

Russian Invasion of Ukraine



**How Nine Central
and Eastern European
Countries Will Respond**

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Future of Ukraine In Central European Perspectives

By Ireneusz Bil, Wojciech Przybylski and Marcin Zaborowski

The developments in Ukraine have been outliers of a new security environment for the rest of Europe and especially for Ukraine's immediate neighbours. The post-Cold War setting, which helped establish the independence of Central European states, has been shaken by the geopolitical interventions by Russia in the 2008 war with Georgia, the 2014 occupation of Crimea and the sponsorship of Ukrainian separatists. This calls for immediate coordination of efforts in the region to respond to the threat of geopolitical shifts which undermine the current world order.

We started thinking about what Russia's threat to Ukraine means for Central Europe in summer 2021 following the amassing of Russian troops on Ukrainian borders in March and April 2021. Then, after a couple of months of posturing, Russian troops returned to their barracks. But by the end of 2021, they were back only larger in number and more threatening in posture.

As we conclude the work on this report, the concentration of Russian troops continues,

and according to American intelligence, Russia is more likely to invade this time around. Whether a Russian invasion will materialise or not seems impossible to predict at this point in time, not least because this decision belongs to one man only: Vladimir Putin.

However, we can see that, at a minimum, Russia has already achieved considerable diplomatic success. The United States and NATO are involved in an array of diplomatic initiatives which are meant to persuade Russia to cease its threat to Ukraine. Following the Russian proposals that the West commit to an indefinite freeze of NATO enlargement and the withdrawal of NATO's presence from the Alliance's Eastern flank, a considerable part of the Western opinion started to argue that we need to understand Russian concerns more acutely. The criticism of NATO enlargement, not just potential future growth but also the previous augmentation, has been recalled by some seasoned diplomats such as Gerard Araud and international relations scholars like Steven Walt.

Although the US administration and NATO rejected Russia's demands, the West has offered its own proposals — on arms control

and limitations on exercises — which, if accepted, could affect the strategic balance in Central Europe. Currently, these moves have not yet figured in Central Europe's debates on Ukraine, which, as demonstrated in this volume, remains determined first and foremost by individual nations' historical attitudes and geographical proximity towards Russia although with some exceptions. Hence, the nations that are most supportive of Ukraine and provide tangible military support are the Baltic States and Czechia, though the latter does not border Ukraine or Russia. Poland, which has the longest NATO border with Ukraine, is a vocal supporter of Kyiv and provides the country with humanitarian assistance; however, only very recently has Warsaw agreed to provide Ukraine with military support.

Romania's policy towards Ukraine appears to lack a strategic dimension. On one hand, the Romanians support Ukraine's Western orientation; on the other, their policy seems still determined by bilateral disputes with Kyiv, which affect the cohesion of Bucharest's approach. Slovakia has not really developed a policy towards Ukraine that would be independent of its policy towards Russia, which — as argued in this volume — reflects the divisions in Slovak society, a society that still has some strong pro-Russian traditions. Bulgaria and Hungary are most openly pro-Russian and far more likely to side with Moscow than with Kyiv.

The region has, therefore, not developed a unified approach towards Ukraine, and this echoes the diversity of strategic perspectives in Central Europe. That being said, there are some very promising initiatives involving Ukraine in the region. For example, Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine have set up a 'Litpolukr Brigade', which has been in operation since 2016. These three nations have also set up the so-called 'Lublin Triangle', with the express purpose of supporting Ukraine's relations and future membership in the EU and NATO. All three Baltic States, Poland, Czechia and Romania firmly support Ukraine's Western aspirations. With the exception of Hungary's notable absence and Bulgaria's lower-level participation, all other Central European states attended the Crimea Platform conference to show solidarity with Ukraine.

Economically, Ukraine is becoming ever-closely linked to the Central and Eastern European states. Poland has emerged as its second greatest

trade partner, overtaking Russia. Ukrainian migrant workers are most numerous in Poland, Czechia, Slovakia and the Baltic States.

A further boost to this relationship could come from the integration of the energy sector. Ukraine's energy sector represents a legacy of the Soviet era and is not integrated with the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity.

However, Ukraine's energy sector is undergoing a deep and fast transition, particularly in the gas sector. Since 2014, there have been no direct imports of gas from Russia. Nevertheless, Ukraine has been able to sustain several harsh winters and develop alternative sources of supply based on their extensive gas transmission system, which is connected to seven neighbouring states. As a member of the Energy Community, it has already brought a vast part of its legislation in line with the EU energy acquis, including the full unbundling of its gas storage and gas transmission system operator. As a result, the country has become an attractive spot for international gas trading, supported by the vast gas storage capacities, the largest in Europe (over 30 bcm). Yet, there is still much space for Central European neighbours to play constructive roles, as with the recent effort to establish new firm gas import capacities with Slovakia and Poland, to tap on larger volumes of EU gas and LNG imports.

These kinds of initiatives can be considerably aided by the Central European Three Seas Initiative (TSI). As of now, however, Ukraine is not a member of the TSI, which is open to EU member states only.

Potential Futures For the CEE-Ukraine Relationship

The future of Ukraine's relations with Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) does not solely depend on all parties involved. An essential external variable in this relationship is Russia. Depending on Russia's future course of action and reactions to it from Central Europe we estimate that this relationship can develop on one of the three trajectories outlined below.

I. *Dramatic*

Ukraine is invaded and the role of CEE is limited to taking care of itself and receiving Ukrainian refugees. Four countries — namely Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania — would need to prepare for the intake of a large number of people, estimated by the Ukrainian government at one million, with Poland receiving the majority. In such a scenario, the EU would need to step up relief measures which could expose the Union to anti-migrant disinformation narratives and increased internal divisions.

II. *Limited Support*

Russia intervenes to occupy disputed eastern territories in Ukraine. Most of NATO's Eastern Flank Nations ramp up military support for Kyiv, but the rest of the region will be indifferent or pro-Russian. If such a scenario materialises, Hungary will almost certainly side with Russia and distance itself from NATO. A sceptical response from Budapest to the possibility of Hungary hosting a NATO presence is a clear indication of Budapest taking such a line. Slovakia, which is Ukraine's direct neighbour, is however unlikely to follow in Budapest's footsteps not least because of its likely exposure to a refugee crisis.

III. *Full Support*

The US intervenes in the region conscripting CEE governments to promote the Westernisation of Ukraine. The efforts are spearheaded by NATO's Eastern Flank Nations but the rest of CEE also provides limited support. Ukraine is asked to join several of the Three Seas Initiative projects, and it works closely with the V4 on cohesion strategies based on the idea of the future EU integration of the country. A comprehensive energy strategy for Ukraine is developed that includes its synchronisation with the European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSOE), which include incentives for Ukrainian oligarchs to accept this harmonisation with the Union's system.



Recommendations

In order to promote Ukraine's integration with Western institutions and its embedment in Central Europe, we suggest the implementation of policy recommendations as listed below:

- CEE needs the strong involvement of the USA to prompt cooperation with Ukraine and to increase NATO at the Eastern flank and other parts of Central Europe, such as Slovakia and Czechia.
- CEE needs to stand firmly in defence of the OSCE as an institution meant to defend rule-based international order and make sure it keeps engaging civil society actors, rather than becoming a relic of the past with Russia exploiting its legalistic caveats without substance.
- Germany must be engaged and included in regional initiatives towards Ukraine. Germany could be granted an observer status in the Lublin triangle, and it could be conscripted to join the TSI.
- The EU should double up its support for Ukraine including placing a CSDP mission as soon as possible, echoing Josep Borrell's comments on the issue. The mission should have considerable endowments and contain a robust military component. The EU should open up its market asymmetrically to Ukrainian products and offer an extension of the four freedoms.
- New targeted sanctions on Russia (such as SWIFT) should not be off the table and CEE should advocate for the effective implementation of existing sanctions by both the EU and the U.S.
- The Three Seas Initiative should engage Ukraine in its key projects, envisaging its future EU membership and, on that basis, involve the country in strategic planning and investments in a TSI+ formula.
- Ukraine should be provided with incentives to synchronise with the ENTSOE investments in interconnectors with the Baltic States, Poland, Slovakia, etc.

Estonian Perspective

By Kaarel Kullamaa

Amid the general uncertainty, Estonia's position towards Ukraine is fully supportive. Estonian support is rooted in its firm belief in a world order based on international law and treaties, in which each country has the right to sovereignty, its freedom to choose its course and defend its territorial integrity as laid out in the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris (UN 1945, art. II; Helsinki Final Act 1975, art. I-VI; Charter of Paris for a New Europe 1990, chap. I, art. III, cl. III). This support is further reinforced by the fact that Ukraine today in many respects faces a similar situation as Estonia did in 1991, giving substance to its independence but hampered by our common neighbour whose ruling elite still believes that its size, military power and imperial heritage gives them the right to decide the fate of their neighbours.

Therefore, Estonia has been expressing its support at the highest level while spreading awareness about the region to make sure that all of the EU countries and beyond are aware of the acuteness of Ukraine's problems and the European interests that are at stake. Thus Estonia was one of the seven EU member states, along with Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Croatia, Slovakia and Slovenia, who signed a declaration at the governmental level reaffirming their support for Ukraine's accession to the EU if the latter fulfils the conditions set for it in the Association Agreement between EU and Ukraine (AA) (Kallas, 2021; President of Ukraine, 2021a; Ukrainian MOD, 2021; President of Ukraine, 2021b, 2021c;

2021d). Furthermore, Estonia has also shown political support towards the freedom of Ukraine to join other economic, security and defence associations, including, latterly, the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) (Estonian MOD, 2021; Err, 2021).

