nonetheless, in all V4 countries agricultural producers have expected support in easing the difficulties associated with selling their products to Russia from national governments and EU institutions. In

Hungary, agricultural producers are the only group exporting to Russia to have asked for governmental assistance.

Imports from Russia to the Visegrad countries consist overwhelmingly of energy resources, especially crude oil and natural gas. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are still very dependent on a single supplier – more than 75% of these countries' petroleum and natural gas imports come from Russia.

**Table 2. Share of imports of gas and petroleum from Russia as a percentage of total national V4 and EU imports of the product in 2013**

Country	Natural Gas	Petroleum Oils
Hungary	75–100 %	75–100 %
Czech Republic	75–100 %	75–100 %
Poland	75–100 %	75–100 %
Slovakia	75–100 %	75–100 %
EU	41 %	35 %

Source: Eurostat

Trade with Ukraine definitely figures less prominently in the Visegrad countries' trade turnover than trade with Russia, especially with respect to imports. In the case of Hungary, 2.39% of total exports went to Ukraine in 2013, and imports from this country constituted only 1.65% of Hungary's total imports. The situation in Polish-Ukrainian trade is similar, where the share of Polish exports that went to Ukraine in 2013 was 2.81% of Poland's total exports, and its imports from Ukraine made up just 1.08% of Poland's total imports. The breakdown of the Visegrad countries' exports to Ukraine is similar to that of their exports to Russia, i.e. comprising mostly manufactured goods and machinery. Ukraine is important for the Visegrad countries as a transit country for Russian gas.

**Table 3. Trade between the Visegrad countries and Ukraine in 2014 (in millions of EUR)**

Country	January–December 2014			Value index (same period of the previous year = 100.0)	
	Imports	Exports	Balance	Imports	Exports
Hungary	1,277.7	1,567.1	289.4	103	81
Czech Republic	869.73	748.17	-121.55	96	60
Poland	1,696.98	3,140.61	1,443.63	102	73
Slovakia	556.00	326.00	-230.00	89	68

Source: Statistical offices of the Visegrad countries

Economic data indicate that the current economic crisis in Ukraine is having a visible negative impact on the Visegrad countries' export potential to Ukraine. The value index shows that the decrease in exports varies from 19 (Hungary) to 40 points (Czech Republic). Nevertheless, it must be underlined that in absolute figures this decrease is not considered to be significant in the total volume of the Visegrad countries' exports.

Over the last few years, the Visegrad countries' trade relations with Russia and Ukraine have experienced a period of serious fluctuation. After a sharp fall in general turnover with both eastern neighbours in 2008–2009, which came as a consequence of the financial crisis and the Ukrainian-Russian

gas crisis, economic cooperation started to recover (faster with Russia, slower with Ukraine). The situation worsened in 2014, however, and turnover plunged once again (especially due to a significant decrease in exports from the Visegrad countries).

The current negative trend in trade relations with Russia is first and foremost a consequence of the devaluation of the rouble that took place in 2014 and early 2015. Russia's involvement in the conflict in Ukraine and falling oil prices have eroded confidence in the Russian state and its economy, which have resulted in exchange rate volatility and shrinking consumption in Russian society. The economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the West represent another factor which is considered to have had a negative influence on the Russian economy, as well as on trade between Russia and the Visegrad countries, although the sanctions' real impact on trade relations is rather difficult to measure.<sup>133</sup>

There is no consensus among the political leadership of the Visegrad countries on the sanctions imposed on Russia by the EU. In Poland, the strongest supporter of economic sanctions, the policy of maintaining (or even strengthening) sanctions is favoured by both the current government and Polish society. At this moment, it seems rather unlikely that Poland will ease its stance on sanctions, even after the new government comes into office following recent parliamentary elections.

On the opposite side is the position of Hungary's ruling elite. The Hungarian government has been very critical of the sanctions, and Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has characterised them as "shooting ourselves in the foot". The government's position is that sanctions are not yielding a result and are harmful to European economies. A similar position is held by Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, who has stated repeatedly that the sanctions are counterproductive. In the Czech Republic, the political attitude towards sanctions appears to be the most complicated. The government seems to have certain reservations about sanctions, but is definitely more careful in expressing its concerns than the country's president, Miloš Zeman, who is the Czech Republic's most visible protagonist of the so-called "friends of Russia" camp.

