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**BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN UNION AND RUSSIA.
PERSPECTIVES ON UKRAINE'S COMPLEX POLITICAL SITUATION**

Rusch L.

Ukraine finds itself in a difficult position between the European Union and the newest Russian-engineered integration project for the post-Soviet space, the Eurasian Union. A thorough understanding of the interdependence between Ukraine and its partners is thus essential for determining “the right way” for Ukraine. The paper, on which this article is based, explores this by applying Complex Interdependence Theory and proposes a cautious foreign policy approach.

Keywords: interdependence, Ukraine, European Union, Eurasian Union, Customs Union, Russia, relations, multi-vector, Association Agreement.

**МЕЖДУ ЕВРОПЕЙСКИМ СОЮЗОМ И РОССИЕЙ.
ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ СЛОЖНОЙ УКРАИНСКОЙ
ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ СИТУАЦИИ**

Руш Л.

Украина находится в затруднительном положении между Европейским Союзом и зарождающимся новым российским интеграционным проектом на постсоветском пространстве – Евразийским Союзом. В условиях взаимозависимости Украины и ее партнеров необходимо дать определение «правильного пути» для Украины. В исследовании, на котором основана данная статья, рассматриваемая проблема изучается на основе сложной теории взаимозависимости, предусматривающей осторожный подход во внешней политике.

Ключевые слова: взаимозависимость, Украина, Европейский Союз, Евразийский Союз, Таможенный Союз, Россия, отношения, мульти-вектор, Соглашение об ассоциации.

Ukrainian dilemma

At the present moment Ukraine finds itself in an awkward situation between two projects of economic, social and political integration, of which it can choose one. Officially, Ukraine has a multi vector foreign policy, in practice, however, Ukraine has to make a strategic choice between the European Union on the one hand, and Russia's Customs Union and soon-to-be Eurasian Union on the other hand. In this paper the capitalised term "Customs Union" shall refer to the customs union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, not to the European Union. The choice is one between a complicated, resource-intensive association process with the EU, and a warm welcome from the Russian Federation in their vision of a Eurasian Union.

The Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine is due to be signed at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November 2013 and shall contain a Comprehensive Free Trade agreement. It thus is expected to significantly deepen Ukraine's political association and economic integration with the EU. The fundamental deal made at the EU-Ukraine summit in Brussels in February 2013 entailed that Ukraine would prove its willingness to commit to the EU by initiating and carrying out reforms in a number of areas by the deadline 1st May 2013. There has been no definite decision from the EU side as to whether Ukraine's progress so far is considered satisfactory. The European Commission has expressed her consent to go ahead in with the plans of signing the agreement this year if Ukraine shows further progress [18]. Jan Tombinski, head of the EU's delegation to Ukraine, however, warns of false enthusiasm by saying that an agreement could not be signed as of this moment (May 2013) [20].

As Brussels and Kyiv continue their path of uncertainty, the Russian Federation is also more than eager to foster cooperation with the second-largest economy of the former Soviet republics. First of all, Russia has voiced a Monroe doctrine-like interest in its "near abroad" and has been hostile to the Euro-Atlantic integration of former Soviet republics. Secondly, Russia is currently creating a Eurasian Economic Space, reuniting some countries of the former Soviet space in an organisation, which is intended to turn into a "Eurasian Union" eventually. The

present Customs Union includes Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, but is open to additional members, including Ukraine. Winning Ukraine for the project would significantly enhance the prospects of the project.

At this moment, Ukraine is sending paradoxical signals by, on the one hand, reaffirming its willingness to go through with the planned EU agreement, and on the other hand, demanding observer status in the Russian project. An agreement that grants Ukraine observer status has been reached. Some even went as far as suggesting a 3+1 format, in which Ukraine is not a full member of the customs union, but holds a special, privileged position. Hence, to the outside world it is unclear where Ukraine's priorities lie – East or West. Every policy choice that is made in the near future will be intertwined with and needs to be interpreted in the light of the choice between European integration and a Eurasian outlook. Considering the fact that membership in any of the two organisations will be a permanent project, those choices have to be made carefully and in full awareness of the consequences.