Estonia also supports Ukraine through several major international donors, organisations and financial institutions. The largest and best known of these are European Commission, USAID, SIDA, GIZ, CIDA, the World Bank, the EBRD, the EIB and the IMF (Estonian MFA, 2020, 7). The most extensive European Commission frameworks where Estonia contributes focus on decentralisation and anticorruption (Estonian MFA, 2020, 7). In the case of the EU-funded decentralisation framework U-LEAD with Europe, implemented by GIZ and SIDA, Estonia operates the sub-project EGOV4UKRAINE (Estonian MFA, 2020, 7). The project has lasted since 2012 and as a result, numerous digital solutions have been implemented that improved administration and e-governance in Ukraine (ibid.).

Bilateral Relationship With Ukraine

Bilaterally the relations with Ukraine are good as well. Estonia has had a bilateral friendship and cooperation agreement with Ukraine since 1992, but closer cooperation began after 2014 (Estonian & Ukrainian gov., 1992). Both the Prime Minister and the President have visited Ukraine several times. However, the October 2021 visit of eight counsellors from different ministries and state secretaries to Ukraine has underscored the relationship's impor-

tance, as such inter-departmental delegations have previously visited only Brussels (Estonian MFA, 2021b).

Estonia also has a dedicated development strategy for 2020-2030, which main goals aim to develop democracy, good governance, the business environment, and the education system in Ukraine in accordance with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (Estonian MFA 2020, 3). In the main, cooperation between Estonia and Ukraine takes the form of capacity building projects in e-governance, strategic communication or fight against corruption, focusing on counselling, training, research and technical collaboration (Estonian MFA 2020, 4). Some of the best-known projects are the Lift99 which helps create start-up companies, and the Estonian Academy of E-Governance (eGA) (eGA, 2022; Lift9, 2022). For example, the Estonian private sector's Trembita data exchange program is now being used in about 600 Ukrainian municipalities thanks to these projects (e-Estonia, 2022).

Furthermore, since the beginning of the conflict in 2014, Estonia has been offering medical treatment and rehabilitation to wounded Ukrainian soldiers and nurses together with training for Ukrainian soldiers (Estonian MOD, 2015; Estonian Embassy in Kyiv, 2018). Estonia also covers the costs of Ukrainian students studying at the Baltic Defence College in collaboration with other Baltic states and Denmark (Estonian Embassy in Kyiv, 2021). Additionally, last September, Estonia and Sweden signed a joint declaration for development cooperation to provide training and development activities for "diplomats of Ukraine and other Eastern Partners, as well as Ukraine's regional civil servants in charge of international relations" (Estonian MFA, 2021a).

Amid the latest rise in tensions, Estonia has already delivered 2400 Makarov pistols to Ukraine and is currently preparing to deliver a high-tech portable military hospital financed by Germany and Javelin anti-tank missiles and 122m howitzers together with ammunition (Hindre and Pott, 2021).

Possible reaction in the event of the Russian invasion of Ukraine

From the Estonian perspective, it is essential to understand that Russia's demands as delivered to NATO and USA on 15 December are not academic discussion points, but concrete objectives that it will pursue tough diplomacy, backed by the threat to impose a 'military-technical alternative' if progress is not swiftly forthcoming. Rather than give credence to disingenuous charges of a NATO threat to Russia's security, Estonia's, and its allies first priority must be to underscore our determination to uphold our core security interests, as well as the fundamental principles of the Washington Treaty, the Paris Charter and the NATO-Russia Founding Act. At the same time, we should reaffirm that we remain open to arms control and confidence-building measures that enhance mutual security. On no account will we or our allies accept the establishment of a two-tier NATO, *de jure* or *de facto*.

The second thing to ensure is that decisions over Ukraine would not be taken above its head. It is equally imperative that NATO's Eastern flank members play a full and equal role in deliberations and decision-making. This is a matter of practicality as well as principle. Estonia and its Baltic neighbours are sensitive to the possibility that Russian ops in Ukraine will be accompanied by diversionary ops (possibly blatant, possibly deniable) or other provokatsii ('provocations') to test internal and Alliance cohesion, create confusion and sow alarm and despondency. We must be prepared for aggressive reconnaissance activity and a high level of military tension on our borders.

Regarding concrete measures, on an EU level, member states should agree to launch the recently discussed EU Military Advisory and Training Mission to Ukraine (EUATM) which, together with high-level visits like the recent Josep Borrell visit to the contact line, would make it harder for Russia to escalate the situation without immediate detection (Kuleba, 2022; Brzozowski, 2021). Moreover, Estonian Energy Commissioner Kadri Simson, in particular, should move forward more vigorously in ensuring Ukraine's energy security because, in contrast to Baltic states where we have connection issues, Ukraine, according to its Energy Minister Herman Haluschenko, already has the

technical capacity to synchronise with European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity (ENTSO-E), but the process is stuck in discussions over market regulations (European Commission, 2017; Haluschenko, 2021). Since individual oligarchs dominate the electricity market in Ukraine, a strong opposition against such synchronisation with EU system is expected, and hence EU should be prepared to offer considerable rewards (Feldhaus, Westphal and Zachmann, 2021). Furthermore, to help Ukraine, the EU could immediately offer more responsiveness at the ongoing Association Agreement discussions on articles 29 and 481, which address the elimination of customs duties on imports and evaluation of AA objectives (EU, 2014).

At the same time, however, major allies in NATO could continue to share intelligence with Ukraine and consider providing anti-aircraft weapons as Ukraine has the greatest shortage of the latter.

Regional Approach Towards the Future Relationship With Ukraine

The fate of Ukraine could well turn on the resolution of NATO and Russia's perception of it. For this reason, and for the sake of European security as a whole, neither Estonia nor its allies should be prepared to accept that the surrender of Ukraine's sovereignty would be an acceptable 'lesser evil'. The decision to launch a further round of aggression against Ukraine is Russia's. Surrendering Ukraine's independence in order to avoid aggression would be a false solution and a retrograde step for European security as a whole. Instead, Russia should be left with no doubt that, if it attacks Ukraine, it will lose more than it gains.

On the NATO level, it is in Estonia's interest to secure the maximum degree of cohesion and consensus on the part of regional allies (including Poland) and, as far as possible, Romania. Our national and joint contribution should provide 'value added' to the work of NATO HQ, SHAPE and the Office of the Secretary General.

In the EU, the most tangible first objective should be to move onwards with deepening the cooperation between the EU and Ukraine with a focus on the Four Freedoms. The Internal market, especially regarding the art. 115, cl. H & art. 225 in the AA covering the digital single market-related matters, is an area where the process could be started (EU 2014).

Outside the EU, a symbolic step to consider

would be to include Ukraine in the Three Seas Initiative (3SI).

While the Russian elite aims to "continue the Eurasian Reconquista" in a post-Soviet space (Dugin 2022). Ukraine, fighting for its sovereignty and territorial integrity, is therefore also fighting for our common values. So, our moral obligation is also a pragmatic need to help Ukraine. There is a real military threat and the only way to avoid further escalation is to show Kremlin that its gains would be much lower than the losses it would sustain when it attacks Ukraine.

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Latvian Perspective

By Imants Liegis



Based on its own experience in joining NATO and the EU, Latvia considers that Ukraine has every right to integrate into Euro Atlantic structures. Since 2014 and especially more recently, there is an emphasis in particular on Latvia's unwavering support for Ukraine's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity as expressed recently by both the President and Minister of Foreign Affairs (Levits, 2021a and 2021b).

This right to choose its own path is seen to come with responsibilities and meeting appropriate conditions. Support for Ukraine's membership in the EU, based on the 'common historical experience of Latvia and...Eastern Partnership countries' is implicitly tied to conditions relating to democracy and the rule of law, where Latvia sees its role as 'a player in facilitating the implementation of (appropriate) standards' (Rinkēvičs, 2018). Latvia firmly rejects the notion that a third party outside the Alliance, such as Russia, can have a say on whether Ukraine can join NATO. As Foreign Minister Rinkēvičs recently pointed out, 'If the country in question is ready to join Nato, that is a sovereign Nato decision and there will be no third country meddling' (Rinkēvičs, 2021).

Bilateral relations

As well as expressing strong political support, Latvia also provides practical support to Ukraine. In 2020, 15 per cent of Latvia's development aid went to support for Ukraine. This support includes technical assistance for judicial reforms, strengthening the rule of law and increasing Ukraine's export potential. Since 2014, humanitarian aid from Latvia has been provided to the inhabitants of Donetsk and Luhansk; some 75 persons from Ukraine wounded in the conflict have recuperated in Latvia; there are currently 11 civilian experts participating in EU and OSCE missions in Ukraine and indeed 65 per cent of the total of civilian experts from Latvia have served in Ukraine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Latvia, 2021). The fact that there are 41 (out of 100) members of the current Latvian Parliament who are in the Group for cooperation with the Ukrainian Parliament testifies to the strong Parliamentary interest in and support for Ukraine. Recent years have witnessed a constant flow of high-level Latvian official visits to Kyiv. Latvia no doubt lobbied strongly for the Ukrainian (and Georgian) Minister of Foreign Affairs to be invited to the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers

held in Riga on 1 and 2 December 2021. Latvia's President attended the Crimea Platform in Kyiv on 23 August 2021 and announced at the Democracy Summit organised by President Biden in December that 'Latvia intends to hold an international event next year to support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, building on the recently launched Crimea Platform' (Rinkēvičs, 2021).

Possible reaction in the event of Russian invasion

The response should be swift, clear, broad and united. It should target Russia, but also provide a reinforced NATO and US presence on NATO territory in the Baltic States, Poland and the Black Sea flank about which Russia should be clearly informed in advance. This action needs to be accompanied by clear messaging about NATO defending the territory of its member states. Russia needs to be excluded from the international SWIFT banking system. Those assisting Russia to increase its revenues should also be targeted. There should be sanctions affecting the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline between Russia and Germany whereby EU energy ministers could agree to prevent the completion of the pipeline and the EU Commission could proceed to check compliance with EU law. These, together with other economic sanctions need to be ready and agreed upon in advance so that they can be speedily implemented. These are amongst the reactions outlined by Latvia's Minister of Foreign Affairs during a recent visit to London (Rinkēvičs, 2021). In addition, he has stated that allies need to be given a clear signal that it is not possible to create spheres of influence or divide up the world (Rinkēvičs, 2021).

