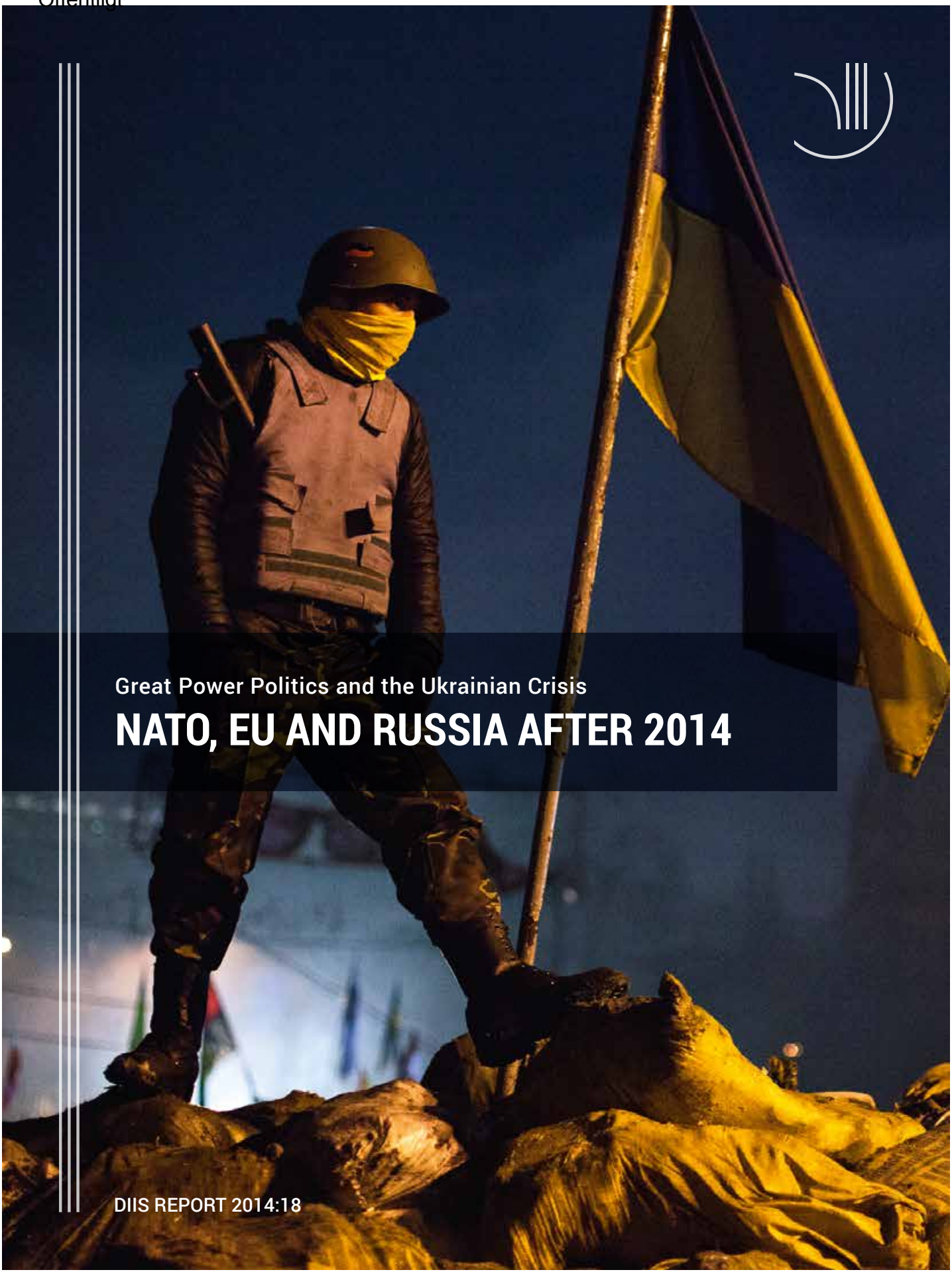

Great Power Politics and the Ukrainian Crisis

NATO, EU AND RUSSIA AFTER 2014

DIIS REPORT 2014:18

This report is written by Henrik Boesen Lindbo Larsen and published by DIIS
as part of the Defence and Security Studies for the Danish Ministry of Defence.

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Layout: Lone Ravnkilde og Viki Rachlitz
Printed in Denmark by: Bording A/S

ISBN 978-87-7605-696-4 (print)
ISBN 978-87-7605-695-7 (pdf)

DIIS publications can be downloaded free of charge or ordered as hardcopies from www.diis.dk

For academic citation:
Larsen, H.B.L., 2014. **'Great Power Politics and the Ukrainian Crisis:
NATO, EU and Russia after 2014'**, Report 2014:18, Copenhagen: DIIS, Danish Institute for International Studies.


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report assesses the relationship between Europe and Russia as the sum of great power reactions to the Ukrainian crisis and Russia's annexation of Crimea. Despite agreement on a no business-as-usual principle, important national nuances have arisen stemming from different historical bonds to eastern Europe and Russia (Germany, Poland, United States) or different interests in the region (France, United Kingdom).

The report calls for a recalibration of the Europe-Russia relations along three dimensions based on the great power pattern: imposing moderate sanctions and thus letting markets punish Russia, given its vulnerability to international investors; placing the EU at the forefront of implementing the Association Agreement already in place to assist Ukraine in painful but needed reforms; and getting NATO to reinforce its eastern posture to incentivize de-escalation.

The Ukrainian crisis must be recognized and managed as a predominantly political-economic rivalry involving relatively strong Russian interests in this common neighborhood with the EU.

INTRODUCTION

The Ukrainian crisis that started with the Euromaidan protests in November 2013 and have culminated thus far in Russia's annexation of Crimea represents the biggest geopolitical shock to the European security system since the end of the Cold War. On this occasion Russia was prepared not only to use military force but also to pursue a forward policy by annexing territory. If the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 had put an effective halt to further NATO enlargements, the Crimean crisis of 2014 was about preventing the EU from extending its eastern neighborhood closer through forms of association.

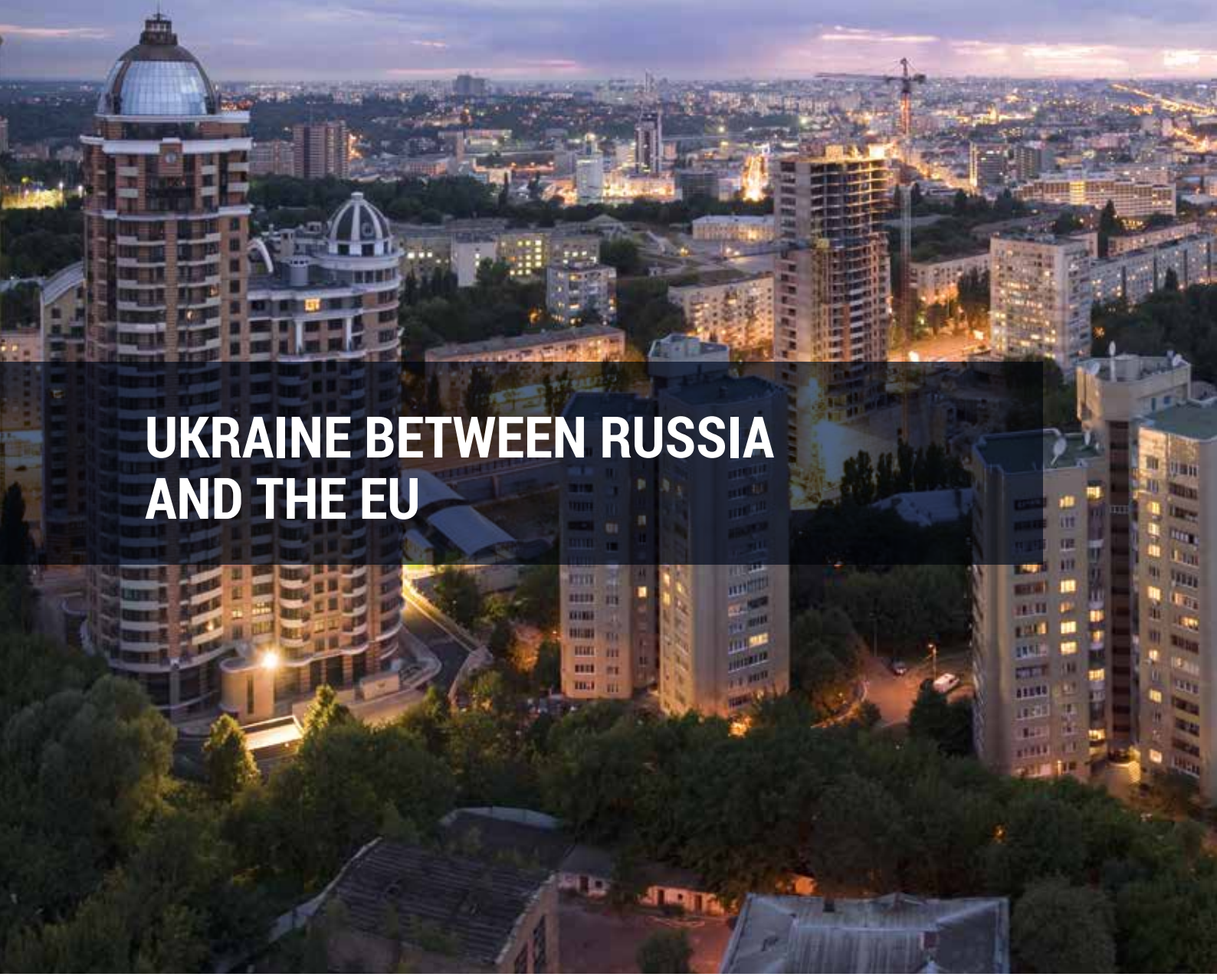
This report focuses on great-power reactions as a basis for a realistic assessment of how policymakers can and should navigate the new perils of European security