As has already been mentioned, the countersanctions imposed by Russia on the EU as an answer to Western sanctions, have hardly been noticeable in three out of the four Visegrad economies. Only in Poland has this issue been considered a serious challenge, as agricultural products constituted between a 10% and 20% share of Poland's total exports to Russia before the countersanctions were introduced. Even in Poland, however, it seems that a solution to this problem has been found. The combined actions of financial support for food producers, promotional campaigns (e.g. "I eat it because it's Polish") and an active search for new markets for Polish agricultural products have visibly reduced the economic costs of the Russian countersanctions for Polish producers.

An analysis of trade relations in the energy sphere between the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia on the one hand and Russia on the other shows that all the Visegrad countries are dependent on a single dominant supplier of energy resources, namely gas and oil. Although the total amount of these resources imported from Russia is decreasing, Russia's dominant role as a provider of gas and oil persists. Despite the fact that they face similar problems in this area, the Visegrad countries do not present a united position on energy vis-à-vis Russia. Whereas Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovakia seem to perceive their energy security priority to be finding alternative suppliers of energy resources, e.g. the LNG terminal in Poland, the Hungarian government believes that it can improve its energy security through closer cooperation with Russia. The most visible example of this policy is the contract signed in 2014 between Hungary and Russia to build new reactor blocks at the Paks Nuclear Power Plant. The project is to be financed with loans provided by the Russian side.

In February 2015, the European Commission officially launched an initiative to establish a European energy union, the final goals of which are to create a single energy market among the European Union countries and to ensure that energy security is provided in line with climate policy. In general, the Visegrad countries welcomed the idea of establishing an energy union, although the prime minister

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**133** The example of Slovakia demonstrates that it is possible to collect data on this issue, however. According to figures provided by the Slovak Ministry of Economy in February 2015, the EU's economic sanctions contributed to an overall decline in Slovakia's bilateral trade with Russia in 2014 by approximately 16% on both the export and import sides.

of Hungary has raised doubts as to its workability. In some interviews, he has praised it, while on other occasions he has characterised it as unacceptable, contending that it further constrains national sovereignty over energy policy.

The Visegrad countries' respective expectations for the energy union are not always compatible. Differences can be discerned, for example, between Poland and the Czech Republic, although both countries' governments have supported this initiative. Whereas the Polish government expected that the energy union would entail the introduction of a demand aggregation mechanism for gas trading, the Czechs are overwhelmingly against this possibility. The Poles have been rather supportive of the European Commission's engagement in evaluating Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs) signed between an EU country and third states, while the Czechs have objected to such a provision. Despite some visible differences, the Visegrad countries still have a lot in common regarding energy policy. Improving energy security remains high on the V4 agenda and various actions have been initiated in this area. The Visegrad countries are implementing projects of common interest (PCIs) – studies and infrastructure connections aimed at creating an integrated EU energy market (*Projects of Common...*, 2015). The question of joining regional markets is especially important for Poland, which is still considered an "energy island", having almost no electricity interconnections with its neighbours. It seems that nuclear energy too is considered important for strengthening energy security – nuclear power plants already exist or are planned in all the Visegrad countries. Nuclear energy is considered by a portion of society and the political class in the Visegrad countries to be an important resource for diversifying the energy mix, despite increasing concerns about its financial feasibility. It seems that in all of the Visegrad countries questions of energy security and affordable energy prices are a priority for society. The need to invest more in energy efficiency is also discussed, but the V4 countries are still considered to have insufficient levels of investment in these technologies. Similarly, the investment into the renewable sources of energy is very low in the Visegrad countries and the political climate is rather reserved or even hostile to the development of the renewable energy sector, especially when it comes to small or communal investments into the solar and wind energy. Finally, climate policy, which remains high on the agenda in Western Europe, does not rank high on the list of priorities for Visegrad energy policy.

When it comes to relations with Ukraine, it must be emphasised that each of the V4 countries is ready to support Ukraine's energy sector. Thanks to the reverse flows in pipelines, gas can be pumped not only from Russia through Ukraine to the European Union, but also from neighbouring countries back to Ukraine. Such reverse flows are being provided by Slovakia, Poland and Hungary (the Czech Republic does not share a border with Ukraine). As of January 2015, these three Visegrad countries have the technical capacity to deliver approximately 21.9 billion cubic metres annually to Ukraine, and it was anticipated that European suppliers would provide 60% of total gas imports to Ukraine in 2015 (*Ukraine Talks Tough...*, 2015). Slovakia has the largest potential capacities, as the Vojany-Uzhhorod pipeline can deliver approximately 20 million cubic metres (mcm) per day; Hungary can deliver nearly 16 mcm per day and Poland 4 mcm (*Enhancing energy security...*, 2015). This demonstrates that despite the fact that the Visegrad countries have differing views on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, Ukraine can to some extent count on their solidarity in the sphere of energy.