After the EU European Council meeting on 17 December 2021, Latvia's Prime Minister indicated that in the event of an escalation of aggression against Ukraine by Russia, the EU reaction will be strong, coordinated with partners

and with very serious economic sanctions and consequences (Kariņš, 2021).

Latvia's Minister of Defence has also gone on record, together with his Estonian and Lithuanian counterparts, as saying that Latvia 'will increase the readiness of (its) armed forces and take planning measures to respond to any kind of escalation' (Pabriks et al., 2021).

Regional Approach Towards Future Relationship With Ukraine

Within NATO, Latvia views the regional approach towards Ukraine as primarily being coordinated amongst the NATO Eastern flank countries which, since 2017, have hosted allies' enhanced forward military presence (EFP) – the three Baltic countries and Poland. The emphasis will be on coordination with Estonia and Lithuania, given the similarity in size and existing defence cooperation. Illustrative of this approach is the recent meeting (20 December 2021) in Kaunas of the Baltic Ministers of Defence. This resulted in a clear message of support for Ukraine which included a call on Russia to end 'its illegal occupation of Crimea, as well as by stopping military support to separatist groups in the areas of Luhansk and Donetsk.' Their joint statement went on to say that 'given the legitimate concerns and the need to strengthen Ukraine's defence capabilities, the Ministers of Defense of the Baltic States stress their immediate readiness to provide non-military and military support to Ukraine, including weapon supplies' (ibid). Possibilities for Baltic support is limited. Latvia would probably support a push for EU and NATO allies to strengthen Ukraine's resilience.

Although Ukraine is not a member, Latvia will host the next Three Seas Summit and Business Forum in Riga on 20 and 21 June 2022 thereby offering the prospect for this format encompassing 12 countries linking the Baltic,

Adriatic and Black Seas to also focus on the strategic importance of Ukraine for this region.

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Lithuanian Perspective

By Dovilė Jakniūnaitė



The dominant position on Ukraine in Lithuania emphasises that the country is a victim of Russian aggression and further meddling into its domestic affairs. Ukraine has to make painful but necessary reforms; it is generally acknowledged in Lithuania that Ukraine has huge problems with corruption, their judicial system and they have not resolved the role of oligarchs in its political and social life. Regardless of these issues and perhaps because of all the difficulties facing the nation, it is important to support the country since they are self-motivated in strengthening their democracy or as the President of Lithuania Gitanas Nausėda said, all the work has to be done “by the Ukrainian peoples themselves” (Jaruševičiūtė and BNS 2021).

Therefore, in the international arena Lithuanian foreign policymakers are as often as possible repeating that Ukraine needs strong and permanent support for its Western agenda, for its fight against Russia and for its democratisation and modernisation efforts from all European, other Western countries and specifically the EU. Any rhetoric by Russia about the spheres of influence or interests is unacceptable and should at least be ignored if not denounced outright as it violates Ukrainian sovereignty. Besides, Lithuania actively supports and advocates the membership of Ukraine in the EU and NATO.

In a similar vein, Lithuania thinks that the Western position in general, and the EU’s in particular has to be similar: a demonstration of the constant support for Ukraine in its resistance against Russia and its attempts to conduct reforms. Therefore, for example, it was welcomed that in early January 2022, Joseph Borrell visited Ukraine and reiterated the EU’s support, even travelling to the line of contact in the east (Euronews 2022).

Currently, in the context of the EU, Lithuanian foreign policy concentrates on promoting the idea to establish in Ukraine the EU military mission, which would focus on training and advisory functions (Brzozowski 2021). It should be something similar to the European Union Advisory Mission Ukraine which aims at advising on the reforms in the domestic security sector.

Bilateral Relationship With Ukraine

For quite a long time Lithuania and Ukraine have been developing friendly but not intense bilateral relations. Lithuania followed the most visible domestic quarrels and scandals in Ukraine, was worried about its energy relations with Russia and was suspicious of Ukraine’s pro-Russian politicians. However, the official relations were occasional and shallow: there were a few bilateral treaties (e.g. on friendship and cooperation, or on investment promotion), several intergovernmental agreements, mostly on economic cooperation, state and official visits by presidents and prime ministers also took place, symbolic institutions like the Lithuanian–Ukrainian Presidential Council or

Business Forums were created, trade relations and some investments were developed, but not much of interest was to tell (Lopata et al. 2007, 134–36).

The 2004 Orange Revolution was the first opportunity for foreign policymakers of Lithuania to demonstrate their interest in and start developing closer relations with Ukraine. Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus, at that time just recently elected for a second term, decided to participate actively in Ukraine's electoral debacle. He helped Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski mediate the negotiations between Viktor Yanukovich and Viktor Yushchenko camps and subsequently reach the agreement on the repeated elections which Yushchenko won (ELTA, BNS 2004).

The Lithuanian public and elite support for Yushchenko and for the protests in Kyiv was strong. The Orange Revolution was seen as yet another victory (after The [Georgian] Rose Revolution in 2003) for the democratic forces in the region. However, disappointing developments in Ukraine after 2004 lessened also the initial euphoric support (based on Jakniūnaitė, 2017).

2011–2013 in Lithuanian foreign policy were marked with the preparations for the presidency over European Council in the second part of 2013. It was a time when a more serious focus on Ukraine developed. At the start of 2013, the priorities for the presidency were declared, and among them was the goal to sign Association Agreement with Ukraine during the EaP Summit in Vilnius. However, several days before the summit Yanukovich announced that he was not going to sign the agreement, and then, as is widely known, the Euromaidan started. Lithuanian foreign policymakers and media followed closely the events, manifestly supported the European aspirations of Ukraine, harshly critiqued Yanukovich's behaviour, were infuriated by the Crimea referendum and subsequent occupation, and later by the Russian war in the eastern part of Ukraine (e.g. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania 2015a; 2015b).

Compared to Lithuania's capabilities, a lot of help and support was given (e.g., in 2014 Lithuania provided ~307 thousand euros of support to Ukraine). In 2014 and 2015, Lithuania was a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, and in 2014 alone, it initiated 8 meetings

to discuss Ukrainian matters (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2014). It was one of six co-sponsors of UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262 on the “Territorial Integrity of Ukraine” (United Nations News Centre, 2014).

Lithuania had also invited the people who suffered from the war for medical treatment and rehabilitation. Vilnius has, since 2017, organised military training missions to strengthen and reform the Ukrainian military and donated military equipment (Government of the Republic of Lithuania 2021b). It seems for some time, Lithuania was the only country that officially provided Ukraine with lethal offensive weapons (Bornio, 2021).

All the high-level Lithuanian politicians have on numerous occasions expressed support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the implementation of reforms and aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration; in 2021, they also support increasing pressure from Russia (e.g., President of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021b; Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021a). The Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis explained that “Lithuania never abandons its partners and friends in adversity” (BNS, 2021a).

On 10 January 2022, the State Defence Council met to discuss, among other matters, the Ukraine support plan. The Council agreed to extend support for Ukraine by increasing the number of military instructors in the Lithuanian military training mission and rendering material and humanitarian aid (Ministry of National Defence of Republic of Lithuania 2022). It was announced that the government is planning to transfer the thermal imaging cameras to Ukraine as a part of the commitment to send to Ukraine the military equipment for at least 1 mln. euros every year (Pankūnas and BNS 2022).

Possible reaction in the event of the Russian invasion of Ukraine

Lithuanian foreign policymakers have frequently expressed their concern about the military Russian build-up: “I still have the feeling that we are not taking this seriously enough,” said Minister of Foreign Affairs (BNS 2021b) and,

according to the President, “probably we face the most dangerous situation in the last 30 years” (BNS 2021c). Lithuanian officials also worry that the West might not do enough in case of aggressive Russian actions and might make some major strategic concessions to Russia (BNS 2021b).

As for the possible reaction, President Nausėda has stated that “we [the West] have enough tools in order to stop Russia's aggressive behaviour;” this was in reference to the shared EU position about sectoral, economic sanctions while maintaining that NATO might be the solution as well (BNS 2021c), and, on other occasions, Nausėda has warned that “the consequences will be severe” (BNS 2021d).

In December 2021, also reacting to the Russian military build-up at the Ukrainian border, the Minister of Defence stated that “it is necessary to support Ukraine with all means, Lithuania is prepared to do that, including selling lethal arms to Ukraine” (Andriukaitytė and BNS 2021).

On the EU level, one of the main goals of Lithuanian foreign policymakers at the moment is to urge the EU institutions to start preparing for sanction procedures in order, in case it becomes necessary, to be ready (BNS 2021b).

Regional Approach Towards the Future Relationship With Ukraine

The Lithuanian regional approach taken towards Ukraine focuses on cooperating with Poland. There are two trilateral institutional structures.

The first focuses on military cooperation, the Lithuanian–Polish–Ukrainian Brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIG), a multinational unit consisting of subunits from the Lithuanian, Polish and Ukrainian Armed Forces. The preliminary agreement on its establishment was reached already in 2007, but the brigade was officially established in 2014 and finally formed in the fall of 2015 (ELTA, 2015).

Since 2016, LITPOLUKRBRIG has been an important part of NATO actions aimed at implementing NATO standards in the Armed Forces of Ukraine. The brigade's main activities include training Ukrainian officers and military units, planning and conducting operational tasks, and maintaining operational readiness (Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, 2017).

The second institutional format is the Lublin Triangle, established in July 2020 by the foreign ministers of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine. According to the Joint Declaration, it is “a trilateral platform for political economic and social cooperation” whose main goal is to express “unwavering support to Ukraine’s independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity” and “firm support for the European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, 2020).