For the first time since the end of the Cold War, the Crimean crisis has forced Western powers to seek a new equilibrium between balancing Russia through forceful countermeasures or accommodating mutual security interests in an East-West dialogue. Basically incompatible ways of thinking about security are complicating the management of state relations in the spirit of a cooperative and inclusive Euro-Atlantic space. This calls for a qualitative assessment of the political purpose underlying the Western attempt to promote political-economic integration in Eastern Europe, concentrating on how this clashes with Russia's determination to contain this aim.

This report discusses the management of East-West relations going forward given a new geopolitical situation in which Russia controls territory in all three borderline republics that aspire to closer ties with the EU (Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova). It provides a study in European great-power politics with the aim of exploring the possibilities for successfully managing East-West relations, defined as the restoration of stable security interactions through accommodation, balancing, or a mixture of both.

The report represents an independent contribution to the vast body of policy and academic commentaries already published on the implications of Russia reasserting itself. It focuses specifically on great-power reactions as a basis for a more realistic assessment of how policymakers can and should navigate the new perils of European security. The report is structured in the following way:

- A brief overview of the increased competition between Russia and the EU that has caused Ukrainian politics to spiral into an international crisis and the geopolitical dilemmas that Russia's land grab in Crimea pose in terms of policy response.
- An analysis of the foreign-policy reactions of the Western great powers, namely Germany, Poland, the United States, France, and the United Kingdom, with particular attention to sectional interests or the revival of historical sensitivities that account for predictability in action over time.
- The pattern of reaction and its impact on Russia, which provide an assessment of viable Europe Russia readjustments and institutional responses to the changed eastern neighborhood (EU, NATO), given the conflict's protracted economic implications.



UKRAINE BETWEEN RUSSIA AND THE EU

While European policy makers were well aware of Russia's objections to NATO enlargements, the Ukrainian crisis came as a big surprise in terms of the depth and severity of Russia's objections to a growing EU influence in the common neighborhood.

The relationship between the EU and Russia deteriorated significantly after 2009, when the EU launched its Eastern Partnership to cover the eastern dimension of the existing European Neighborhood Policy. Russia quickly developed a hostile zero-sum attitude to the EU's growing influence in the region, launching its own alternative Eurasian Customs Union in 2011 with Kazakhstan and Belarus, and leaving no doubt that it would like to see other post-Soviet states joining in too.

Russia's integration project suffered severe setbacks when Ukraine was scheduled to sign an Association Agreement (AA) with the EU during the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius in November 2013, an agreement that had been initialed in 2012. At the same

time, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia were supposed to initial an AA after years of negotiation with the EU. The AA is a framework for closer political association and includes as its most substantial element the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA), in which candidate countries commit themselves to implement EU laws and regulations in return for enhanced access to the EU market. To a large extent the EU formulated association with itself or with Russia as an either/or question, which may have increased Russia's already hostile attitude to the AA and the DCFTA.

Russia exerted intense pressure on the neighborhood republics not to opt in to the EU initiative approaching the Vilnius Summit, using trade sanctions and threats to cut energy supplies. In the case of Armenia, it also threatened to withdraw its military presence from the country. As a result, only Moldova and Georgia remained on the DCFTA course, while Armenia opted for the Eurasian Customs Union. Russia rewarded Ukrainian President Yanukovich's decision not to sign AA in November 2013 with a package of much-needed economic benefits, including $15 billion of credit, the elimination of trade sanctions, and lower gas prices (Lehne, 2014: 7-8). Yanukovich's decision not to sign was at first seen as a victory for Russia's hard power game, but the Euromaidan protests in Kiev and other major cities in Ukraine that were provoked by this decision showed the persistence of the EU's soft power.

As the situation threatened to spiral out of control, with casualties increasing in the Maidan, Poland, Germany, and France (acting on behalf of the EU) brokered a deal between President Yanukovich and the opposition. The deal signed on February 21 restored Ukraine's constitution of 2004 and scheduled elections for May 2014. The loss of life in the Maidan arguably made Yanukovich's position untenable and contributed to his rapid ouster. On February 27, the new interim government in Kiev announced that it intended to reverse Yanukovich's decision and to sign up to the DCFTA. Russian 'green men' gained military control over Crimea on March 2. The European Commission soon thereafter pledged $15 billion in loans and grants to keep the new government in Kiev financially afloat in the face of looming bankruptcy – the same amount Moscow had initially offered Yanukovich as a reward for not signing the AA. The referendum on the status of Crimea, held on March 16, was in favor of Crimea joining the Russian Federation, and Russia formalized its annexation of the peninsula on March 18. The interim government in Kiev signed the political framework of the AA, but not as yet the DCFTA, with the EU on March 21. These events demonstrated that Russia and the EU were the main external actors affecting political developments in Ukraine.

Russia's annexation of Crimea, despite her strong and well-established historical and ethnic ties to the peninsula, is a far-reaching step that represents the greatest revision of Europe's geopolitical landscape since German reunification. Territorial annexation represents a major geopolitical rupture, one that shows that Russia is no longer playing by established international rules. The West's recognition of Kosovo and Russia's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in 2008 nourished great mutual distrust, but neither were cases of outright territorial expansion. Moreover, in annexing Crimea, Russia violated the assurances concerning Ukraine's territorial integrity that were enshrined in the 1994 Budapest Memorandum in return for Ukraine giving up its nuclear arsenal. Russia, according to NATO estimates, stationed about 35,000-40,000 combat-ready troops

on Ukraine's eastern border, nourishing fears of further military incursions as a response to Kiev's anti-separatist crackdown.

Russia now enjoys control over all of the three post-Soviet borderline republics that aspire to closer association with the EU or NATO: Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. None of these countries can seriously start accession negotiations unless they are willing de jure to give up their now de facto separatist entities (Abkhazia/South Ossetia, Transnistria, and Crimea). When it comes to association agreements, Russia retains the ability to exert pressure on the governments of these countries through gas cut-offs, trade embargoes, or the further encouragement of separatism. The annexation of Crimea expressed Russia's determination not only to contain the EU, but also to strengthen its own Moscow-centric integration projects.

One should not underestimate the significant amount of soft power which Russia enjoys in many parts of Eastern Europe. On the economic side, being on good terms with Russia implies visa-free regimes and easy access for immigrant workers to the Russian labor market, due in no small part to Russia's own shrinking demography. Seasonal work and remittances are a much-needed economic boost to small economies like Georgia or Moldova. On the 'cultural' side, Russia enjoys the predominance of Russian media, especially TV, with a powerful ability to influence public opinion among CIS countries where Russian remains the dominant lingua franca. Ethnic ties and a shared history and religion are effective in mobilizing domestic constituents, as shown by the strong pro-Russian sentiments in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

The simultaneous reliance on hard and soft power leaves the Western powers bewildered about how to deal with Russia's unilateral redrawing of the borders of eastern Europe

The simultaneous reliance on hard and soft power leaves the Western powers bewildered about how to deal with Russia's unilateral redrawing of the borders of eastern Europe. Putin challenges the plus-sum thinking that characterizes the attempt to expand the liberal security community through forms of associated affiliation. The new geopolitical situation is closing down some opportunities while opening up others. Although Russia's hard-power assertiveness has dismembered Ukraine as a coherent state, it has strengthened Ukraine's otherwise weak sense of nationhood and pushed Kiev and moderate forces further westwards. This changed geopolitical landscape begs three essential questions:

- To what extent should Russia be confronted with sanctions, and with what long-term aim?
- To what extent, and using which incentives, should the neighborhood countries be supported?
- To what extent does the Crimean crisis give reason to reassert NATO's Article 5?