One can conclude that, contrary to many statements by self-described "pragmatists" in the V4 countries who have continued to criticise the sanctions against Russia over alleged damage to V4 economies, the overall impact of the conflict and the EU sanctions policy, while visible, has been relatively modest in the light of these countries' overall trade volumes with the rest of the world, and especially with other EU member states. Poland, which has been the most outspoken critic of Russia and the strongest supporter of sanctions among the V4, has also been the most affected by the sanctions and countersanctions, but the overall strong performance of the Polish economy and booming exports have largely cushioned the blow. As regards energy security, the conflict may yet turn out to be a blessing in disguise, as it has prompted V4 governments to enhance the diversity and stability of supplies, and to improve regional cooperation, of which reverse gas flow mechanisms with Ukraine are the best example.

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## AFTERWORD

# The V4 reassembled – but to what end?

JACEK KUCHARCZYK – GRIGORIJ MESEŽNIKOV

The ambition of this book-length publication has been to analyse in detail the responses of the V4 countries (not only by their governments, but also civil society and all significant actors) to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as well as the impact of this conflict and the Kremlin's policies on V4 politics, societies and economies. The broad aims of this publication required extensive research, which provided a broad overview, yet left a number of issues in need of further investigation. This is especially true in the case of the direct impact of Kremlin propaganda on V4 politics and society. While there is some amount of anecdotal evidence, which has also been mentioned in this book, there is clearly a need for more systematic empirical research in this area. Such reservations notwithstanding, we believe that the data and insights collected by this publication's authors will provide readers with useful knowledge and a better understanding of the dynamics and complexities of the responses in each V4 country which go beyond the abundant stereotypes and generalisations in the public debate.

We hope that policy- and opinion-makers in the V4 countries will gain additional insight into and understanding of developments in other V4 states. Equally important is the interested public, as well as key partners and stakeholders outside the V4 who should also benefit from the detailed analysis offered by the present publication. Here, we should mention in particular our German and Ukrainian colleagues. Let us hope that this book will contribute to a more informed debate on the consequences of Russian revisionism for Europe.

It is also important to note that as we have worked on the successive chapters of this publication, there have been a number of developments within the region and beyond which are highly relevant to the subject matter of our analysis. While the Minsk agreements appear to have reduced the amount of violence in the Donbas region and have led to a certain stabilisation of the conflict (albeit at a very basic level, with no real solution in sight), European public attention has been shifting elsewhere.

The so-called refugee crisis has focused the spotlight of political debate on the Syrian civil war and the immeasurable suffering of this country's civilian population. While unprecedented numbers of refugees are reaching the shores of Europe and making their tragic trek across the continent, European public opinion has become increasingly divided with respect to this humanitarian crisis. Angela Merkel's decision to suspend the dysfunctional Dublin rules and not to return refugees arriving in Germany to the "first safe country" marked a political turning point for Europe. While many civic groups and ordinary Europeans made efforts to help the refugees, their increasingly large numbers have strengthened populist and xenophobic reactions throughout the EU. One of the most outspoken critics of Merkel's humanitarian gesture and – more generally – of the idea that European governments should live up to their obligation to admit refugees – has been Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Other Central European leaders, such as Czech President Miloš Zeman and Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, followed suit with apocalyptic warnings of the consequences of allowing Muslims into their countries and purported threats to host societies in the areas of security, economics and cultural identity. It should come as no surprise that the same politicians who were most outspoken in their criticism of

the EU sanctions against Russia and most apologetic of Putin's policies vis-à-vis Ukraine were also the loudest fear-mongers with respect to the refugee crisis. The fear of refugees and islamophobia have consolidated the European "populist international", who look to the Kremlin for inspiration, guidance and support.

The refugee crisis came in the midst of the Polish parliamentary elections, and politicians across the political spectrum were mindful of opinion polls showing large majorities opposed to admitting refugees under the quota system proposed by the European Commission. This led to the initial adoption of a hard line by Ewa Kopacz's government, and united the Visegrad countries in rejecting the quota system. Although PM Kopacz eventually yielded to pressure from the liberal segment of Polish public opinion and certain EU partners, and broke ranks with the other V4 countries by voting in favour of the quotas, the earlier V4 unity on this issue has done irreparable reputational damage to Central Europe.