This format was expanded to the level of the presidents, and on 2 December 2021, the presidents of the three countries held the first joint meeting. Besides the expression of concern regarding recent Russian actions, the presidents agreed to work together “to oppose the monopolisation of the European gas market by Russia, which is using energy as a geopolitical tool” (President of the Republic of Lithuania, 2021a).

The uniqueness of the Lublin Triangle is that among the many regional formats existing in the region (V4, Bucharest Nine, NB8, Three Seas Initiative), this is the only one including Ukraine as an equal and full partner.

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Polish Perspective

By Michał Potocki

The growing tension in Eastern Europe, caused by Russia's aggressive policy towards Ukraine, is treated in Poland as a threat to its own security. This is the base of Poland's policy towards its neighbour. Regardless of which party was in power, support for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations remains constant. In case of a full-scale invasion, Poland would support the toughest possible sanctions against Russia, including economic ones.

Consistent Strategy

Poland was the first country to recognise independent Ukraine in 1991. The so-called Giedroyc doctrine, the basis for Polish foreign policy agenda, assumes that supporting independent aspirations of the non-Russian republics of the former Soviet Union will increase the level of Poland's own security. Over the past 30 years, all Polish governments have more or less openly referred to this doctrine. This was also the reason for silencing disputes with Ukraine, mainly concerning divergent perceptions of the black pages of our common history.

On every occasion, Polish authorities emphasise their support for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations. In the statement of the presidents of Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine of 2 December 2021, it was stated that 'the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Poland reconfirm their full support for Ukraine's membership in the EU and NATO' (Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2021). Another example comes from the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 when Poland – along with the United States, the Baltic states and Romania – was one

of the main promoters of granting Ukraine and Georgia the Membership Action Plan. While these efforts failed due to opposition from France and Germany (Asmus 2010), they nevertheless highlight how constant the Polish position has been.

Warsaw explains its support by shared values based on their common history. As stated in the above-mentioned declaration, 'the democratic tradition developed in the Commonwealth of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, as well as by the Solidarity movement in Poland, the Reform Movement Sąjūdis in Lithuania, the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine, and the struggle of Belarusians for democracy represent [their] strong pursuit of freedom, human rights and democracy in Central and Eastern Europe' (Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 2021). Poland believes that in order to stabilise the region it is crucial to withdraw Russian troops from Crimea and the occupied part of Donbas.

Bilateral relations

Bilateral political relations are characterised by highly frequent visits at various levels. The last time that the presidents of both countries met was at the summit of the Lublin Triangle (Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine) in Huta on December 20, 2021. Two days later, the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Zbigniew Rau, participated at the annual conference of Ukraine's ambassadors in Ivano-Frankivsk. 'We know well from our own history how true it is to say that a friend in need is a friend indeed. Ukraine, our good neighbour which has to defend itself from external aggression and pressure,

needs our solidarity and support today. That is why I am here with you telling you: do not give up, because you have friends,' Rau stated (Rau, 2021).

Intensive diplomatic relations are fulfilled by economic cooperation. Trade volumes have been growing dynamically since the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement has been signed by Ukraine and the European Union in 2014. The volume of trade reached in 2020 was \$7.4 billion, which makes Poland Ukraine's second-biggest trade partner after China (\$15.4 billion) and ahead of Germany (\$7.4 billion) and Russia (\$7.1 billion) (Derzhavna sluzhba statystyky Ukrainy, 2021).

The growing Ukrainian diaspora also deepens bilateral relations. At the beginning of 2022, 302,400 Ukrainian citizens legalised their stay in Poland (Migracje.gov.pl, 2022). However, the actual number of Ukrainians working in Poland is higher. According to the latest data of the Social Insurance Institution, 532,500 Ukrainian citizens paid contributions for pension insurance (Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych, 2021).

However, there are also disputes. For many years, Ukraine has been complaining about the

insufficient number of permits granted to truck drivers which entitle them to cross the border. At the end of 2021, Kyiv introduced a de facto ban on rail transit. The insufficient number of border crossings remains an unresolved problem, causing huge queues. In 2016, it has been promised during President Petro Poroshenko visit to Warsaw to double the number of border crossings but the promise has not been implemented yet (Duda, 2016).

Different views on common history remain a problem, especially concerning the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA). For Ukraine, the UPA and its political mentor Stepan Bandera are first and foremost a symbol of resistance against the Soviet Union, which is politically useful in its current defence against Russia. Poland perceives the WW2 Ukrainian nationalist underground through the prism of the genocide committed on the Polish inhabitants of Volhynia and Galicia in 1943–1944. Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the ruling Law and Justice party, said in 2017 that 'Ukraine will not enter Europe with Bandera,' (Dziennik.pl 2017). Historical disputes have been silenced in official rhetorics



Lithuanian, Polish and Ukrainian Ministers of Foreign Affairs meeting at the Summit of the Lublin Triangle on 7 July, 2021.

after Volodymyr Zelenskyi's inauguration in 2019, but Polish officials still emphasise that 'the attempt to build a modern identity on integral nationalism in today's Europe cannot be accepted,' (Potocki, 2021a).

Possible reaction in the event of Russian invasion

Historical problems, however, are relegated to the sidelines in the face of Russia's aggressive policy towards Ukraine. Polish authorities have repeatedly emphasised that any escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian war that has been ongoing since 2014 has to be met with a decisive reaction from the West (Potocki, 2021a). In case of a full-scale invasion, Warsaw will promote the toughest possible sanctions against Russia, including tightening of economic sanctions and the permanent ban on the Nord Stream 2 pipeline which bypasses Ukraine and Poland and has been constantly perceived as a crucial threat to the security of both states.

Poland decided in favour of weapons supplies to Ukraine only very recently, following in the footsteps of the UK, Czechia and the Baltic States (Błaszczak, 2022). So far, the Polish authorities have not explicitly supported the possible weapons supplies to Ukraine (Potocki, 2021b), contrary to the more determined Lithuania, but in case of a further escalation, this position is going to be corrected. Poland favours rejecting the Russian ultimatum aimed at presenting a legal guarantee that Ukraine will not become a NATO member and no Western military installations could be deployed in the NATO eastern flank (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021). By proposing such a deal the Kremlin has strengthened Warsaw and Kyiv's common interests perception.

'NATO cannot promise that it will not expand, because the right to access is included in the North Atlantic Treaty,' said Marcin Przydacz, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. According to him, 'it is not only about Ukraine or obeying international law, but also about NATO cohesion. Any concessions at the expense of Central Europe are out of the question. On the contrary, only strengthening the NATO eastern flank would be properly interpreted in Moscow. In Russia's perception, any concessions are evidence of weakness. They immediately take advantage of it,' said Mr Przydacz (Potocki, 2021a).

Regional Approach Towards Future Relationship With Ukraine

Poland supports Ukraine in its efforts to activate its regional policy. Kyiv has repeatedly expressed its ambitions to join the Three Seas Initiative, which is, however, impossible for the time being. The Three Seas Initiative, established in 2016 by leaders in Poland and Croatia, is a format for the EU member states only (Yevropeyska pravda, 2019).

In order to deepen cooperation with Ukraine, the Lublin Triangle has been established by Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine. The first summit of the Lublin Triangle at the presidential level took place in December 2021. Poland supported Ukraine in its efforts to provide the necessary impetus to the inaugural summit of the Crimean Platform. Its aim is to coordinate activities aimed at regaining control over the Russian-annexed peninsula.

Polish politicians also appreciate the establishment of the Association Trio with Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Its goal is to coordinate the European integration policy of the states which signed the association agreements with the EU. For now, there are no attempts to formalise the Chişinău format (Moldova, Poland, Romania, Ukraine). It has been discussed during the mini-summit of their presidents, which took place in Chişinău in 2021. Warsaw does not offer its mediation for Hungary and Ukraine over the situation of the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattia region, despite good relations with both partners. The conflict may potentially threaten Ukraine's cooperation with NATO, which in the context of the Russian ultimatum is particularly dangerous.

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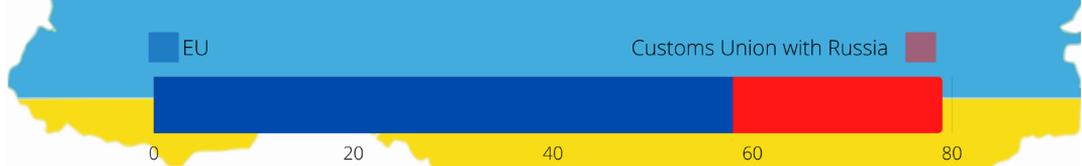
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When asked which international economic union they would join if Ukraine could only join one, respondents overwhelmingly chose the EU (58 per cent) to supporting a Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan (21 per cent).



The same survey found that a majority would support NATO membership (54 per cent) if the offer was available.



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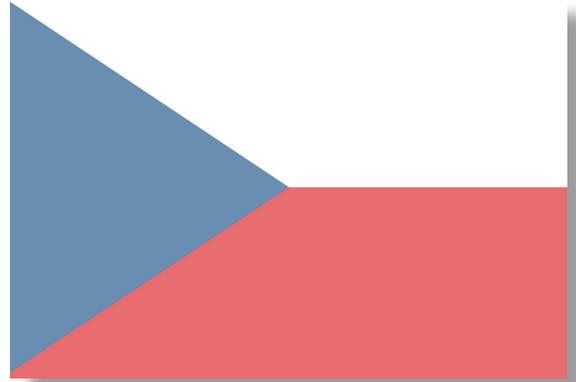
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Czech Perspective

By Pavel Havlicek



Czechia considers Ukraine its main ally in Eastern Europe and it welcomes and actively promotes the pro-Western course of Ukraine's post-Maidan elite. This has been manifested over many years, especially after 2014 and the start of Russian aggression. In this context, it is also planned that the new Czech PM Petr Fiala is going to be the next EU leader to endorse Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, which represents a powerful diplomatic gesture underscoring the country's long-term commitment to Ukraine's integration with the West and reinforcing the country's sovereignty to make this choice. Thus, Czechia has been highly represented at the first official summit of the Crimean Platform and expressed its desire to support this initiative in the future..