КРЕМЛЬ
РОССИИ-ДА
ПУТИНУ-НЕТ
ПУТИН
Здравый смысл
ПУТИН,
ПРОЧЬ

REACTIONS TO RUSSIA'S CRIMEAN ANNEXATION

The reaction to the Crimean crisis calls for a primary focus on the great powers, which is essential to understanding how the relationship between Russia and Europe may develop beyond the crisis.

As during other major international crises such as the invasion of Iraq in 2003 or the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, it is great powers that structure the international pattern.

The Ukrainian crisis witnessed the strong involvement of two European powers with strong ties to the post-Soviet region (Germany, Poland) and less direct involvement by three other powers (United States, France, United Kingdom).

Together, these five states constitute the stable pattern around which international coalitions align in an otherwise great variety of foreign-policy preferences on the crucial Russia question. The position of each power is analyzed in turn, addressing the historical narratives that account for stability over time.

Germany

Berlin has risen to the challenge of formulating a consistent foreign-policy stance and, indeed, has emerged as a pivotal actor on European–Russia affairs. Although Germany has emerged from the recent economic crisis as Europe's strongest country, it was not until the Crimean crisis that it came to assume an actual political leadership role that went beyond mere rhetorical signals. By contrast to the Russo-Georgian war of 2008, when France was in the front seat, this time it was Germany that appeared as the key European state determined to meet Russia's annexation with gradual sanctions. Whereas in 2008 it was reluctant to impose sanctions, such as suspending the EU–Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement and the NATO–Russia Council, in 2014 Germany changed its position towards one of gradual confrontation as a response to further Russian escalations. On the other hand, Germany wanted to facilitate de-escalation by avoiding NATO deployments and keeping communication channels open.

The EU lives up to Berlin's ideal 'civilian power' principles for how influence should be exerted because it works through economic incentives

In the early phase of the Ukrainian crisis, German Foreign Minister Steinmeier reacted to the unrest in Ukraine with conciliatory rhetoric, saying that both Russia and Europe should work for the stabilization of the country and to prevent the creation of new divisions in Europe. Germany from an early stage supported the creation of a 'Contact Group' led by the OSCE (Boston Globe, 2014). However, Germany's position quickly shifted after Russia's military incursion into Crimea, and especially after Russia's formal annexation of the peninsula. Steinmeier condemned Russia's 'attempt to splinter Europe' (Radio Free Europe, 2014). In a speech to the German Bundestag on March 13, Angela Merkel called upon Russia to abandon what she referred to as the 'politics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', while implying that the 'right of the strong is being pitted against the strength of the right, and one-sided geopolitical interests against understanding and cooperation'. Merkel rejected the perception of the Association Agreement (AA) as directed against Russia and as an either/or choice for Ukraine between the West and Moscow.

Moreover, Merkel made it clear that Germany would be ready to stand united with the other 27 EU members and the United States in imposing sanctions (Bundestag, 2014). After Russia's formal annexation of Crimea, Germany consequently agreed to the imposition of travel bans and asset freezes targeting top Russian business people and politicians and signaled a willingness to proceed to trade sanctions if Russia were to escalate the crisis further. Merkel declared that the G-8 format effectively no longer existed (BBC, 2014a). On the other hand, Germany was on the conservative side on the issue of expanding the list of blacklisted Russians, as expressed by Steinmeier: '[w]e're doing a balancing act, whereby we can still find a diplomatic solution and not paint ourselves into a corner' (EUobserver, 2014a). Steinmeier paid a visit to Donetsk on March 23 and called for international financial support to Ukraine, adding that the Crimean crisis must not cause Ukraine to split up (Euronews, 2014).

Steinmeier supported the suspension of activities in the NATO–Russia Council but nevertheless stressed the need to keep channels open to prepare for the possibility of de-escalation. Unhappy with NATO Secretary General Rasmussen's wording (in an op-ed in Die Welt) that the path to NATO membership remains open for Ukraine, Steinmeier responded that 'NATO membership for Ukraine is not pending' and adding that foreign policy was in danger of becoming militarized (Atlantic, 2014). The Chancellery simultaneously refused to deploy large numbers of troops as requested by Poland and the Baltic States because it would give Russia reasons for breaching treaties.

Steinmeier claimed that the deployment of a significant NATO force in Poland would not be completely in line with the 1997 accords with Russia committing NATO to refrain from stationing large numbers of troops in former Warsaw Pact countries (Reuters, 2014a). On the other hand, Germany supported the deployment of AWACS to increase security on NATO's borders with Russia (EUobserver, 2014b). In April Germany also took the step of halting the export of German weapons to Russia 'as matter of principle' (Telegraph, 2014c).

Germany's reaction to the Crimean crisis is best described as a continuation of its Ostpolitik, a key foreign policy guiding principle since the Cold War. Germany saw the ability to reach out and facilitate dialogue as means of promoting détente with eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as a major contribution to the peaceful end of the Cold War. After assuming office, Steinmeier made it clear that he would continue to work in the tradition of Ostpolitik when in 2006 the German Foreign Ministry described its policy towards Russia as one of 'rapprochement through economic interlocking' (Stelzenmüller, 2009: 93-94). Germany perceives itself as the most important bridge-builder between Europe and Russia, based on the assumption that its greatest triumph would be the successful integration of Russia into a rule-based international order.

A powerful historical narrative compels Germany's empathetic engagement with and integration of Moscow. First, Germany sees in Russia a negative parallel to its own national fate. Just as the harsh conditions imposed on Germany under the Treaty of Versailles in the 1920s and 1930s after its First World War defeat led to the rise of National Socialism, it is crucial that Russia today is not marginalized in the current international system after its so called 'defeat' in the Cold War. Germany therefore generally seeks to avoid confrontational moves that could risk cornering Russia and pushing it further into increased domestic upheaval involving nationalism and militarism (Chivvis and Rid, 2009: 118). Secondly, Germany retains a fundamental, tacit feeling of guilt from the atrocities it committed in eastern Europe and Russia during the Second World War. Germany's own process of coming to terms with the past provides a powerful impetus for abstaining from criticizing Russia, even though decision-makers are rarely explicit about it.

Germany's dovish attitude can be traced back to one generational factor: among the generation presently in power in Germany, many look gratefully to Russia for having supported German reunification in the 1990s and for its willingness to engage in genuine efforts to dissolve the communist bloc. Some nuanced differences, however, can be identified between the Social Democratic Party (SDP) to which Steinmeier belongs and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) to which Merkel belongs, the latter being generally more hostile

to Russia than the former and increasingly critical of Putin's authoritarian style (Nünlist, 2014). As another example, CDU Finance Minister Schäuble drew an analogy between Russia's annexation of Crimea and Hitler's annexation of the Sudetenland (Spiegel, 2014a). Merkel has consistently been more critical of Russia than Steinmeier, who earlier during his time as foreign minister spoke openly about the need for establishing Germany's equidistance between Washington and Moscow. Recent opinion polls in Germany have shown, fuelled most recently by revelations of National Security Agency surveillance activities in Europe, a populace so distrustful of the United States that it sceptical of following it in geopolitical conflict (Wall Street Journal, 2014e).

On the other hand, Germany's strong commitment to international law compels it to condemn territorial annexation. German foreign policy-making at all levels cherishes multilateralism, international rules, and consensus-building almost as goals in their own right (Krause, 2004: 48-49). Berlin adheres to internationally agreed principles and reacts strongly to overt breaches against it because Germany fears the deterioration of relations into obsolete power rivalry for spheres of influence in Europe. Moreover, Germany has a traditionally strong preference for working through the EU, which Berlin sees as a benign international actor. Rather than NATO, with its far stronger hard-power component, the EU lives up to Berlin's ideal 'civilian power' principles for how influence should be exerted because it works through economic incentives. Whereas in 2008 Germany showed sympathy for Russia's opposition to NATO extending its Membership Action Plans to Ukraine and Georgia, it has shown less understanding for Russia's wish to contain the EU because it perceives the latter as an inherently benign civilian actor.