A theoretical approach

So far, the scholarly community has not applied IR theory in order to shed light on the Ukrainian East-West dilemma. I am convinced that this topic is currently much debated in Ukraine, but very few studies have been published in English and thus been made available to the international relations community. It might, however, be a useful tool to explain the situation on the ground and can provide for certain directions with regard to policy choices. What is needed is a framework with which Ukraine's interdependence with both the EU and Russia can be put in perspective. A useful concept in the Ukrainian context is Complex Interdependence (CI) Theory, which was developed by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye [13].

The research questions of the study this article is based on therefore are: *to what extent does Ukraine find itself in a situation of Complex Interdependence with, on the one hand, the EU and, on the other hand, the Eurasian Union project exemplified by the Russian Federation? Drawing from those findings, which kinds of policies are smart policy choices for Ukraine in the next few months?*

Complex interdependence

Complex Interdependence, or “the opposite of realism” is an “ideal type of world politics” [13, p.19], which entails a set of assumptions about human nature and the international system. They hold that reality usually lies somewhere between the ideal type of realism and CI. A number of criteria point towards the presence of CI, rather than the realist view on relations between states.

The first point they make is that there are *multiple channels* connecting societies, including formal governmental ties, and, informal non-governmental ones. This opposes the traditionalist state-centric view on international relations. Besides the *interstate* relations assumed by realists, they therefore also assume *transgovernmental* and *transnational* ties. As an effect, Nye and Keohane argue, different countries’ policies have become more sensitive towards each other, even domestic politics have increasingly tangible effects in other countries.

The second characteristic is an *absence of hierarchy* among issues on the national political agenda, which also leads to a more prominent role of domestic politics compared to the traditionally larger concern with foreign politics. The supposed effect of such a development is the problem of coining a coherent foreign policy. Multiple interests groups voice their concerns on multiple types of policies, making every foreign policy decision essentially a consensus. As an example, every economic choice also requires a consideration of ecological and/or strategic concerns.

Thirdly and lastly, that more diversified political agenda also implies that the use of military force is by no means the preferred policy choice for politicians, who seek to pursue their (diverse) interests. Although of course not deemed irrelevant altogether, military force takes is a lower profile policy choice in a situation of CI and other issues, be they ecological or economic, may be the main concerns.

In the light of these characteristics of CI, Nye and Keohane turn to describing their view of politics in such a system [13, p. 25-32]. Firstly, unlike in the traditionalist view of politics, where militarily strong states manage to achieve all their goals by linking their power in the military sphere to any other issue area, such *linkages* are less successful in CI. Secondly, agenda setting becomes a key

component of policy making. When agendas are more varied and actors more diverse there suddenly is a competition for the top agenda points and different actors may at different times be successful in pushing their matter of concern to the top of the agenda.

Thirdly, the concept of national interest becomes blurred. Unlike in the realist view of international relations, many contacts are beyond the control of state. These links affect the outcomes of political processes and make it increasingly difficult for governments to anticipate and control outcomes, hence to define *the* one national interest. Lastly, the role of international organisations increases in a situation of CI. Not only do they serve as a forum, they also significantly increase the position of small and economically weak countries in the international arena.

In order to find out to what extent Ukraine's relationship with either side is characterised by CI, a number of questions have to be raised. Firstly, how varied are the channels of interaction between the two entities? Secondly, how varied is the political agenda? Thirdly, are there signs that military issues and security concerns play a minor and/or diminishing role on the political agenda between the countries? Supplementing questions are, for instance, is an increasing amount of issues being dealt with in international fora, rather than on a bilateral basis? Is there evidence that the stronger entity in the dual comparison does not dominate on all issues of negotiations, but dominance can be assessed on an issue-by-issue basis? Furthermore, is active agenda making being pursued by a variety of actors, or, does the government simply dictate the agenda? Lastly, can it be argued that the national interest of either entity is not easy to define? All of those questions will guide the analysis of Ukraine's East-West dilemma.