Bilateral relations

Already before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, the bilateral relations were developing rather swiftly, particularly after the 2019 visit of the vice-PM Karel Havlíček and PM Andrej Babiš in Kyiv and his bilateral meeting with President Volodymyr Zelenskyi, which also contributed to deepening economic ties between both states. At the beginning of 2019, a new platform of the Czech-Ukrainian Discussion Forum was established to tackle the issue related to historical memory and promote people-to-people dialogue and other issues of common interests.

Czechia has also been actively involved in supporting Ukraine in its fight against the Kremlin when bolstering its resilience on multiple levels, including by traditional security, good governance and local development or economic and development aid (BusinessInfo.cz, 2021). The country was among the first

ones to supply both non-lethal and lethal weapons and ammunition to Ukraine after 2014. The Czech diplomacy has invested in cooperation with civil society and non-state actors, including media and civic initiatives promoting critical thinking and media literacy in the society.

In addition, Czechia has been a traditional destination for Ukraine's labour migration, currently amounting to around 145,000 (officially), which is a relatively high figure in Czech society, especially as it represents the largest diaspora in the country, ahead of Slovaks and the Vietnamese (Cieslar, 2021). Therefore, there is certainly some space for investment into the humanitarian dimension of relations with Ukraine.

At the V4 level, Czechia and Poland have jointly endorsed a number of ideas about strengthening security cooperation with the Associated Trio, and this appeared in the V4 joint declaration on the future of the Eastern Partnership at the end of April last year. Additionally, Visegrad also signed up to the Partnership's core set of values and called for solidarity with the Eastern Partnership countries in regard to Russian aggression and the ongoing problems associated with the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent recovery (V4 East Solidarity Programme). But at the same time, differences between the individual V4 countries – particularly Hungary – persist, especially in the case of the Hungarian approach towards Ukraine and Russia which has been undermining the group's coherence.

Finally, the Czech Republic has also been continuing preparations for its forthcoming EU Council presidency in the second half of 2022, which could be a good opportunity to promote the Eastern Partnership agenda and relations with Ukraine onto a new level. At the centre of the Czech

approach should be, in particular, issues related to the resilience of the EaP countries, their economic recovery after the pandemic, but also, for example, the green transition as well as cooperation in the field of people-to-people ties, including education.

Possible reaction in the event of Russian invasion

The Czech-Russian relations reached their lowest point since 1993 when the Russian involvement in the Vrbětice affair was revealed in April 2021 and the Kremlin labelled Czechia an 'unfriendly' nation, together with the United States as the only two countries in the world. It should be added that the bilateral relationship had been spoiled for several years before the Vrbětice scandal. That is why Czechia has been actively advocating for increased sanctions against Russia and demanding financial compensation after the terrorist attack against its territory.

The crisis in bilateral relations has also been visible on the international stage, predominantly in Eastern Europe, where Czech diplomacy has been consistently involved in promoting a Euro-Atlantic orientation of partners as well as their domestic reform agenda, particularly in the EU's Associated Trio countries, in which it has invested

through a number of instruments and tools. Czechia has been actively promoting a more ambitious EU response towards hybrid threats and other traditional security challenges coming from Russia. This agenda is also going to be the central focus of the future Czech policy on the Eastern Partnership during the upcoming Czech EU presidency in the second half of 2022.

That is why in case of further escalation, the new Czech government would support a much stronger response based on political and economic sanctions, including diplomatic means as well as stepped up military cooperation with Ukraine and more resolute presence of the West in CEE. The Czech position is closely tied with the Transatlantic relations and believes in a united and credible response to the crisis. However, it is yet to be seen if Petr Fiala's government would be in favour of sending troops to Ukraine to support the Ukrainian army or help with training and assistance to Ukraine's military.

In any case, over the past months, the Czech government has repeatedly recommitted to security and stability in CEE and its willingness to share its part of the responsibility for the continent, including when offering help and sending soldiers to protect the Polish-Belarusian



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Jan Lipavský, on 27 January 2022.

border. The government's officials also speak about sending more soldiers to the Baltics as part of NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence, to which it already contributes. Its own security and defence cooperation within the EU and NATO is going to receive additional boosts and investment until 2025.

Czech Approach Towards Regional Cooperation

Czechia has been traditionally open and willing to invest in regional formats of cooperation, including the V4, Slavkov Triangle, Central 5, Bucharest Nine and a network of bilateral strategic tracks with Germany, Poland and Slovakia, among others. It also supports the V4+ formats, particularly with Eastern Partnership and Western Balkan countries as well as other third parties from outside these regions.

The new government of Petr Fiala is going to step up its relations with closest neighbours and add new policy agendas, including the Three Seas Initiative, which – for the first time ever – found its place in the government's list of priorities. As was announced by the Czech FM Jan Lipavský, the next visit of Slavkov format with Slovakia and Austria is going to take place in Ukraine, as a concrete demonstration of the group's commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Czechia perceives Ukraine's ambitions to join Central Europe with interest and support this political stance, which corresponds to the country's ambition of gradual integration of Ukraine within the EU and NATO. For this ambition of President Zelenskyi and FM Kuleba, it is possible to find a good ally in the new Czech government, as the first official contact between both MFAs has already proved. Ukraine's chairmanship in the Danube Strategy is one of the tangible results of the close cooperation with the EU, even if regional differences (e.g. from the side of Hungary) still persist.

On the top, a new potential might be offered by increased Czech contribution to the Three Seas Initiative as well as the new EU projects focused on interconnectivity, people-to-people ties and closer cooperation on the cross-border level under the Eastern Partnership policy and its resilience agenda. This is especially attractive for countries from the CEE, which often prove to be better prepared and politically willing to gradually integrate with Ukraine

better. In that sense, Czechia is in a different situation not having a common border with Ukraine, but the more issues of energy security, green and digital transition or security and stability-related problems touch upon its internal development, which makes it highly relevant to further invest in meaningful projects and cooperation with Ukraine also in the future.

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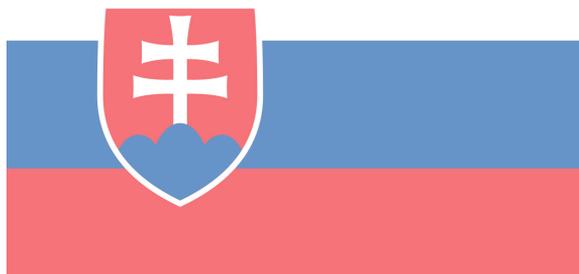
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Slovak Perspective

By Juraj Kuruc



Slovakia has a skewed view of the world when looking east. Ukraine is a country that only vaguely figures in the thoughts of most of the Slovak populace while Russia, on the other hand, is still somewhat of an aspiration and a threat at the same time. This division is not only apparent among the Slovak populace but in the mixed record of Slovak foreign policy. The general views towards Ukraine are benevolent and largely uninterested.

Bilateral relations

Bilateral relationships of the two countries are friendly and at the same time viewed through the prism of alliances that Slovakia is a member of while Ukraine is not. This view is reflected in possible reactions of both the Slovak public and policymakers to the threat of Russian invasion. When it comes to questions of possible futures of the region, the Slovak position is hard to predict, mainly due to its mixed record with regards to the Ukrainian relationship vis-à-vis Russia and Slovak domestic views on the latter country.

Ukrainians are the most numerous immigrant workers in Slovakia bar none, according to official Ministry of Labour statistics as well as independent research (Mimovládky.sk., n.d.). The occupations taken up by Ukrainian workers are overwhelmingly in the lower-skilled industry or services that do not interact with the general public such as public transport, construction, cleaning but also production lines in automotive industries, etc. Similarly, while Ukraine is an important export market for Slovakia, Ukrainian imports into Slovakia are smaller. Despite competitive pricing and labour costs, Schengen rules make exporting to Slovakia prohibitive if not impossible (Trading Economics, 2020). The Ukrainian ethnic minority (referring to settled

immigrants and not newly-arrived guest workers) in Slovakia is one of the smaller registered ethnic minorities in Slovakia. Jostling with the Ruthenian minority in the east of Slovakia, Ukrainians, unlike the more numerous Hungarian or Roma, do not have significant political representation.

Slovak politicians when winning elections traditionally travel to Prague first, after which they have a meeting with our Hungarian neighbours, followed by a meet and greet with Polish representatives at one or another regional gathering of the V4, and then in the course of normal duties after visiting Austrian counterparts travel to Kyiv as well, but generally without much pomp or fanfare.

Successive Slovak governments have at times had to contend with crises caused or precipitated by Ukrainian leadership vis-à-vis Russia that had unintended consequences for Slovakia. The foremost example was the gas crisis in the winter of 2008/2009 (Lowe, 2009) after Slovakia was left cut off from natural gas deliveries from Russia due to the dispute between Ukraine's then Prime Minister Tymoshenko and Russia's Gazprom over prices of natural gas. Slovakia was too small a player in the whole scheme of things to enact any meaningful remedy. The meaningful impact was a technical implementation of reverse flow that enabled Slovakia to pump gas from the west and potentially assist cut off Ukraine as well.