Germany has been trapped between two contradictory concerns in its response to the seizure of Crimea: its fundamental commitment to international law and economic integration versus its role as a bridge-builder to Russia. In addition to its strong moral concerns, one should also take into account Germany's strong dependence on Russian gas supplies (35 percent of its imports), which have pushed Berlin away from the idea of proceeding to trade sanctions because it would hurt the German economy just as it is recovering from the financial crisis. The inauguration of the North Stream direct gas pipeline between Germany and Russia in 2012 signaled a continued strong bilateral relationship based on economic interests, in contrast to other EU members' attempts to promote a Southern Energy corridor weakening Russia's position as energy supplier. German industry has warned that 6,200 German companies work in Russia, accounting for 300,000 jobs (Ostausschuss, 2014), but Steinmeier has stated instead that there can now be no business as usual with Russia (EUobserver, 2014c).

Poland

Warsaw's position in many ways represents the antithesis of Berlin's in the sense that it has called for a strong military build-up in existing NATO countries, extending a supporting hand to Kiev, and has called for common measures to punish and isolate Russia for its actions in Ukraine. In 2008, in concert with the Baltic States and Ukraine, Polish politicians reached out to the Georgian government by flying to Tbilisi to act as human shields against the Russian invasion. However, the move was isolated as a predominantly symbolic gesture detached from the broader Western effort of which the suspension of the NATO–Russia Council was the most tangible evidence. The Ukrainian crisis, conversely, has underlined Poland's rise from its marginal position as a new NATO member in 1999 to being among the top six most influential countries today.

As initiator (with Sweden) of the EU's Eastern Partnership, Poland put a great deal of effort and national prestige into Ukraine accepting the AA and in ensuring Kiev's continued west-leaning course. Foreign Minister Sikorski emphasized Poland's role as a European leader on the Ukrainian issue: 'the EU will not take any decisions concerning Ukraine without Poland. Many European governments expect Poland to be a leader on this issue given Poland's historical and diplomatic experience and the role it plays in the Eastern Partnership policy' (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014a).

Poland advocated the immediate extension of a promise of EU membership to Ukraine (EUobserver, 2014f). Moreover, it was strongly opposed to Russian demands for the federalization of Ukraine: '[w]e cannot agree to a colonial discourse that it is foreign powers which impose a constitution on a large European state. Ukraine, if it wants to, will decentralize on its own' (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014c).

As in its role as a mediator in the Orange Revolution in 2004-05, Poland was a major actor in brokering the deal on February 21 ending the violent conflict between pro-Europe protesters and the Yanukovich government. From an early stage the Polish parliament called on the Ukrainian authorities to settle the conflict through public dialogue and gradual state reform according to European standards (KyivPost, 2013). Sikorski was caught on camera warning the opposition, 'If you don't support this [deal] you'll have martial law, the army, you will all be dead' (Telegraph, 2014a) as a testimony to Poland's direct involvement. Poland (along with Sweden and the United Kingdom) initiated the deployment of the CSDP mission to Ukraine to help it carry out reforms of its security apparatus (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014b). As Sikorski also stated: 'I think Ukraine is paying the price of 20 years of strategic illusions of being able to be neutral and of not paying enough attention to their security sector' (Washington Post, 2014a).

Poland turned out to be the strongest supporter of a Cold-War style reassurance of military protection. Poland (along with Lithuania) called for a NATO meeting under Article 4 in response to Russia's incursion into Crimea. Sikorski said that the time had not yet come to fear a military threat: 'It's just that we are concerned for ominous developments on the territory of an important partner of NATO. And that's why it has been important and correct to raise NATO's situational awareness. And, of course, the question remains whether Crimea is the limit or whether it's phase one, and then, of course, it could get much more serious' (CNN, 2014). As the build-up of Russian troops threatened to intervene in eastern Ukrainian

separatism, Poland asked NATO for the deployment on its territory of two heavy brigades corresponding to around 10,000 troops (Financial Times, 2014). Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said that the pace at which NATO was increasing its military presence was unsatisfactory (Reuters, 2014). The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2014a) declared the NATO decision to reinforce defense capabilities on the eastern border to be a 'good way of strengthening our position ahead of the negotiations'.

Sikorski advocated a hawkish line in terms of sanctioning Russia, describing it as a 'predator' and stating that 'we know that by eating predators only have even more appetite' (Spiegel, 2014b). On the other hand, it was less clear what such sanctions could entail: 'The EU's reaction demonstrates that we are united and that sanctions are possible and will be severe. Moreover, we are showing Moscow a way out of the crisis, and I think that Russia should expect severe economic sanctions if it decides to invade the rest of Ukraine' (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014a). He added that '[o]nly about 30 percent of the natural gas in the EU originates from Russia. Norway is a larger supplier. I do not believe Russia can use it to put us under pressure. Moscow needs our money' (Spiegel, 2014c). Sikorski was disappointed with the EU's actual willingness to sanction Russia's inner circles, declaring 'the US is from Mars and we're from Venus – get used to it' (EUobserver, 2014a).

Poland is very explicit about the lessons it has drawn from the twentieth century that compels it to stand in solidarity with its Ukrainian kin against Russia. Poland sees the events in Ukraine through the lens of its own destiny as a victim of great-power partitioning, leading either to the destruction of the Polish state or it being reduced to a satellite state under Moscow's tutelage. In the words of Foreign Minister Sikorski, '[w]e were partitioned by Russia in the eighteenth century – literally our country was occupied. And this was also done on the pretext of protecting national minorities. So it's an old story. It's like watching an opera whose libretto is known in advance.' Sikorski further added that, '[i]n Europe there isn't a country that doesn't have national minorities, and if we started changing borders on the pretext of protecting them we would be back to the hell of the 20th century' (Polskie Radio dla Zagranicy, 2014).

Although being careful in drawing direct parallels between Putin's Russia and Hitler's Germany, Polish decision-makers insinuated that there were such similarities. Tusk has said that '[h]istory shows – although I don't want to use too many historical comparisons – that those who appease all the time in order to preserve peace usually only buy a little bit of

time' (EUobserver, 2014e). In the same vein, Sikorski declared that '[n]o one has the unilateral right to move borders in response to presumed ethnic grievances. We've seen what happened when a European leader tried to do that before: the peoples of the Soviet Union paid one of the biggest prices for this' (Telegraph, 2014b).

Poland's willingness to risk a substantial deterioration of the relationship with Russia must be ascribed to historical animosities overruling its material dependence

Moreover, for historical reasons Poland looks at the West European powers with greater skepticism as to their ability and courage to stand up for NATO's principles. Sikorski described those who think that Ukraine can save itself by sacrificing Crimea as 'pocket Chamberlains', adding that Europe has never lacked such people (Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014a). Making a clear reference to 1939, when the United Kingdom and France declared war but did not live up to their commitment to start fighting Germany after it had invaded Poland, Tusk declared that '[w]e know from history that guarantees can be empty. The guarantees of serious countries about Ukraine's territorial integrity also turned out to be guarantees of doubtful quality. We want Poland to be defended by the military, not only by words written in a treaty' (Financial Times, 2014). Poland values its bilateral relationship with the United States over the paper guarantees the multilateral institution that is NATO.

Finally, Poland has historical ties with the post-Soviet region, especially Ukraine, whose western regions were part of Poland before 1939. Poland represents by far the biggest country among the former communist states and, given its own successful transition to democratic rule, sees itself as a mentor and a bridge-builder between the established democracies and the emerging democracies in the east. Sikorski earlier declared that '[…] some of these countries think of us as role models. We are more comparable to them than the United States. And they are more willing to take lessons from us than from their former colonial masters or from countries with strong ties to their former dictators. Poland is true to herself when we play the role of a beacon of international solidarity on democratization' (Foreign Affairs, 2013). Poland identifies with countries with similar geopolitical concerns as Poland did in the past (Lasas, 2010: 1062-63), first in breaking free from a Moscow-imposed hegemony, and secondly in assisting in developing a democratic system at the domestic level.