In Poland, the Civic Platform (OP) government's hesitation on the issue of quotas – first rejecting and then embracing the quota system – was ruthlessly exploited by its chief rival, the Law and Justice (PiS) party. Its leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, took a hard line on quotas, rejecting the "dictate from another power" (i.e. Germany), and pointed to the purported damage brought upon other European societies by the presence of Muslim communities. This unrepentant islamophobia places Kaczyński in the same group as the aforementioned Central European politicians. Ironically for a strong critic of Putin and the Russian policy in Ukraine, Kaczyński's new bedfellows are some of the most pro-Putin politicians in Europe.

The tough line on the refugee crisis definitely contributed to the PO defeat and the PiS victory in Poland's October parliamentary elections. V4 unity on the refugee issue was restored after a new government was constituted, which has allowed PiS to claim that it has begun to fulfil its election pledge to strengthen Visegrad cooperation. Needless to say, this is a rather roundabout way of building a lasting coalition on the issue which matters most in Polish foreign policy, namely, how to properly respond to the Russian threat and to sustain Ukraine in its pro-European reform efforts.

As has been mentioned in earlier sections of this publication, the 2015 Polish election campaign did not reveal any substantive policy differences concerning the Russian-Ukrainian conflict between former President Bronisław Komorowski and the Civic Platform government on one hand and the Law and Justice presidential candidate (and current Polish president), Andrzej Duda, and his party on the other. Indeed, foreign and European policy played a surprisingly marginal role in the debates, and the two main parties seem to have agreed on the key policy priorities in this area, namely, keeping Ukraine independent and pro-European and strengthening NATO security guarantees in Poland. Law and Justice strongly criticised the PO government for not doing enough on these issues. Time will tell whether they will be able to deliver on their promises on such issues as enhancing NATO's military presence on Polish soil and significantly augmenting military spending (the latter promise comes on top of a very generous set of social spending pledges which seem to be a priority for the incoming government).

The initial weeks of Beata Szydło's government have seen certain developments which may significantly obstruct the implementation of the above-mentioned objectives. Firstly, controversial appointments to key government posts – as well as certain statements made by these new appointees – will not build trust with Poland's key partners, be they the Germans or the Americans, as regards such sensitive topics as military and security cooperation. Secondly, some of the new government's actions, with active support from President Duda, have included an Orbán-style assault against Poland's Constitutional Tribunal, as well as certain other moves which have rekindled fears that the PiS government may threaten the principles of democracy and the rule of law. This may not only weaken Poland's position within the EU and its ability to shape EU policies, but also undermine EU efforts to promote democracy beyond its eastern borders. Until recently, Poland had been a prime example of the success of both democratic and economic transition, but the discourse adopted by PiS during the campaign (ironically labelled the "Poland in ruins" narrative) and – more importantly – their domestic policies implemented after the elections will undermine Poland's ambitions to serve as a role model for Ukraine's European choice.

In Slovakia, the refugee (migrant) situation has been taken up by the ruling Smer-SD party as a central campaign issue ahead of upcoming parliamentary elections in March 2016. Casting himself as Slovakia's main protector against external threats, Prime Minister Fico has sued the European Union at the Court of Justice in Luxembourg for its decision to reallocate 120,000 refugees according to defined quotas for individual member states. By characterising migrants as posing an imminent terrorist threat, Fico is stoking xenophobia among a broad section of the population. Symptomatically, he did not use such explicit language to express his views on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, nor did he mention Russia's aggressive and subversive anti-Western policy as a potential threat to stability in the Central European region and to security throughout Europe.

Slovakia was not alone in its opposition to the European Union on the issue of reallocating refugees; Hungary filed a lawsuit against the EU at the Court of Justice in Luxembourg as well. The basis of Hungary's legal challenge differs from that of Slovakia's, which attacks the very essence of the decision-making process by qualified majority introduced in the Lisbon Treaty. By contrast, Hungary's lawsuit contends that it is inappropriate to decide on the reallocation of refugees when the Schengen Area's external borders are not sufficiently protected. In this connection, Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán has stated that the redistribution of migrants is a threat to all European countries and to the Hungarian nation in particular. His government appealed to the Court of Justice after Hungary's parliament passed a law obliging it to do so. The law states that the EU Council has not taken into account the principle of subsidiarity, nor has it provided the opportunity for national parliaments to present their positions. Previously, the Hungarian parliament passed a resolution rejecting the EU plan to introduce a quota system for the reallocation of migrants. The resolution was supported by MPs from the ruling Fidesz party, its coalition partner KDNP and the opposition radical right-wing party Jobbik.