Ukraine and the European Union

The analysis of Ukraine-EU channels of interaction shows that next to interstate relations, transnational and transgovernmental links between the societies exist. EU-Ukraine interstate relations are mainly governed through the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the foreign policy scheme governing EU relations with neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. In particular the

Eastern Partnership (EaP) has been a forum in which the Association Agreement talks have been conducted since 2008. The Association Agreement, which is due to be signed at the upcoming Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius in November 2013, is a document, which is intended to create a deep political cooperation between the EU and Ukraine. It is „unprecedented in its breadth and depth“ and shall include among support for essential reforms and a “Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area – this will go further than classic free trade areas, as it will both open up markets but also address competitiveness issues and the steps needed to meet EU standards and trade on EU markets.” These schemes provide for regular summits and meetings. In Action Plans, the fields of cooperation are listed and concrete plans for reform and financial support are agreed upon. Cooperation includes issues relating to economics and trade, as well as “soft” issues such as respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms, social policies, shared values, and the like are addressed at an interstate level. For instance, the recent imprisonment of former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko is seen by the EU as a case of selective justice and a violation of human rights [6]. Furthermore, the European Union is a major financial contributor of development aid to Ukraine [9]. Another important “soft” issue on the agenda has been the facilitation of the visa regime between the country and Schengen space. All in all, *interstate* relations between Ukraine and the EU are strong in a variety of issue areas and both sides are seeking to deepen such relations even further.

The second category of channels of interaction, which Nye and Keohane name, are *transgovernmental* relations. The activities of international organisations and international conferences provide bases for such contacts [14, p. 50]. The Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) are two noteworthy examples of such fora, in which transnational talks are conducted. Both of these organisations bring together experts and representatives from their member countries in a variety of bodies, be they formal committees and working groups or in informal settings at meetings.

The third and final category is *transnational* relations, pursued by actors, which are in no way associated with the state itself. The first type of connections to be named is business ones. The trade volume with the European Union countries is also significant, making the EU Ukraine's second largest trading partner [21]. Besides interaction through commerce, Ukraine and the EU have created favourable conditions for both academic and youth exchange. Student and university staff mobility is one of the core elements of the European Higher Education Area, to which Ukraine has acceded [10]. Academic and Youth exchange is comparatively low [5], the harmonisation of education policies and increasing provision of scholarships for EU citizens to study in Ukraine and vice versa is leading to an increase in academic mobility and scholarly exchange.

Civil society provides the basis for another channel of interaction between the EU and Ukraine. Susan Stewart has found that Ukrainian civil society is very dependent on external funding, especially from the European Commission. Stewart was also able to observe that while cooperation is rarely happening, there is a genuine and widespread sharing of information among civil society actors, especially in the human rights domain, thus effective communication.

Even at the individual level, interaction between the societies can be observed. 6.5 million Ukrainians currently reside in foreign countries according to the data provided by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and many of them are believed to be migrant workers [15]. Russia is by percentage the highest labour migrant receiving country for Ukrainians, but the EU ranks a close second (approximately 40%). The remittances of Ukrainians working abroad to their families at home are tremendous: they amount to over 5 billion Dollars in 2010, roughly the equivalent of total Foreign Direct Investment to Ukraine. Remittances are not only received from migrant workers, but also from the Ukrainian diaspora in the EU.

The second variable to be tested in the context of the question whether or not CI is predominant between Ukraine and the European Union is the political agenda. While the study this article is based on is more detailed in this regard, the article focuses only on the *common* political agenda of Ukraine and the EU, i.e. fields of

cooperation between the two entities. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement [16] of 1998 is due to be replaced by the more elaborate and more inclusive Association Agreement. The Association Agenda [7] gives an idea of what kind of issues are prioritized in EU-Ukraine cooperation. When analysing this document it becomes clear is that the EU-Ukrainian cooperation virtually covers all possible issue areas. If one also takes into account that the Association Agreement is meant to include a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, the economic and trade component appears to be the most important agenda point, yet, does not overshadow the overall agenda.

The third question to be considered is whether there are signs pointing to the fact that military issues and security concerns play a minor or diminishing role on the political agenda between the two entities? Judging from Ukraine's and the European Union's common agenda: Security matters do not make up a significant part of the Association Agenda and economic and trade issues clearly have more weight.