In sum, a strong and unequivocal historical narrative broadly shared by domestic constituents drives Poland to take a confrontational posture against Russia, which entails not only sanctions but also reinforced NATO guarantees and increased direct support of Kiev. The sharp contrast between the Polish and German foreign policy reactions highlights the imperfections of political economy in explaining divergent foreign policies. Russia is a bigger export partner for Poland than for Germany. Poland's dependence on Russian gas as a share of domestic consumption (54.2 percent) is higher than Germany's (39.9 percent) (Ratner et al., 2013: 10). Poland's willingness to risk a substantial deterioration of the relationship with Russia must be ascribed to historical animosities overruling its material dependence.

United States

On the rhetorical level Washington played a rather hawkish line against Russia and voiced strong support for the pro-European forces in Ukraine from an early stage. On the other hand, today's situation is different from the US position under George W. Bush, who in 2008 was ready to reward Ukraine with NATO membership for its fragile democratic progress after the Orange Revolution. At the time the United States also had a large number of military advisors stationed in Tbilisi, none of which can be said to be the case in Kiev today. The US 'reset' with Russia in 2009 heralded a new period of pragmatic management of relations: in Vice President Biden's words, 'the United States and Russia can disagree but still work together where our interests coincide' (Biden, 2009). The seriousness of the Ukraine disagreement, however, left the Obama administration challenged by suddenly having to readjust to a combative diplomatic line underpinned by sanctions and coordinated efforts with the EU.

The Ukrainian crisis has highlighted the enduring dilemmas of democracy promotion for a global power in retrenchment

As a non-EU member enjoying less structural power in terms of its influence over Ukrainian politics, Washington played an important bilateral role in supporting the Euromaidan protests and the interim government. Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland and the Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt distributed cakes in symbolic support of the protesters on the Maidan in Kiev in December. Covert US activism was also uncovered. CIA head John Brennan was reported to be present in Kiev in mid-April. A leaked telephone call between Nuland and Pyatt revealed that the United States was involved in speculations about suitable post-revolution candidates for assuming power in Kiev. The leak, moreover, showed US frustration with the EU in the latter using its long-term power of attraction rather than playing an activist role (BBC, 2014b). However, compared to the amount of hard bailout cash that the EU countries mustered in financial support of Kiev ($15 billion) after Russia's annexation of Crimea, the US contribution was only $1 billion (Voice of America, 2014).

The United States plays a naturally primordial role in reassuring its eastern allies about NATO's willingness to defend them. At the beginning of the conflict, Washington's Article 5 reassurances were predominantly rhetorical, exemplified by Vice President Biden's visits to Lithuania and Poland at the end of March and his declaration that '[w]e will respond to any aggression against a NATO ally' (White House, 2014a). As a short-term measure the United States decided to add six fighter aircraft to the NATO air-policing mission over the Baltic States, and it also dispatched twelve F-16 fighters for a training exercise in Poland (White House, 2014b). Washington subsequently dispatched a total of 600 troops, 150 of them to Poland for a bilateral infantry exercise and 450 to the Baltic States for similar exercises (US Department of Defense, 2014). In June Obama proposed $1 billion in additional defensive reassurances, including the pre-positioning of military equipment in Europe and infrastructural improvements.

Washington imposed more far-reaching sanctions against Russia than did the EU. Targeting President Putin's inner circles and selected Russian companies with travel bans and asset freezes, Washington made it clear that Russia would have to suffer 'costs' for its behavior. The United States has declared that sanctions will not yet involve any attempt to target key industries of the Russian economy such as mining, energy, or the financial sectors, but that these measures could still be considered if Russia were to send troops into eastern Ukraine (France24, 2014). The US Treasury has powerful tools with which to impact Russia's ability to access the global banking and trade systems, imposing both investment and reputational costs (Zarate, 2014). At the rhetorical level, Secretary of State Kerry condemned Russia's invasion of Crimea, calling it an 'incredible act of aggression' (Reuters,

2014b). President Obama pejoratively classified Russia as a 'regional power' that was threatening its immediate neighbors not out of strength but out of weakness (White House, 2014c).

The US commitment to supporting the free choice of political and economic union goes back to the vision of a 'Europe whole and free' into which subsequent presidents wanted to infuse a strong US leadership. The fall of the Berlin Wall was seen as a triumph of US determination to defend freedom and democracy in Europe through NATO and to make up for the earlier abandonment of eastern Europe (Munich, Yalta). The successful democratic transitions in central and eastern Europe in the 1990s and 2000s were seen through the lens of US and allied determination to expand the EU and NATO. The war in Georgia in 2008 defied the US narrative and was interpreted as 'the resurgence of history' by virtue of Russia's attempt to maintain a sphere of influence in eastern Europe. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 was interpreted similarly as an attack against the free will of nations.

In a speech to European youth in Brussels, President Obama described history as an 'ongoing clash between two sets of ideas [democracy versus autocracy] both within nations and among nations' (White House, 2014d). He added, 'that's what's at stake in Ukraine today. Russia's leadership is challenging truths that only a few weeks ago seemed self-evident – that in the 21st century, the borders of Europe cannot be redrawn with force, that international law matters, that people and nations can make their own decisions about their future'. Obama further

The question is not US economic dependency on Russia, which remains insignificant, but whether Washington in the long run will be able to resist the temptation to fall back on its reset policy to address security issues outside Europe

warned, '[t]o be honest, if we defined our interests narrowly, if we applied a cold-hearted calculus, we might decide to look the other way... Our own borders are not threatened by Russia's annexation. But that kind of casual indifference would ignore the lessons that are written in the cemeteries of this continent... And that message would be heard not just in Europe, but in Asia and the Americas, in Africa and the Middle East' (White House, 2014d).

In sum, the Ukrainian crisis has highlighted the enduring dilemmas of democracy promotion for a global power in retrenchment. The Obama administration, already blamed by the opposition for naively believing it could reset relations with Moscow to focus on the Asia-Pacific, has been under pressure to pursue a harder line in terms of sanctions and the reinforcement of NATO guarantees. The United States cannot afford to let Russia undermine the European security system. Burden-sharing with the EU in respect of its powerful economic resources has proved to be crucial in keeping Kiev afloat for the time being. The question is not US economic dependency on Russia, which remains insignificant, but whether Washington in the long run will be able to resist the temptation to fall back on its reset policy to address security issues outside Europe, notably Syria (chemical disarmament) and Iran (curbing nuclear ambitions), areas where Washington is strongly dependent on Moscow's cooperation (Fikenscher, 2014).

France

Paris sided with Washington and initially against Berlin on the need for harsher sanctions against Russia. Compared to its role as mediator in the Georgian crisis, when Sarkozy, in his function as EU president, bent over backwards to forge a European consensus, this time France was better able to allow itself an independent foreign policy stance. Foreign Minister Fabius called Russia's annexation the worst since the end of the Cold War, adding that 'we want firmness to prevail and for Putin not to go any further, but at the same time we want to de-escalate the situation via dialogue' (Reuters, 2014c). Fabius supported the suspension of Russia's G-8 participation and cancelled a scheduled visit to Russia by its foreign and defense ministers, but decided not to cancel Putin's visit to France in June to celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Normandy landings (Reuters, 2014c). France threatened wider economic sanctions as pro-Russian separatists stormed government buildings in eastern Ukraine.

French Prime Minister Ayrault called for everything to be done to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity. He further said that 'Ukrainians want democracy, and we can understand that […] They are turning to Europe, to European democracies. It is Ukrainians who must build their future' (RFI, 2014). On the other hand, France has been wary of reaching out to Ukraine. As early as in February 2014, French officials communicated that Western countries should await the Ukrainian elections in May before pledging large-scale assistance, arguing that this would undermine the push for reform and alienate Moscow (Wall Street Journal, 2014a). France not only opposed any mention

of Ukrainian EU membership, but also wanted to affirm that Ukraine would never become a member (EUobserver, 2014f). The French position is not new, however, but fits its vision of a Europe of concentric circles consisting of core countries (including itself) and associated members such as Turkey or Ukraine on the periphery.

Paris's reactions were cooler and reflected more general concerns about a European balance of power and world order

France has been a strong supporter of backing NATO's Article 5 with concrete action (despite common views to the contrary) and taking the possibility of challenges to NATO's credibility as a collective defense alliance seriously (Ministère de la Défense, 2013: 52). It was, for instance, the biggest contributor to the Steadfast Jazz exercise (with 1,200 troops), which NATO held in Poland in November 2013. France deployed four fighter jets to Poland along with seventy support personnel to reassure its eastern allies as a response to the annexation of Crimea (Newvision, 2014). On the other hand, France has made it clear that military action in Ukraine itself would not be an option (Wall Street Journal, 2014c).