Possible reaction in the event of Russian invasion

When looking to the future and trying to assess the future reaction of Slovakia to the possible continuation or escalation of conflict in eastern Ukraine one has to consider what would

the Slovak parliament look like. In the past, former Slovak Prime Minister Fico embodied the slightly schizophrenic view of the Slovak public. The view that EU Sanctions against Russia are ineffective and hurting Slovak economic interests, that the painting of the conflict in terms of Ukraine good and Russia bad is dangerous and should be viewed in the wider geopolitical conflict of US versus Russia, where Slovakia should not be taking sides. Nevertheless, this perspective is combined with another, that Slovakia is a member of the EU and out of solidarity will not stand in the way of sanctions (Jancarikova and Hovet, 2016). Mr Fico's opinion has shifted into a more extreme pro-Russian side since he's stepping down and into opposition.

Nor is Mr Fico alone in these sentiments. In the most recent intra-coalition government altercation, the US-Slovakia defence treaty that was ratified by 23 other countries in more or less the same wording including Poland and Hungary (Tasr, 2021) was criticised publicly in Slovakia. The treaty created a controversy during the legislation process after the Slovak Attorney General called the treaty unconstitutional (after his visit to Moscow) and a hodgepodge of left and extreme right opposition parties and even some from the coalition joined to publicly oppose its adoption (Šnídl, 2022).

As was illustrated in past examples, at the domestic level there would be some heel-dragging and strong words distancing Slovakia from the conflict, condemning it and calling for a peaceful resolution; very little actual independent diplomatic effort would be undertaken. On the international level, Slovak diplomats would quietly support EU steps, without being too vocal or zealous about it. However, if the escalation went as far as requiring NATO engagement – in any form – a great deal of heel-dragging could be expected as well followed by unenthusiastic support abroad and slightly braver statements at home condemning but not blocking any action. If the composition of the government was different than today's and more extreme elements were present in the government, then the reaction might be a notch more extreme: an open criticism of steps aimed at Russia and possible obfuscation of joint steps abroad. On the domestic scene, much more open and intense condemnation of Western responses and support of Russia is a

possibility. Pretty much mirroring domestic public opinion that is split along pro-Western and pro-Russian elements. Any view of Ukraine or its people is coloured by this split; any help to Ukraine will only go as far as to not alienate Russia.

Due to this split, the current Slovak government would be hard-pressed to make a case for a regional initiative whatever format it may take. Hungary's Mr Orban is a friend of Russia and a vocal critic of the EU. Sidelining him by creating an alternative regional platform to the V4 would be complicated by the mutual friendship of Mr Orban and the former Slovak PM and current minister of finance Matovič, not to mention other elements within the coalition government, namely the chairman of the national assembly Mr Kollar. As discussed above, a more extreme element of Slovak opposition if in power would nullify such attempts at regional initiatives in favour of tacit support of Russian interests.

In conclusion, the Slovak position on Ukraine is more concerned with the relationship of its alliances with NATO and membership in the EU and relations with Russia than the bilateral relationship with Ukraine. Although relations with Ukraine are friendly, this friendship is unlikely to be enough to make Slovaks active advocates of Ukrainian interests among its crucial allies in the EU or NATO. Furthermore, good relations with Russia will, for the time being, be above those with Ukraine.

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Military Committee in Chiefs of Defence Session, NATO Headquarters - 12-13 January 2022

Hungarian Perspective

By András Rácz

Contemporary Hungarian foreign policy towards Eastern Europe is dominated by the concept of the so-called ‘Eastern opening’. Starting in the early 2010s, this logic implies that Hungary needs to intensify its relations with Eastern countries in order to counterbalance economic dependence on the West. From 2014 on, this trade-oriented approach has become the leitmotif of Hungarian foreign policy. Even the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was renamed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade to emphasise the shift of focus.

Within Eastern Europe, this concept clearly prioritises relations with Russia due to its economic weight, which affects also Hungary’s relations with Ukraine. If there is a forced choice between Russia and Ukraine, Hungary often favours the interest of Moscow, as long as the issue is not an EU or NATO one because, in these cases, Hungary is almost always compliant with allied interests. The case of the EU sanctions against Russia is a good example: Hungary has long been critical of them but has never vetoed any of them. Still, as long as there is no violation of EU or NATO policies, Hungary tends to favour Russia’s interests.

Reasons are multifold. Russia is Hungary’s key supplier of natural gas; a new, 15-year-long gas contract was signed in late 2021. In order to please Russia, the contract clearly stipulates that Hungary is not going to import gas through Ukraine anymore. Besides, back in 2014, the Hungarian government contracted Rosatom to build two new nuclear reactors in Paks. This is by far the largest and most important project in Hungary-Russia relations. In addition to all these, several large Hungarian companies (MOL, OTP, Richter, Wizzair)

are active and successful on the Russian market, meaning that they are exposed to potential Kremlin pressure. All in all, it is unlikely that Budapest would take up any confrontation with Moscow for the sake of Ukraine.

Bilateral relations

Hungary’s present bilateral relations with Ukraine is strongly defined by the presence of the ethnic Hungarian minority in Ukraine and by how Kyiv is treating them. The current, restrictive minority policies of Ukraine, particularly the language law and the education law are very sensitive issues in bilateral relations. Budapest’s attention is not new at all: caring for the Hungarian minorities that live in the neighbouring countries has been one of the cornerstones of Hungarian foreign policy ever since 1989.

Hence, the Hungarian government is adamant in standing up for the rights of the Hungarian minorities in Ukraine. As initial negotiations did not bring any results, Budapest changed its approach in 2018 and started to employ a coercive strategy vis-à-vis Kyiv. Hungary keeps blocking high-level contacts of Ukraine with NATO and the EU, and thereby intends to put pressure on the Ukrainian government. In January 2022, the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Péter Szijjártó, openly declared that minority-related tensions ‘will very much limit the Hungarian government’s ability’ to help Ukraine.

However, this strategy has serious limitations: as only high-level contacts are blocked, this does not inflict heavy-enough damage to Ukraine to make Kyiv change its minority policy.



Vladimir Putin's meeting with Viktor Orbán in Moscow on 1 February 2022.

Budapest cannot escalate further: blocking also practical, lower-level cooperation with Ukraine – where most security and military assistance projects take place – would mean that Budapest has to take up an open confrontation not only with Kyiv, but also with other NATO allies, and this is a cost Hungary is unwilling to pay. Besides, Ukraine has demonstrated several times that it is ready to retaliate against the Hungarian minorities. All in all, the current Ukraine-strategy of the Hungarian government is enough only for a stalemate but not any breakthrough. Still, blocking Ukraine's high-level relations with NATO is something that is certainly welcome in Moscow.

Meanwhile, somewhat paradoxically, there is shared interest between Budapest and Kyiv to avoid Russia-instigated provocations in Zakarpattya. In the past, there have been several cases, when Russia organised various actions in Zakarpattya that were intended to instigate ethnic hatred: false-flag attacks, aggressive leaflets, etc. These attacks were supported by intensive information campaigns too: in Ukraine, Russian propaganda spreads fake news about Hungary allegedly intending to grab Zakarpattya, while in Hungary Russian media channels talk about Ukraine's radical nationalism and the suppression of ethnic Hungarians. Hence, since 2019 there is an informal coordination between Kyiv and Budapest to share information and counter such Russian actions.

Parallel to tensions in high politics, bilateral economic ties are flourishing. Thanks to Ukraine's integration into the European automotive industry production chains, Ukraine's importance in Hungary's foreign trade is growing rapidly as a supplier of parts for the automotive factories (Audi, Mercedes, Suzuki, etc.) located in Hungary. Similarly, Hungary has been more and more reliant on the imported labour force from Ukraine. As of 2021, the number of Ukrainian guest workers employed in Hungary exceeds 40,000. This is still not much compared to the number of Ukrainians in Poland or the Czech Republic but is quite high compared to Hungarian standards. Assisting the recruitment of the Ukrainian labour force is one of the designated tasks of Hungarian diplomatic representations in Ukraine.

Possible reaction in the event of Russian invasion

In case Russia decides to militarily escalate in Ukraine, Hungary will be affected in several ways. First and foremost, a major Russian incursion to Ukraine would severely affect regional security in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in the Black Sea region. Second, members of the Hungarian minority living in Ukraine would suffer the direct consequences of the war.

Effects

Many ethnic Hungarians serve in Ukraine's armed forces as professional or contract soldiers, particularly in the elite 128th Mountain Assault Brigade located in Mukachevo. Should a major escalation occur, this unit will surely see combat, inevitably resulting in losses, including potentially ethnic Hungarians. Besides, if Ukraine needs to launch another wave of mobilisation and/or conscription, ethnic Hungarian citizens of Ukraine will also be affected. There is also a chance for small-scale draft evasion, i.e. that mobilised Ukrainian citizens would come to Hungary to escape the military draft, though a more likely destination of draft-dodgers is Poland.

If a major war starts, Budapest expects thousands, possibly tens of thousands of Ukrainian refugees to arrive in Hungary. These asylum-seekers would be likely to come not only from Zakarpattya, where the Hungarian minority lives but also from other parts of the country, mostly from where the guest workers are. If an escalation starts, many of these guest workers are unlikely to return home; moreover, they will probably try to bring over their families too. Another dimension of the problem that a mass mobilisation in Ukraine would negatively affect the ability of Ukrainian guest workers to come to Hungary.

Last, but not least, a major military escalation may well affect the oil and gas pipelines transiting Ukraine. While oil import could be substituted with relative ease, or covered from strategic reserves, gas is more problematic. Since 2021, Hungary has not been buying natural gas directly from Ukraine; nevertheless, Budapest would still be affected. The reason is that the Baumgarten gas hub in Austria is the most important point, from where Hungary is importing gas from the West. Should the gas pipeline coming from Ukraine to Slovakia and leading to Baumgarten get blocked or damaged, an important supply channel of this crucial gas hub would fall out, which may affect Hungary too.

Policy actions

Despite these arguably serious consequences, it is certain that Hungary is not going to provide any lethal military aid to Ukraine. This would contradict Hungary's general policy not to provoke Russia and would have been particularly counter-productive

ahead of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's visit to Moscow on 1 February 2022. The maximum likely military-related contribution of Hungary is hosting wounded Ukrainian soldiers for medical treatment; Budapest has been doing so already since 2015.