Can it also be said that security concerns play a decreasingly important role on the political agenda of Ukraine? The history of independent Ukraine reveals that security concerns have played a more important role in the 1990s and the early 2000s. The initial situation after factual independence was characterized by uncertainty about the sovereign status of Ukraine [3, p. 448]. Big questions such as the state of the Black Sea Fleet and the Soviet Union's nuclear weaponry were dominant topics in Ukraine's early years as a sovereign state. Ethnic conflict erupted in several former Soviet republics, one of them in Transnistria, right at Ukraine's territorial border. By now, it became clear that cooperation with NATO would continue at a partnership level, appeasing Russia. The territorial disputes in the Caucasus and Moldova have turned into "frozen conflicts". Officially, an agreement has been made that settles the dispute of the Russian Black Sea fleet until 2042 [11]. All of these facts point towards the notion that although security concerns are still important, in comparison with the immediate aftermath of independence, they play a decreasing role on the political agenda.

In the case of Ukraine and the European Union, the question whether an increasing amount of issues being dealt with in international fora, such as international organisations, rather than on a bilateral basis, hardly requires discussion. As asserted above, many fields of cooperation can nowadays only be addressed at the supranational level. The second question, whether there is evidence that the stronger entity in the dual comparison does not dominate in all areas of negotiation, but dominance can be assessed issue-by-issue, is more complex. On the one hand, the EU is often said to impose its values and policies on its partners by the use of sticks and carrots, effectively acting as a regional normative hegemon [12, p. 1601-1622]. The conditionality of the proposed Association Agreement reflects this. On the other hand, this study shows in detail that Ukraine has a real choice between two different organisations and is not without an alternative.

Whether active agenda making is being pursued is the third question. The politics of agenda setting within the EU have been studied in great detail and it is generally held that interest groups have a reasonably good access to the policy making process [23]. As for Ukraine, politicians are widely criticised for acting out of their self-interest rather than adhering to the will of the people. The final question is whether it is difficult to define the national interest. In Ukraine's case, this is clearly the case. For instance, as explained in the introduction of this paper, to the outside world it is difficult to see where Ukraine's priorities lie, since Ukraine is sending paradoxical signals. All in all, the additional part of the analysis roughly suggests that the EU and Ukraine really find themselves in a situation of CI.

Ukraine and Russia

The following section deals with the Russian dimension to the CI analysis. The *interstate* relations have a complicated history and have been characterized by complexity and uncertainty. Overall, it can be said that since President Yanukovich is in power, the relations have been improved. Under the "orange" administration they had been characterized by a comparatively cool tone, if not hostility. A number of conflicts are unresolved and are likely to remain problematic. On an institutional basis Russia and Ukraine have regular diplomatic relations with each other. The

heads of state meet in a bilateral context at Interstate Commission meetings, but also in the context of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). It can thus be said that regardless of the climate of *interstate* relations between Russia and Ukraine, they exist and there is active correspondence due to the sheer abundance of common areas of interest and conflict.

Just as with the case of the EU, Ukraine and Russia also have *transgovernmental* relations, most notably through contacts within international organisations. In the previous section two prominent international organisations, the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) were named. Russia is a member state to both organisations, as well, and an important player in such fora. Beyond membership in such “Western European” organisations, there is also a number of Eastern European regional organisations, such as the CIS.

As with the European Union grand part of *transnational* interaction is conducted through business links. Russia is Ukraine’s largest trading partner. The overwhelming majority of commodities imported from Russia are mineral products, i.e. energy resources making Ukraine an important transit country for Russian gas to Western Europe. The topic of energy transit is a sensitive topic in its own right and any discussion of trade in energy relations between the two countries has a large political dimension, not just an economic one. Because of that, it is ever so important to inquire after the institutional developments governing economic relations [8, p. 23].

In the so-called humanitarian sphere of relations between Russia and Ukraine experts identify some serious obstacles to interaction. They see the root of these obstacles in the tendency to politicise issues in the ethnic, socio-cultural, linguistic and historic fields, effectively hindering cooperation between societies [8, p. 28].