France does not have the same emotional connection to the Ukrainian crisis and the eastern neighborhood as Germany and Poland, nor, for that matter, as the United States. Paris's reactions were cooler and reflected more general concerns about a European balance of power and world order. Referring to Ukraine's 1994 renunciation of nuclear weapons, Fabius stated that the Russian annexation of Crimea made nuclear non-proliferation less relevant and that the broken taboos tell us something about tectonic shifts happening, the full scope of which are as yet unknown (Brookings, 2014). France's economic dependence on Russia is limited due in no small part to its reliance on nuclear energy. On the other hand, France faced one sectional dilemma, namely its significant arms trade with Russia (the highest among European countries), and notably the sale of Mistral amphibious assault vessels produced in France.

The timing of the arms trade is problematic (the first vessel is scheduled to arrive in October), but France has 1,000 jobs directly at stake at a time when unemployment is already high and the French arms industry needs customers. President Hollande was elected with the promise of creating more jobs. Moreover, a breach of the $1.7 billion contract would entail heavy penalty payments (Economist, 2014). France has not been willing to halt the trade despite allied pressure; in the words of Foreign Minister Fabius, 'the rule with contracts is that contracts which have been signed are honored' (Economist, 2014). Fabius said that the deal could be cancelled as part of a third wave of sanctions but, in this case, that this would be part of a general effort, notably the United Kingdom taking equivalent measures against the financial assets of Russian oligarchs in London (TF1, 2014). Fabius' remark came as a response to the UK proposal to punish Russia through restrictions on military cooperation and the arms trade.

United Kingdom

London reacted with traditional hawkishness against Russia in line with previous conflicts with Russia such as the Litvinenko case, the closure of the British Council in Russia, or allegations of Russian spying activity. Hague described the situation as the biggest crisis in the 21st century and warned that Russia would face significant costs for its behavior in international affairs (Mirror, 2014). Russia's annexation of Crimea caused a new wave of hawkish UK responses. Foreign Secretary William Hague uttered a wish for fundamental change, suggesting that the relationship with Russia would be 'one in which institutions such as the G8 work without Russia; military co-operation and defense exports are permanently curtailed; decisions are accelerated to reduce European dependence on Russian energy exports; foreign policy plays a bigger role in energy policy; Russia has less influence in Europe; and European nations do more to guard against a repetition of the flagrant violation of international norms' (Guardian, 2014a).

London has been careful not to risk sanctions that would damage its own sectional interests, namely its status as a major haven for Russian capital and Russian expats

Acknowledging the fruitful relationship with Russia developed over the years, Hague said that its actions in Ukraine 'hark back to a wholly different era'. He continued that '[a]ll nations, including Russia, depend on a rules-based international system. For those rules to remain credible there must be costs attached to breaking international agreements. If we do not defend these principles in Ukraine, they will be threatened elsewhere in Europe and the world' (Telegraph, 2014d). Hague argued that European nations should not 'run scared' before Russia's 'bullying behavior' (Telegraph, 2014d). Similarly, Prime Minister Cameron is reported to have told his EU partners that sanctions are not painless: 'if you throw a punch, your wrist gets hurt' (Guardian, 2014a). The United Kingdom decided to suspend all military cooperation with and defense exports to Russia, and urged its European allies to follow suit.

Foreign Secretary Hague travelled to Kiev as the first high-ranking western official in Ukraine after Russia's military incursion into Crimea. The United Kingdom has called for a firm NATO reinforcement: in the words of Defense Secretary Hammond, '[c]ertainly one of the things we are looking at is a greater participation in exercises in the Baltic States, the eastern European NATO member countries, as a way of reassuring them about our commitment to article five […]' (Guardian, 2014c). The Crimean crisis represents an awakening for the United Kingdom, judging from the fact that the National Security Strategy of 2010 places a conventional attack against NATO in the lowest priority category in terms of both its likelihood and its impact (U.K. Ministry of Defence, 2010: 27).

Although London has been a hardliner against Moscow, it is in a more favorable position than the other European great powers because it does not rely on Russian gas and does not have a significant pending arms trade deal on which many jobs depend. By comparison to the French deal, last year the United Kingdom granted licenses for arms exports to Russia of approximately £80 million (Guardian, 2014b). However, it should be noted that London has been careful not to risk sanctions that would damage its own sectional interests, namely its status as a major haven for Russian capital and Russian expats, whose children attend British schools and universities (Schwarzer and Stelzenmüller, 2014: 8).

RECALIBRATING EURO-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

Great-power reactions to Russia's land grab in eastern Europe reveal a pattern in which they all agree that there can be no business as usual regarding European security but also that the collective response reflects the lowest common denominator on the three major issues.

They disagree basically on the harshness of sanctions against Russia and whether they should serve as punitive measures (Poland) or as a platform for a new East-West dialogue (Germany).

They disagree on the timing in providing financial support to Ukraine and the wisdom in the longer term of Ukraine becoming either an associated or a full EU member.

They agree on the need to reinforce NATO guarantees, but disagree on the nature and extent of a military build-up in eastern Europe and over whether to provide military assistance to Ukraine.

The different great-power approaches must be assessed against their effectiveness in restoring stable security relations with Russia and the strategic objective of ensuring a European continent in which countries are free to choose their political and economic associations.

Countering Russia

The European powers, with the possible exception of Poland, have not been willing to gamble their economic dependence on Russia (whether shipyards, financial interests, or energy imports) to engage in a strategy of open confrontation. They have said, however, that this would be the case if Russia were to annex more territories in the eastern Ukraine. The United States, from its position of economic independence, could impose tougher sanctions, but still with the limited purpose of driving wedges between Russia's political leadership and its big businesses and the population at large (Trenin, 2014). It was only after the downing of the MH17 Malaysia airplane over Ukraine that the EU proceeded to new measures hitting Russia's banks, oil industry and military and withholding technology. The United States followed up by announcing similar sanctions against Russian banks as well as the energy, arms and shipping sectors (Wall Street Journal, 2014f).

Some disagreement among allies was observed, such as the United States and Poland over the French arms trade or Poland over Germany's energy dependence. The Western response never came to an open confrontation with Russia similar to the example of Iran, in which consistent pressure was exerted for the country to give up its nuclear program (Alcaro, 2014). Instead, incrementalism prevailed for reasons related to national interests or historical bonds with the post-Soviet region as shown above, which in most cases translated into a more downbeat assessment of what sanctions could achieve. Sanctions were, after all, limited mostly to travel bans and asset freezes. Practical military and civilian cooperation in the NATO–Russia Council was frozen, although the possibility of dialogue was kept open, and cooperation over, for instance, Afghanistan remained intact.

Most western states preferred rather symbolic sanctions paralleled by a simultaneous diplomatic dialogue with Moscow. The G-8 format was suspended, but one can question in this connection whether the disruption of such an important great-power

forum was helpful in reality in pressuring Russia on the Crimean and Ukrainian issues. As Wolfgang Ischinger, German top diplomat and Chairman of the Munich Security Conference, argued, subsequent bilateral meetings between the G-7 and Russia were likely to create conflicting messages about the situation in Ukraine, and that it would therefore have been better to keep the G-8 in place, with Crimea as the single item on the agenda (Voice of Russia, 2014).

In terms of efficiency, on the other hand, the incremental approach to imposing sanctions on Russia has proved its merits for the indirect damage it has caused and continues to cause to the Russian economy. The sanctions imposed in terms of exclusion from international forums as such constituted a small countermove to Moscow's self-perceived interests in Ukraine, with which it enjoys deep historical and cultural ties. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov scoffed at EU and US blacklists of Russian officials, saying, 'We find little joy in that, but there are no painful sensations. We have lived through tougher times' (EUobserver, 2014b). The reality is, however, that western sanctions scare investors and that market reactions therefore have been grim for Russia.

The International Monetary Fund predicts that the combined impact of western sanctions and lost market confidence will ruin all growth in Russia this year and seriously affect the next (Wall Street Journal, 2014d). In the first place, Russian companies relying heavily on western banks are affected by the decline of the ruble because it pushes up their debt servicing and refinancing costs for foreign currency-denominated debt (Schwarzer and Stelzenmüller, 2014: 11). The main problem, however, is not primarily the loss of prestige connected to the plunge in the value of the ruble or the Russian stock market, but more the fact that raising money on the international markets has become more costly and that investors are now moving assets out of or refraining from entering Russian markets (Trenin, 2014). The very threat of a 'third wave' of economic sanctions has been a powerful impetus for investors to keep out of Russia. The asymmetrical nature of the international financial system allows the imposition of significant long-term costs to Russia, with little costs to Europe itself.