Unlike Slovakia, which was circumvented by the wave of refugees making their way through the Balkans to Western Europe, Hungary was impacted directly by an influx of refugees. What brought the two countries together on this issue, however, was their ruling elites' approach to the crisis: in Hungary, as in Slovakia, the refugee issue was exploited for domestic political gain. At the beginning of November, Fidesz initiated a citizens' petition against the EU quota system, and according to opinion polls carried out by the TARKI agency, support for the Fidesz-KDNP governing coalition increased during the peak of the crisis from 22% in June 2015 to 28% in October 2015.

A garrulous statement was made by the speaker of Hungary's National Assembly, László Kövér, in connection with the Czech government's decision to send 50 police officers to Hungary to help patrol its southern border. Kövér placed particular emphasis on the Visegrad dimension of such solidarity: "This technical, police and military assistance is significant in itself, but more significant is the symbolism of mutual solidarity at times when one country gets into trouble." Kövér believes this move also sends a message to the European Union that the V4 countries are very serious about being treated as equal partners.

In view of the need to end the war in Syria, which is a major source of the migration flows into Europe, and to defeat the Islamic State, Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó has stressed the need for cooperation between Russia and the transatlantic community. It is noteworthy that completely absent in such statements is the context of current Russian policy towards Ukraine and the West, as well as the context of Russia's military actions in Syria, where its aims – i.e. maintaining at all costs the pro-Russia dictatorship of Syrian President Assad – diverge significantly from the declared intentions of the EU and NATO.

In the Czech Republic, President Miloš Zeman has raised the flag of renewed "Visegrad solidarity". At the end of November, Zeman condemned the Czech government led by Bohuslav Sobotka for not mounting a legal challenge against the refugee quotas at the Court of Justice along the lines of the lawsuits filed by Slovakia and Hungary: "It would be in fact a similar betrayal to when Poland changed course and ultimately agreed to the quotas," Zeman said. "We should not engage in dirty tricks," he went on, "because each dirty trick breaks down the Visegrad Four, which – if united – could have real power." At every opportunity, the Czech president reiterates his views about the terrorist threat posed by the refugees. While Czech Prime Minister Sobotka counters that the threat comes from terrorists,

not refugees who need help, Zeman considers this attitude dangerous, believing it beyond doubt that the Islamic State has planted jihadists among the migrants, as was purportedly confirmed by the terrorist attacks in Paris. Zeman sees danger approaching his country's borders, and considers it naive to think that there is no link between the migration wave and terrorism. It is only a matter of time, he says, until Islamic militants attack the Czech Republic.

Alongside Hungary and Slovakia (as well as Romania), the Czech Republic rejected the EU proposal to introduce a quota system for relocating 160,000 refugees. In early October, the Czech Chamber of Deputies voted against the EU plan, and in mid-November the Czech Senate adopted an Interior Ministry proposal to amend the law on asylum, residence and the temporary protection of foreigners which tightened the rules for granting international protection to foreign migrants. In the end, however, the Czech government did not mount a legal challenge over the quotas, fearing that such a move would worsen relations between the Czech Republic and the EU. The Czech Republic did manifest its "Visegrad solidarity" on the issue, however, by sending police to patrol Hungary's southern border and by including the issue of the current migration situation in Europe on the agenda of the V4 summit in Prague in early December 2015 (the Czech Republic holds the rotating V4 presidency in the second half of 2015).

The change of government in Poland and turbulent domestic political developments in three other V4 countries have come at a time when President Putin has sent Russian troops to Syria to support his only political ally in the Middle East, Syrian President Assad. Putin's assertions that he shares the same aims as Western countries in their fight against the Islamic State have become particularly resonant in the wake of the terrorist attacks in Paris. Accepting Putin's offer of an alliance in Syria would undermine EU and NATO resolve to contain Russian aggression in Eastern Europe and to force it to respect international law. The first test of this resolve will be the decision to extend sanctions against Russia, which will otherwise expire at the end of January 2016. We can only hope that the V4 governments will rise to the occasion and – despite populist temptations on the domestic front – remain united in their support for a sustained and principled EU response, which also happens to be in their long-term best political interests.

Warsaw and Bratislava, December 2015

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The annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and the launch of a hybrid war against Ukraine was Russia's answer to the revolution triggered by Euromaidan. This has posed a fundamental challenge for the European Union. Although the EU has reacted to the conflict in a unified manner, statements made by certain European political leaders have undermined the public perception of European unanimity.

The authors of this publication – Polish, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian experts – examine the factors that have influenced the stances of the Visegrad countries vis-à-vis the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, as well as the positions of individual Central European politicians. They trace the domestic political discourse, examine the formation of foreign policy towards Russia and Ukraine, and assess the conflict's impact on the individual V4 countries' economies and energy policies.

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