Yet, one of the strongest links between the countries are the diasporas. The census conducted in 2001 showed that while 78% of the Ukrainian population considered themselves Ukrainian, but 17% (over 8 Million people) saw themselves as Russian [1]. Findings about mother tongues being spoken in Ukraine from October of

that year show that 29% of Ukrainians considered both Russian and Ukrainian as their mother tongues. Only 43% considered just Ukrainian to be their language, while 26% thought of Russian as their mother tongue [19]. Almost half of the 6.5 Million Ukrainians living abroad reside in the Russian Federation, mainly for the purpose of employment. Remittances from family members living and working abroad are quintessential to the performance of the Ukrainian economy [17]. As previously suggested, multiethnicity and working migration makes up for a significant societal connection between countries, in this case Ukraine and Russia.

Just as in the Ukrainian case, making statements about the political agenda requires fields of cooperation. What is peculiar about the Ukrainian-Russian relations is that they are, despite currently good relations, highly sensitive and characterised by some major disagreements, rather than by broad schemes of cooperation. Among these are the state of the Black Sea Fleet, the territorial disagreements concerning the Sea of Azov and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, gas issues, Russian attempts to take over key industries of the Ukrainian economy and the Russian mission to promote the Russian language outside its borders, thereby allegedly meddling with Ukrainian internal affairs. Energy politics for Russia and Ukraine are a highly volatile matter as well. Also the Russian influence on the Ukrainian economy and state language are being seen as an offence to Ukrainian national sovereignty. It can therefore be said that the Russian-Ukrainian agenda is, in fact, headed by strategic concerns. There is no blatant dominance, however.

The second part of the assessment is concerned with the hierarchy of issues. The previous analysis of the political agenda can account for much. Compared to the EU analysis strategic and security concerns rank a lot higher on the political agenda between Ukraine and Russia. As for whether the role is also diminishing, it can be said that at the moment many disagreements and security problems are, at least temporarily, settled. For instance, the Black Sea Fleet is scheduled to remain in Ukraine until at least 2042. Another sensitive issue was Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO. Since 2010, this possibility is off the table and Ukrainian participation in the organisation is no longer threatening Russia's interests in its sphere of influence.

Compared with the period since 1991, security issues are diminishing in importance on the Russian-Ukrainian agenda. Whether or not Russia and Ukraine still regard military force as an appropriate policy choice is difficult to estimate. During the Russo-Georgian War of 2008, Russia violated Georgian sovereignty. The aggressor question remains subject to dispute, but it shows that Russia is prepared to go to war, if it sees in danger vital interests.

Regarding the first additional question, there is evidence that the role of international roles in Russian-Ukrainian relations is increasing. The Russian Eurasian Union project has the potential to become an effective regional organisation dealing with economic integration [4]. Ukraine shows an increasing preference to such structures over bilateral arrangements. Secondly, does Russia dominate Ukraine in all issue areas? While Ukraine is highly vulnerable to Russia's powers, as exemplified by the 2009 gas crisis, Ukraine has retained some leverage for itself by resisting Russian language legislation pressure. Besides, with regard to Ukraine's association with the European Union Ukraine has a lot of leverage, too.

The third question concerns the agenda making process. Both countries are generally underdeveloped with regard to citizen activism. Not so much in Ukraine, but Russia is currently cracking down on civil society organisations and NGOs, foreign or domestic, thereby disabling important agenda setting actors. As for the spheres of cooperation one could say that the agenda is dictated by the facts on the ground. The final question is whether the national interest is easily defined or whether the multiplicity of actors contributing to the national dialogue blurs the concept of national interest. Russia's national interest is indeed subject to dispute. Andrew C. Kuchin and Igor A. Zevelev have recently identified three major domestic groups, who rally each other in their views of where Russia should be heading [2, p. 148]. These different influential sub-groups may have quite different opinions on Russia's role on the international stage. As for the additional questions asked, one can say that at least three out of four point to the fact that Ukraine and Russia find themselves in a situation of CI. In sum, the characteristics of CI have been fulfilled in both parts of the analysis and additional indicators confirm this to some extent.