The asymmetrical nature of the international financial system allows the imposition of significant long-term costs to Russia, with little costs to Europe itself

Russia's pivot to China shows in practice how sanctions can stimulate new geo-economic alliances. In May Gazprom and the China National Petroleum Corporation signed a thirty-year, $400 billion deal for Russian gas sales to China starting in 2018. Although Russia may have lost tactically on the price issue, it is likely to be compensated by a strategic gain in the diversification of Gazprom's customer base and the strengthening of Sino-Russian economic relations. Within any foreseeable future, however, Europe will remain Russia's main energy market for at least two reasons. First, the so-called shale-gas revolution is better described as an evolution that will not reduce but only stabilize Europe's import dependency.

Secondly, it remains questionable how the United States as a net gas importer today would be able to drive Russia out of the market by increasing its energy exports to Europe (David and Leggett, 2014).

Thus, the threat of future sanctions will happen within the climate of a mutual interdependence of energy imports and export revenues. On the other hand, dealing with Russia cannot be ascribed solely to energy but reflects a broader issue of European (dis-) unity (Tsafos, 2014). The great-power reaction pattern shows a preference for de-escalation and a lack of agreement on punitive sanctions, though with agreement on the threat of a concerted third wave of sanctions in vital sectors if Russia proceeds to further incursions. The long-term goal of sanctions must recognize that the recovery of Crimea is unattainable but that Russia's standing among international investors, and thus its ability to generate growth other than the extraction and export of energy sources, is strongly vulnerable to western pressures. Moscow is not in a favorable position in a war of competing sanctions. Critics of the inability of western governments to agree on effective sanctions do not seem to fully appreciate the punitive power inherent in discrediting Russia as a reliable partner in the international investment environment and the impact this has on the Kremlin's long-term cost-benefit calculi.

Assisting Ukraine

The European countries (backed by the United States), rather than punishing Russia to give in, are better positioned to assist Ukraine in its declared ambition of seeking closer ties with the EU. Newly elected President Poroshenko in June signed the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU under the Association Agreement (AA) and, moreover, has called for parliamentary elections in Ukraine before the end of 2014 to ensure national unity on the new reform progress. Any effort intended to assist Ukraine must start with the basic premise that caused the crisis in the first place, namely the powerful external structures that forced Ukraine to choose which economic bloc to align with, Europe or Eurasia.

Fragility and domestic mismanagement have been Ukraine's main problems since its post-Soviet independence. Despite possessing a skilled and educated workforce and important natural resources, Ukraine's economy continues to struggle to sustain economic growth. Corruption and institutional inefficiency remain major problems hampering the development of a responsive state. Neither the Orange coalition in 2005 nor the rise of Yanukovich in 2010 resulted in the necessary economic and institutional reforms that could ensure Ukraine's coherence as an independent country or give it a better investment climate (World Economic Forum, 2014: 5). Ukraine's number one problem remains its inability to sustain itself, leaving it in an uncomfortable situation dependent on external support, with severe domestic repercussions along ethno-linguistic lines.

The AA is undoubtedly the most effective carrot beyond the EU's mere provision of a financial bailout, offering at least two important advantages conducive to wider domestic reform that Ukraine needs. First, the gradual adoption of EU laws and regulations (the acquis communautaire) holds out the long-term prospect of more transparent and effective national institutions. The agreement can potentially help Ukraine in reducing its widespread corruption, which has made it difficult or impossible for successive governments to implement well-intended reforms. Secondly, the expectation is that the DCFTA will attract global investments to a country in which the investment to GDP ratio remains very low. The accreditation of EU quality standards to Ukrainian goods constitutes a sign of trust for global markets, which is conducive to exports on global markets and the inflow of crucial foreign investments. Regulatory reform, elimination of import tariffs, opening up service sectors and improvement in business climate create better investment conditions (Manoli, 2013: 63).

Implementation of the DCFTA is sensitive in the short run because it will be harmful to sectors in Ukraine that are currently protected from free market competition. Moreover, it entails painful demands for legislative compliance and institutional reform. Ukrainian agricultural products will benefit most from the cuts in duties, the expectation being that this will stimulate modernization. The DCFTA offers the opening of markets via a progressive removal of custom tariffs and quotas and extensive harmonization of laws and regulations with the acquis in both the service and non-service sectors (DG Trade, 2013). The long-term expectation is that capital accumulation and the facilitation of cross-border production will improve conditions for deeper integration both among the

Eastern Partnership economies and with the EU market itself, which has remained at low levels. The DCFTA attributes an important role to business communities and non-state actors to strengthen or create new market ties from the bottom up (Manoli, 2013: 63). Altogether, the DCFTA constitutes an attractive model for aligning key economic sectors in Ukraine with EU standards.

Much of the discussion on the AA/DCFTA between the EU and its eastern partners concerns its geopolitical implications rather than estimates purely of welfare

It is important to realize, as Minoli has argued (2013: 63), that much of the discussion on the AA/DCFTA between the EU and its eastern partners concerns its geopolitical implications rather than estimates purely of welfare. Europeanization has a high degree of political significance, if only symbolically, beyond the mere integration of economies because most trade is already liberalized and tariffs have already been greatly reduced as a consequence of Ukraine's WTO membership. In reality the AA/DCFTA signifies the most advanced phase of political association, that before pre-accession, which, although it may not lead automatically to accession, constitutes a step in this direction. The Enlargement Commissioner, Stefan Füle, has openly said that the prospect of EU membership should be held out (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, 2014). Moreover, the language of the final declaration of the Vilnius Summit (November 2013) is sufficiently vague to allow the Eastern Partnership countries to find support for their wish to move beyond neighborhood status (Blockmans and Kostanyan, 2013). On the other hand, the completion of the DCFTA encounters at least two major obstacles: the poor record of domestic progress in the candidate countries, and the geopolitical costs of an alienated Russia.

First, Ukraine has suffered from the absence of real political and economic reform since independence, with wealth concentrated in the hands of government officials and their oligarchic allies (Charap and Darden, 2013). Its democratic standards deteriorated under Yanukovich, although this tendency may now reverse. If the memory of Romania and Bulgaria's EU accession stands out as cases of insufficient reform, the EU is navigating in an even more delicate climate when it comes to the transition to democratic rule in Ukraine. The fundamental question is whether Poroshenko can obtain Parliament's consent in delivering broad structural change: punishing corrupt elites, decentralizing power to the regions, and giving small businesses especially an environment in which they can flourish for the benefit of the national economy. Ukraine must avoid the repetition of the rivalries that hampered the earlier Orange coalition (Freizer, 2014).

According to political scientist Pippa Norris, Ukrainians' approval ratings of 'strong man' leadership amount to around seventy percent, with very little difference between Ukrainian and Russian speakers on this issue. In eastern Europe, the spectrum of division runs from approval ratings for Poles of 22 percent and for Russians of 75 percent (Washington Post, 2014b). The EU should acknowledge the economic and cultural attraction that Russia enjoys in Ukraine's southern and eastern regions, as highlighted at the beginning of this report. Surveys in eastern Ukraine have shown that a majority there does not want to be absorbed by Russia as Crimea was, but also that it does not want to antagonize the big eastern neighbor but rather maintain close cultural and economic ties with it (Merry, 2014). Surveys also show increased polarization in the Ukrainian population on the AA issue after the Maidan protests (International Republican Institute, 2014).

Secondly, the EU needs to take fully into account the fact that Russia does not perceive it as an a priori benign actor. The AA/DCFTA runs counter to its alternative Eurasian Customs Union integration project. The EU and Russia are competing for influence in the sense that Ukraine cannot meaningfully participate in both the DCFTA and the Russia-led Customs Union, which constitutes the essence of the Ukrainian conflict. Russia's economic presence in the Eastern Partnership republics has declined steadily in recent years, and the conclusion of AAs/DCFTAs would further isolate Russia from countries where it has significant capital interests (banking and energy sectors) and to which it exports competitive goods. The EU is therefore faced with significant geopolitical costs in terms of instability as a consequence of Russian political and economic pressures in the common neighborhood (Charap and Troitskiy, 2013: 53; Minoli, 2013: 66-68).