Meanwhile, if the EU is going to adopt new sanctions, as stated before, Hungary will not veto them. Budapest will surely be critical of them, but similarly to the previous sanctions, Budapest's opposition will not exceed critical remarks, and Hungary will not block new punitive measures. From the strongly monetised perspective of the Orbán-government, a Hungarian veto would be particularly counter-productive, because it would take place in times of the EU rule of law debate over Hungary's domestic policies. As Russia is both unwilling and unable to replace the EU funds Hungary plans to receive from the EU, it is unlikely that Budapest would risk assessing EU money for the sake of Moscow.

Should NATO decide to deploy additional forces to Central-Europe to strengthen the region's defences, Hungary declared in the end of January that at that moment Budapest did not need additional NATO troops, because Hungary's own armed forces were strong enough to handle the actual level of threat. Hungary's armed forces have long been fully NATO-minded and socialised; defence cooperation is actually one of the success stories of Hungary's relations with Western powers. Hence, partner should the situation in Ukraine deteriorate significantly, Budapest may reconsider its position on not hosting additional NATO forces.

Hungarian Approach Towards Regional Cooperation

Hungary is highly supportive of the Visegrad cooperation and intends to strengthen it, also in Budapest's conflicts with Brussels. Hungary uses the International Visegrad Fund as an element of its contribution to the EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative. In line with Budapest's alliance with Warsaw, Hungary is usually contemptuous of Poland taking the lead in EaP-related initiatives of the Visegrad.

Budapest does not have an elaborated Black Sea policy. While the Hungarian government is generally supportive of the Three Seas Initiative,

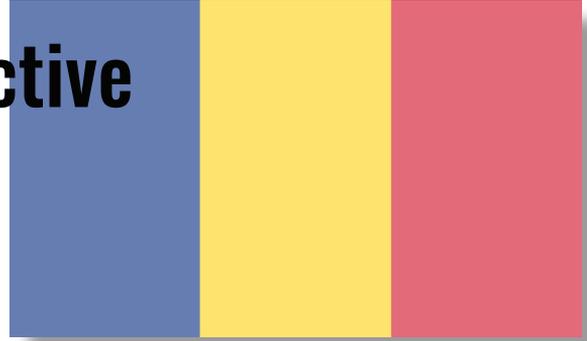
and perceives it as a dominantly economic project, there is no detailed policy behind it. Hungarian strategic documents (national security strategy, national military strategy) do not even mention the Black Sea region. The general support is connected largely to the present alliance between the Polish and Hungarian governments, but Budapest would be unwilling to develop the Three Seas Initiative to any such direction that would result in any confrontation with Russia. All in all, when it comes to multilateral, regional approaches to Ukraine, Budapest strongly favours the Visegrad cooperation as a framework.

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Romanian Perspective

By Radu Albu-Comanescu



Romanians and modern-day Ukrainians have a long history together. By virtue of geography, either with the Kyiv Rus and its successors or with the Zaporozhian Cossacks, Ukrainians have been present in our past — a premise to build a solid relationship for a future yet to be defined. Ukraine is a large neighbour whose presence is still ambivalently perceived, divided between strategic objectivity and a more impassioned perception of Ukraine's Soviet past that left traces on Romania's territorial integrity. However, Ukraine's orientation towards the EU and NATO are positively appreciated as it would generate a community of shared interests efficient in solving bilateral disagreements.

Bilateral Relationship With Ukraine

Following the recognition of Ukraine's independence, Romania is represented by one embassy and four consulates. A joint presidential commission was created in 2006 in order to facilitate political dialogue, as mutual visits between 1999 and 2008 were frequent. It came into disuse after 2008 — because of the frontier delimitation case opposing the two countries at the International Court of Justice — but it was reactivated in 2015. Only the ministries of foreign affairs continued with working sessions at that time on technical issues (minority rights, economy-industry, delimitation of borders and nature conservation in the Danube area).

Trade reaches a total of \$1.37 billion (import-export). Cultural and education agreements, focused on the preservation of Ukrainian and Romanian cultural minorities, are considered important by the two countries. A 'Romania-Ukraine Civil Society Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation' was launched in 2019 as a non-governmental facilitating platform.

Territorial changes in favour of Ukraine, during and after the 1947 Paris Peace Conference, were officially recognised by Romania in the 1997 basic bilateral treaty, with an additional agreement to settle the remaining Black Sea dispute on exclusive economic zones through the ICJ. The latter handed down its verdict with Romania receiving 80% of the disputed area. In 2010, six Danube islands on the frontier were confirmed Romanian based on existing international conventions using riverbed delimitation. This clash supported Ukrainian narratives about Romania's revisionism and desire to seize back pre-1947 territories, affecting cooperation and corroding trust.

After March 2014, Romania condemned the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia and took the lead of NATO's group for Ukraine's cyber-defence. But at the same time, Bucharest did not provide Ukraine with gas, nor did it negotiate better conditions for the protection of the Romanian minority in Ukraine. Therefore, support was granted within certain limits only. The pandemic extended the cooperation to include medical assistance to Kyiv.

In September 2020, the new security strategy of Ukraine (Bezpeka Lyudyny-Bezpeka Krayiny), listing the countries to build a strategic partnership with, excluded Romania despite 650 km of the com-

mon frontier, sharing the same eastern enemy and having signed an agreement for technical and military cooperation in 2019 (reasserted in 2020). Forgetting that Ukraine was not specifically included in Romania's security strategy either, Bucharest raised eyebrows. This created a certain delay in the ratification of the military agreement by the Romanian Parliament, which only voted in favour in April 2021 after Russia's manoeuvres against Romania's neighbour. Bucharest's green light came despite the lack of progress in the debate regarding the Ukrainian legislation on minorities' linguistic rights. In the same month, during a visit to Romania, the Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dmytro Kuleba, stated that a strategic partnership between the two countries should be envisaged. Bucharest took note. In August 2021, Prime Minister Florin Cițu attended the Crimea Platform, both to the surprise of the Parliament and of the Senate Commission for External Intelligence, which required a clarification.

In addition, Ukraine is critical to Romania's energy security, as imports from Russia transit Ukraine via two pipelines: the Southern corridor (with double-track Ananiev-Tiraspol-Izmail and Shebelinka-Krivoi Rog-Izmail, each having a capacity of 24 billion m³/year) and the Urenгой-Yamburg-Dolina-Uzhgorod-Beregovo, with a Khust-Satu Mare subdivision towards north-western Romania, of 2 billion m³/year). The first crosses Romania and continues into the Balkans as part of the Trans-Balkan pipeline, while the second serves Romania's internal market and consumption (of 11.5 billion m³/year, of which two are imported). Starting with April 2021, Russia ceased deliveries to Romania via Ukraine; it was only in January 2022 that distribution restarted. Yet, because of the context, Romania and Ukraine decided to build a new pipeline in their western areas by 2026, destined for exports to Ukraine of 290 mil. m³, in case of emergency.

Possible reaction in the event of the Russian invasion of Ukraine

Romania expressed support for Ukraine's EU and NATO integration as well as for its territorial integrity. The most recent bilateral consultations (in August 2021, involving the strategic

planning and foresight departments of the MFA) focused on security at the Black Sea, reinforcing cooperation and Ukraine-NATO collaboration. Ukraine attended common military exercises such as Riverine 2021 (September 2021), destined to consolidate cooperation and increase interoperability based on NATO operational standards; these are part of NATO's extended policy to reinforce regional security. Such closeness is quite unusual for the two countries, given easily inflammable past circumspection, now tempered by the need to manage the Black Sea neighbourhood. In other words, they are still getting to know each other better.

In the case of a Russian invasion of Ukraine, Romania's reaction will be fundamentally circumscribed to the policies adopted by NATO, yet excluding an excessive anti-Russian stance or adventurism. Romania characteristically does not hazard in bellicose positions: its usual profile being not to engage, disturb or stand out but, at the same time, to be well placed. In April-May 2021, Bucharest estimated that the Russian military build-up was a provocation test addressed to NATO, not an invasion of Ukraine: an assessment that has been proven right, for the moment. But being next to the potential frontline, especially to Ukraine's south — which strategists consider to be of importance to Russia's plans for territorial control — Romania will likely constitute a base for organising resistance and providing military help. This can be pertinently conceived as ranging from military to cyber and humanitarian, based on an extended agreement dating back to 2003-2005, signed by the two countries only after 2017 and ratified in 2020-21, which set the framework for the acquisition, production, delivery, overhaul and upgrade of military equipment, including production and technique licence sales, common research and development, as well as information sharing.

Preventively, Romania will reinforce the presence of its own armed forces at the Black Sea.

Considering the geographic proximity, Russia reacted accordingly; the demand made by the Kremlin on 20 January 2022, that NATO withdraws completely from Romania and Bulgaria, came as no surprise. Such a withdrawal would concern troupes and military equipment deployed by the US, as well as dismantling existing NATO

infrastructure. Russia resents the presence of MQ-9 Reaper drones, the enlargement of the military bases in Transylvania and at the Black Sea (with a \$ 2,15 bn. investment planned for the next decade), the NATO Multinational Corps South-East, based in Sibiu, and especially the US land-based SM-3 interceptor ballistic missile defence system located in Deveselu. The Romanian government — as well as NATO — replied that ‘such a demand is inadmissible and cannot make the object of any negotiation’, taking the opportunity to salute the announcements made by the United States and France (on 19 January) regarding the enhancement of NATO presence in the country.

Romania’s position towards Russia has on multiple occasions been described by the Minister of Foreign Affairs as ‘open to pragmatic and realist dialogue’ on security, but unwavering, with ‘no negotiations and no concessions made on general security in Europe’. Romania repeatedly renewed support for economic sanctions against Russia, affiliating to the prevalent opinion in the EU, yet without approving or rejecting the disconnection of Russia from the SWIFT platform.