Policy recommendations

Having established the theoretical underlying assumption that Ukraine and the European Union are complexly interlinked and Ukraine and Russia likewise, allows for some assumptions about smart policy directions for Ukraine in the near future. Ever since the disintegration of the former Soviet Union into fully sovereign states, there have been attempts to reunite the group of countries into several different types of organisations. As previous (unsuccessful) attempts to reunite the post-Soviet space in a regional international regime, the Eurasian Union is also based on a regional economic scheme of cooperation. But unlike previous projects, Dragneva and Wolczuk argue that the present framework means a “pivotal change in integration patterns” [2, p. 148] with real chances of success. Both the set up and the observed constraint from the side of Russia in terms of domination of the project is seen as contributing to this. Furthermore, the compatibility of the structure with the regulations of the World Trade Organization is believed to grant the project international legitimacy. Although doubts about the viability of the project will remain in place until meaningful success is observed, there are reasonably good chances of success for the Eurasian Union.

What are the implications for this analysis and for Ukraine? Trade relations with Russia are pivotal to the country's economy and a low purchase price for gas, the country's most significant import commodity from Russia, is an essential part of the national interest. Advisable is thus a cautious behaviour vis-à-vis the Customs Union. Hence, regardless of considerations concerning a civilizational choice between Eastern and Western Europe, as it is often put, interdependence concerns must not be overlooked from the Ukrainian side.

On the other hand, the European Union is a long established project of economic integration, which even now, during its most serious crisis since its creation, is still attracting new members. Ukraine, too, might one day become a member of this organisation, but not before the country is not transformed fundamentally. However, the signing of the Association Agreement is a critical step towards furthering cooperation with the EU. As established in the previous chapter,

the EU, too, is a major trading partner and the potential for cooperation in many fields is high. Both are thus serious projects and membership in either project will likely be disruptive to the other relationship.

It is important for Ukraine to bargain for certain security measures. When the signing of the Association Agreement becomes a reality, there must already be a guarantee in place that ensures the continuous flows in commodities and capital between the states of the Customs Union and Ukraine. The membership of both Ukraine and Russia in the World Trade Organisation is likely to ensure this, but political dialogue embracing this possibility is ever so important. On the contrary, if the signing of the Association Agreement fails and reality drives Ukraine closer to the Customs Union the cooperation between Ukraine and the EU must continue undisrupted. It must therefore be ensured that the EU does not stop its investments.

Finally, some consideration must be given to soft issues. The recent trial of Yulya Tymoshenko is a critical factor in the EU-Ukraine relationship and an obstacle to the signing of the Association Agreement. Furthermore, the parliamentary elections of 2012 were conducted partly unfair by international standards [22]. While the EU is a loud critic of such developments, the Russian Federation does not make the resolution of such deficits a condition for cooperation with the customs union. The pardoning of Yulya Tymoshenko is a necessary step, however, if Ukraine wishes to save its face at a respectable democracy at the negotiating table. In the light of the previously assessed interdependence between the EU and Ukraine, this step becomes ever more important. As for the improvement of electoral practices, Ukraine has some time until the next elections will take place. Even if Russia does not seem to mind these shortcomings, unless the President and Government are democratically accountable, Ukraine will find itself closing the door to cooperation with the EU.

All in all Ukraine's Complex Interdependence with both sides can be argued to be a complicating factor, but the outlook does not have to be dim. Ukraine can, and that is if it re-earns its position as a fully democratic and pluralistic country, benefit from good relations with both sides, possibly even play a decisive role in the approachment of Russia and the European Union. This paper will therefore conclude

with a positive outlook on the near future. If Ukraine manages to sign the Association Agreement with the EU in November, while at the same time finding a good balance with its Eastern partners, the political situation may change for the better soon.

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Data about the author:

Rusch Lina – master's degree student of International Relations and International Organization, University of Groningen (Groningen, Netherlands).

Сведения об авторе:

Руш Лина – магистрант по направлению «Международные отношения и международная организация» университета Гронингена (Гронинген, Нидерланды).

E-mail: lina.rusch@gmail.com.