Ukraine's economic choice developed into an international crisis in great part because Russia interpreted the question using a strategic zero-sum logic. However, any nuanced assessment must recognize as well that the EU contributed to the intensification of the conflict. On the domestic level, EU officials quickly embraced the new Ukrainian interim government, which had ties to extremist and fascist factions. On the international level, the EU initially refusing trilateral talks with Ukraine and Russia on the practical implications of the implementation of AA/DCFTA and by balancing the David and Goliath economic relationship between Kiev and Moscow, in turn producing uncertainty about the outcome of the entire process. Moreover, the AA states that economic integration and political association are complementary processes. Gone are the days when the general perception of the EU was that of an 'innocent' international actor engaged in low politics such as good governance (in contrast to hard security through NATO expansion). The EU, and in particular the Commission, needs to acknowledge that its bureaucratic procedures in dealing with Russia have strategic repercussions and that Moscow does not buy into the free trade jargon.

At the end of the day, the recalibration of the EU's relations with Ukraine and the other Eastern Partnership countries, especially Georgia and Moldova, boils down to the political willingness of EU members to incur these risks. That is why it is necessary to turn to the predominant great-power interests in or historical grievances about Ukraine's position in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture. The overwhelming question is, of course, the EU membership perspective. As described above, behind the scenes French officials were reluctant to extend assistance to the interim government before the scheduled May elections because the EU would be bound to end up as a party in the conflict with Russia. France has consistently been opposed to the prospect of Ukrainian EU membership, indeed has wanted to exclude it altogether, putting it at odds with Poland especially on the issue. Germany occupies a middle position between the two extremes, stating that the AA/DCFTA is not the final goal in EU–Ukraine relations (EUobserver, 2014f).

German leadership will be key to common European political adjustments to future challenges and instability in the eastern neighborhood. The United States, by contrast, must accept its role as a bilateral supporter of pro-European integration. Ukraine has testified how support of a magnitude that was hardly imaginable before the crisis can suddenly be mobilized. In any case, the time is not ripe for discussions about the possibilities for Ukraine's eventual EU membership because it can only nourish unrealistically high expectations among the new political leadership in the country. Proponents of EU membership are seldom proponents of the likely parallel scenario, namely a further partitioning of Ukraine between Russian and Ukrainian speakers. Moreover, such a step will almost certainly lead to Russian perceptions that it has been cheated (again) by the West and, thus, to new escalatory steps. The AA/DCFTA has the obvious advantage of exporting parts of the acquis without explicitly giving membership commitments.

Reinforcing NATO

Russia's annexation of Crimea begs the final question about NATO's future posture towards Russia. NATO this year is ending its most demanding operation ever, Afghanistan, leaving the Alliance overwhelmed with grand social engineering projects and 'out-of-area' stabilization missions. The unfolding of realpolitik in the eastern neighborhood certainly gives NATO back some its original raison d'être (defense and deterrence), but the question now is by what means Article 5 should be reaffirmed, as well as the nature of the new relationship with Kiev.

NATO has the option of openly confronting Russia through a strategy unfolding on multiple levels. In this case, NATO would recalibrate itself as an anti-Russian alliance. It would suspend cooperation with Russia and boost its contingency plans for a Russian attack in the Baltic area and Poland with a solid military footprint in the region. It would transfer armaments to countries under the threat of Russian-sponsored separatism or invasion, increase its political-military cooperation with these countries, and perhaps unfreeze Georgia's membership perspective (Alcaro, 2014). However, assistance altering the military balance of power in Russia's disfavor may risk escalating the crisis and absorb NATO countries into commitments they are not willing to honor in the case of an actual confrontation. The Russo-Georgian war of 2008 should serve as an example of precipitate action that proved counterproductive and, in many ways, appeared to be a bluff. A radical recalibration of the NATO alliance would fail to recognize that Russia acts from a position of weakness rather than of strength and, moreover, that the political realities among NATO members only allow military fine-tuning.

NATO's unity must be strengthened and its major members, especially the United States, demonstrate their commitment to collective defense along NATO's eastern borders more than through rhetorical reassertion. As short-term measures NATO has deployed fighter and early-warning aircrafts to Romania, the Baltic States, and Poland and boosted its naval presence in the Baltic Sea. NATO must be prepared for a scenario in which Russia combines political and economic pressure against a member state with cyber attacks, support of proxy militias, infiltration, and propaganda aimed at Russian minorities. The deployment of 600 US troops to the Baltic States and Poland is an important demonstration of a commitment to collective defense, but it would arguably have been a clearer signal if it had been a multilateral NATO deployment. NATO could claim that Russia's invasion and annexation of Crimea in violation of its international obligations and the 1994 Budapest Memorandum guaranteeing Ukraine's territorial integrity is a justification now giving it the right to station troops (permanently) in eastern Europe.

> **'Wall-building' and 'bridge-building' should be seen as complementary security strategies similar to earlier periods in NATO's history**

Such measures should have in-built flexibility, allowing for the possibility of de-escalation, and thus giving Russia an incentive to change its policies towards Ukraine and the post-Soviet countries more generally. Thus, 'wall-building' and 'bridge-building' should be seen as complementary security strategies similar to earlier periods in NATO's history when the alliance employed the dual tracks of military build-up and political dialogue with Moscow. However, NATO has not been able to agree on such measures because France and Germany do not want to breach the 1997

NATO–Russia accords that pledged no additional permanent stationing of 'substantial combat forces' in the region. Poland and the Baltic States, conversely, have insisted that Russia's expansionism will stop only if it is shown unmistakable red lines. Should the Ukrainian crisis escalate at a later stage, however, such unity will move much closer across all NATO members and demonstrate the need for a radical reshuffling of the European security architecture.

NATO now can, and should, offer its core expertise – security sector assistance – to the government in Ukraine, which needs its armed forces to be professionalized. The ongoing struggle against separatist militias in the eastern regions and the initial military setbacks that Kiev has experienced against the rebels underlines this point. However, Kiev should be praised for having been cautious in not resorting to a large-scale counter-attack against separatists in the east, especially in the early stages of the crisis, with the looming threat of further Russian military incursions similar to the situation in Georgia in 2008, when Tbilisi was tempted into a disastrous military move. NATO, partnering with the EU's significant civilian assets, should engage in mentoring the Ukrainian security forces in counterinsurgency or riot control. It can enable Kiev to regain and maintain control over its eastern provinces but should avoid causing Moscow to doubt whether it is arming or emboldening Kiev militarily. On June 25 NATO foreign ministers endorsed a package of defense capacity-building in Ukraine, including areas such as logistics, command and control, and cyber defense (NATO, 2014), and agreed on plans to develop an Alliance Readiness Action Plan for the NATO Summit in Wales in September to be approved by NATO leaders.

Most diplomacy will not happen through NATO, despite the existence of the NATO–Russia Council, which is supposed to serve both as a forum for political dialogue and as a crisis management tool. Great-power arrangements similar to the Geneva talks are likely to drive compromises forward (mediated by the OSCE or small state diplomacy). Russia nourishes big distrust of NATO, which calls for the Alliance to adopt a higher degree of strategic empathy, acknowledging Russia's concerns about an expanding defense alliance on its borders. It will be especially difficult to convince Poland about the wisdom of a dormant NATO enlargement process. NATO now should focus on strategic credibility, enhancing the collective negotiating power of its members in insisting that Ukraine is free is to choose its political and economic associations, but avoiding a direct confrontation with Moscow over winning or losing Ukraine.

In sum, a recalibration of relations with Russia is possible along three main dimensions: let market reactions punish Russia, given its economic vulnerability to international investors; let the EU be at the forefront, using the AA already in place to assist Ukraine in committing to painful but needed reforms; and let NATO station brigade-size units on its eastern borders to incentivize de-escalation. Domestic and international reconciliation on the current Ukrainian issue must be recognized as a critical historical juncture for the settlement of Euro-Atlantic principles and a development towards convergent security narratives. The annexation of Crimea has pushed the possibility of East-West negotiations or concessions in the strategic-military realm far off the horizon. This calls instead for the exploration of compromise or dialogue in the economic realm (inter-regional trade and investment) mitigating the scenario of a highly volatile Ukraine on the verge between two antagonistic blocs. The ideal outcome must be that from now on Ukraine serves as an entity that links rather than divides Europe and Russia, building trust to promote productive negotiations on this and other security issues pertinent to the development of a cooperative and inclusive Euro-Atlantic space.

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