Regional Approach Towards the Future Relationship With Ukraine

Overall, Romania wishes to see a strong and stable Ukraine. Bucharest has all the rational interests to support Kyiv in public statements and in practice. From both sides, there is a mutually demonstrated awareness that the past has to be left behind; the best, symbolic example would be that on 24 January 2022, Bogdan Aurescu suggested that the EU ministers of foreign affairs meet in Kyiv as a sign of solidarity with Ukraine — a statement warmly saluted by the Ukrainian counterpart. Recent reunions of the ‘Romania-Ukraine Civil Society Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation’ insisted on intensifying political dialogue, with professional debates of experts and consultants, paving the way for a common agenda, consensually articulated around topics of interest. Increasing democratic security, fighting corruption, reinforcing democracy, creating new regional formats (Turkey-Romania-Ukraine trilateral, Bucharest9+EaP, EaP-Romania-Turkey or extending the Lublin Triangle to Romania) are considered viable options on the list.

What history separated, history also reunites as Romania and Ukraine look willing to seize the opportunity and build a constructive relationship, despite — and against — a tumultuous context.

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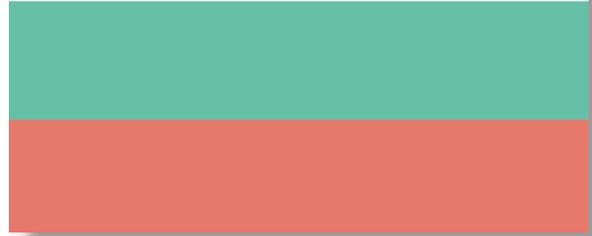
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Bulgarian Perspective

By Spasimir Domaradzki



Ukkraine's relations with Bulgaria are over a century-long. Bulgaria was among the first countries to establish diplomatic relations with the short-lived Ukrainian People's Republic after the Brest-Litovsk treaty of 1918. Bulgaria was also among the first countries to recognise the independence of Ukraine on 5 December 1990.

Bilateral relations

The bilateral relations are driven by the existence of a sizeable Bulgarian minority in Ukraine, tourism and economic exchange. The Bulgarian minority in Ukraine inhabits the ethnically diversified parts of southern Ukraine and constitutes the largest Bulgarian diaspora of approximately 200 000 members. Ukrainians are among the largest groups of tourists visiting Bulgaria, outrunning tourists from Russia since 2019. The economic exchange between the two countries does not exceed 1 bln euros with a substantial surplus for Ukraine. Since 2014, the war in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea brought the question of regional security to the forefront.

Bulgaria's position towards the war in Ukraine is unequivocal. Officially, Bulgaria shares the NATO, US and EU positions on Ukraine. Bulgaria also participates in the EU's Eastern Partnership and supports NATO's open-door policy. However, Bulgaria's energy projects, condition of its military forces and at times confusing statements of senior Bulgarian officials paint a much more ambiguous picture.

While the last comments of President Rumen Radev and the new Defense Minister Stefan Ivanov

required clarifications and reconfirmed support for the shared Western position on Ukraine, the Bulgarian activities over the last decade reveal efforts to balance between the interests of the United States and Russia.

Energy

Since the early 2000s, energy has become a matter of strategic importance and global rivalry. Bulgaria and Ukraine were directly influenced by Russia's decision to bypass Central Europe and to establish alternative energy corridors, thus weakening Moscow's dependence on disobedient transit countries.

While Ukraine became a victim of Russia's energy blackmail and Moscow decided to contain Kyiv's transitory role, Bulgaria became a part of every single Russian energy project bypassing Ukraine. With the completion of the Turkish/Balkan stream through Bulgaria, it became apparent that former Bulgarian PM Borisov's governments prioritised the Russian pipeline contributing to the further dependence of the EU on Russian gas. In tactical terms, the postponement of the interconnector with Greece aimed to secure Sofia's dependence on Russian supplies and led to the further weakening of Ukraine's position as a strategically important piece of Russia's energy supplies to Europe.

NATO Build-up

Despite the American military presence in Bulgaria since 2006, the governments in Sofia are

extremely careful when it comes to the potential NATO build-up in the region. While there is little enthusiasm for US military presence in Bulgaria, the main reason for it was related to the US operations in the Middle East and Afghanistan. After the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, the 2014 NATO summit decisions for an advanced military presence on its Eastern flank had no direct impact on Bulgaria.

When, in 2016, Romania proposed the establishment of a permanent, joint NATO Black Sea force comprised of Romanian, Bulgarian and Turkish support working with Ukraine to counter Russia's domination, the Bulgarian PM Borisov replied that 'he does not need a war in the Black Sea'. From this perspective, also the slow pace of Bulgaria's armed forces modernisation, with a practically non-existent air force and navy, goes in line with Russian desires rather than NATO's tactical priorities in the region.

Balancing between Western Alliances and Russian Influence

The 2017 win of President Radev enhanced the pro-Russian sentiments in Bulgaria. His support for a softer position towards Moscow, reconsidering and removing EU sanctions and enhancing economic cooperation, positioned him among the European politicians pursuing a more reconciliatory approach towards the Russian Federation. This should come as no surprise keeping in mind the political support he received from the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), replete with former communists and openly pro-Russian politicians, for his presidential candidacy in 2017.

In the eve of the presidential elections second round in November 2021, Radev acknowledged the fact that Crimea is under Russian control. His claim sparked reactions not only from Kyiv but also from Washington and was swiftly silenced by equivocal claims for NATO and EU solidarity and reconfirmation of the general Western position condemning the annexation of Crimea. Nevertheless, a month later – in the context of the first visit to Brussels of the newly elected Bulgarian PM Kiril Petkov – the question of enhanced military presence in Bulgaria and Romania as a part of the NATO spearhead initiative was discussed. The reaction of the new Bulgarian minister of defence

(and former PM of the Technical government) Stefan Ianev was moderate, highlighting the lack of urgency on that matter with regard to Russia's actions and Bulgarian national interests.

Ianev's arguments are grounded in a noticeable concern that the East-West conflict that will turn Bulgaria into a front-line state. The left-leaning political circles in Bulgaria, whom Stefan Ianev represents, along with nationalists represent a demand for a more independently crafted foreign policy in line with Bulgaria's own interests.

The repeating appearance of statements among Bulgarian officials that suggest a less hawkish approach towards Moscow is also visible in the dissonance concerning Crimea. The official Bulgarian position condemning the Russian annexation is also at odds with a frequently shared argument among Bulgarians that the peninsula historically belongs to Russia. It was not by chance that Radev made his statement about Crimea during the presidential debate thus reconfirming his pro-Russian sympathies and searching for mobilisation of this electorate.

Today, the new Bulgarian government is replete with contradictions. Ianev's arguments had to be rebuffed by the new PM Kiril Petkov as not representing the governments' position. Petkov's first steps accenting on the need for the prompt completion of the interconnector with Greece and his visit to Brussels suggest a clearly pro-Western orientation.

However, the ruling coalition behind him represents very different political formations with divergent views on relations with Russia. While there is a need to take a stance in times of growing tensions, there is no equivocal foreign policy orientation in the Bulgarian government. The primary goal to remove Borisov from power has overshadowed the incompatibilities in many of the policy areas. The coalition agreement assumes Bulgaria's active role in international relations among which the first priority is the reconfirmation of its geopolitical belonging to NATO and the EU and in particular, support for the peaceful resolution on the Ukrainian conflict within the Minsk process. In the context of Ukraine, the agreement assumes enhancement of bilateral relations, mainly in the context of the

Bulgarian minority.

In his first days as PM, Petkov was able to subjugate the statements of Radev and Ianev, it remains to be seen whether with the further deterioration of the relations between Russia and the West this will not become a divisive issue within the coalition government. While the US efforts for an enhanced military presence on NATO's Eastern flank are met enthusiastically from Bucharest to Tallin, the Bulgarian response will be a litmus test for Sofia's choice in a region with growing polarisation.

Concluding, the balancing between the interests of the great powers' positions is of primary importance, and Ukraine is a secondary partner for Bulgaria. While Bulgaria remains a firm member of NATO and the EU, Petkov's government is no less exposed to the clashing interests of Russia and the West. The presence of colliding visions of regional security within the government can play a decisive role in case of further deterioration. While Bulgarian authorities practically accept the military build-up in the region, the society is less enthusiastic and political parties like the BSP and the nationalists can try to take advantage of it. The current political environment is favourable for President Radev, who wants to keep a hand on Bulgaria's foreign policy. The consequence will be lacklustre formal participation in anti-Russian activities.

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Special Report

Russian Invasion of Ukraine

Visegrad Insight is the main Central European analysis and media platform. It generates future policy directions for Europe and transatlantic partners. It also identifies, strengthens, and links emerging pro- democratic opinion leaders in the region by holding Visegrad Insight Breakfasts - a series of networking events across the region. Established in 2012 by the Res Publica Foundation.

This report was made possible thanks to the cooperation of Visegrad Insight, the Res Publica Foundation and Energy Gate Europe.

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Photo from Lublin Triangle meeting on page 20 "[Wizyta szefa polskiej dyplomacji na Litw](#)" (CC BY-NC 2.0) by [Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Pol.](#)

Photos on pages 24 and 28 are from NATO. [Page 24](#) shows the meeting between NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, Jan Lipavský on 27 January 2022. [Page 28](#) shows the Military Committee in Chiefs of Defence Session, NATO Headquarters - 12-13 January 2022.

Photo on page 30 of Viktor Orbán's meeting with Vladimir Putin attributed to www.kremlin.ru.

Sources for the polling data on page 22 from the International Republican Institute (IRI) can be found [here](#).

With special thanks to the Visegrad Insight team, specifically Kamil Jarończyk and Tetiana Poliak-Grujić.

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