



Ukrainian foreign policy from independence to inertia

Paul D'Anieri

University of Florida, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, USA

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ABSTRACT

In the early years of independence, Ukraine's crucial accomplishment was the establishment a degree of sovereignty and independence that few thought possible. Since that time, Ukrainian foreign policy has largely stagnated. Despite attempts of various internal leaders to adopt decisive policies, and despite significant external pressure, Ukraine has done very little. This paper reviews the first 20 years of Ukrainian foreign policy and accounts for the inertia that has developed. Ukraine's foreign policy passivity results from three uneasy balances: an external balance between the pulls of Russia and the West; an internal balance between Ukraine's regions, and an internal balance between forces of democracy and authoritarianism. These balances mean that while few are happy with Ukraine's policy, no one has been able to decisively change it. While Ukraine's domestic regional division is unlikely to change, change in the balance between domestic political forces or that between international forces could reduce the inertia in Ukrainian foreign politics, most likely leading to a drift toward Russia.

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1. Introduction

Twenty years after Ukraine declared independence, the country has been hugely transformed, as has the world around it. Yet after a period of rapid evolution in the early 1990s, Ukraine's foreign policy has largely stagnated. In many important respects, the policy questions that face Ukraine and the explanatory questions that face students of Ukraine's foreign policy are the same that have recurred repeatedly since roughly 1994. Every time it seems that Ukraine might make a decisive move, and might put one of these questions behind it, the opposite somehow occurs. To cite just one example, a major issue putting Ukraine in the news in mid-2012 is whether Ukraine would join a customs union with Russia and other post-Soviet states. This exact question has been addressed repeatedly since 1991, and indeed the economic relationship between Ukraine and Russia was an issue even prior to Ukraine's independence. This paper explores the sources of this continuity, while also discussing important changes that have occurred.

To summarize the argument, continuity and repetitiveness in Ukraine's foreign policy have been driven by continuity and repetitiveness in Ukraine's domestic politics as well as in the international situation the country has to confront. Domestically, the country continues to lurch from a path of greater democratization to one of greater authoritarianism, with neither trend thus far having been decisive. Moreover, having chosen gradual economic reform (or non-reform), the country still confronts fundamental economic issues. Regional and national identity cleavages continue to be salient, and neither the east nor west has been fully able to establish its preferred view. Internationally, Ukraine's foreign policy remains heavily constrained by the dynamics of the triangle with Russia, Ukraine and the US at the vertices (Bukk voll, 2000; D'Anieri, 2001). US–Russian rivalry in the region, after easing briefly in the early 1990s, has become firmly reestablished, ensuring that Ukraine faces an impossible choice of sides (both in political and identity terms) and providing some opportunity to play one against the other.

The weakness of Ukraine's state might, paradoxically, make Ukraine more resistant to external influence, because the government has a limited ability to fulfill commitments, even when those commitments are coerced. Because it is difficult to move decisively in one direction or another, Ukraine remains where it is.

It is always hazardous to portray the current state of affairs as overdetermined and to view change as impossible. In 2012, it appears once again that the country has passed a tipping point on the path to authoritarianism. Yet the striking thing about Ukraine in recent years is that even a "revolution," such as that which occurred in late 2004, turned out to have much less impact than anticipated. When expected change does not occur, one is prompted to look for structural sources of continuity (D'Anieri, 2011), and that is the tack taken in this paper.

The paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 surveys the substance of Ukraine's foreign policy since 1991, introducing a periodization for the sake of discussion. Sections 3 through 5 examines three broad categories of constraint on Ukrainian foreign policy. Section 3 looks at the international tug between East and West, Section 4 looks at the domestic regional division, and Section 5 looks at the weakness of the Ukrainian state. Section 6 brings domestic and international politics together. Section 7 speculates about the potential for fundamental change.

2. Historical overview

2.1. Independence and aftermath

The dramatic collapse of the Soviet Union in the latter half of 1991, and the simultaneous establishment of a Ukrainian state, presented a complete breakdown of the existing system, and contrary to the overarching thesis of this paper, a great deal was up in the air. It is easy to look back and see the result that emerged — a fully independent Ukraine — as inevitable, but it was not. Initially, many anticipated that Ukraine would not reach fully sovereign status, and would instead remain part of some post-Soviet confederation, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States, or would remain in a clearly subordinate position, even if technically sovereign. Many in Ukraine did not seek full separation from Russia, many in Russia opposed it, and many around the world felt that, especially in economic affairs, a complete separation would be disastrous. The Russian government, initially preoccupied with its own affairs, soon sought to bring Ukraine back under its control, and exercised various forms of coercion to limit Ukraine's sovereignty and freedom of action. In sum, it was not widely accepted in the early 1990s that Ukraine would become a "normal" sovereign state like any other. Bit by bit, however, first under Leonid Kravchuk and then under Leonid Kuchma, Ukraine defied expectations by insisting on total separation and achieving it. By 1997, when the two countries signed the "big treaty" resolving the status of the Black Sea Fleet, Russia and the rest of the world had come to accept that Ukraine was indeed an independent state and that it would retain that status. The contentious relations over Ukraine's status that have persisted since that time have been based on that understanding, rather than fundamentally questioning it. As inept as Ukraine's government has been in many respects, the consolidation of its sovereignty was a major accomplishment that few outside the country anticipated.

When Ukraine declared independence in August 1991, there was no consensus on what was meant by "independence" (a 1990 Ukrainian "Declaration of Sovereignty" clearly presumed remaining within the Soviet Union). The Soviet Ukrainian governmental apparatus successfully recast itself as the government of independent Ukraine, and seized the initiative on establishing and defending Ukrainian sovereignty. Speaker of the Supreme Soviet Leonid Kravchuk worked assiduously throughout the fall of 1991 both to establish the state's complete independence from Russia and to ensure that he won the presidential election held in December 1991. Bold policy decisions in Kyiv (most notably the claim of control over all military assets in Ukraine), coupled with disarray in Moscow, allowed Ukraine to create facts on the ground about which neither the Russian nor Soviet leaderships (both persisted in late 1991) were powerless. Boris Yeltsin found that in order to finalize the defeat of Soviet power, he had to consent to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Once this was done, Ukraine could not be reeled back in, but for six more years, Russia continued to question Ukraine's sovereignty.

From the declaration of independence through late 1994, Ukraine was the isolated member of the Russia-US-Ukraine triangle (D'Anieri, 2001). Russia-US relations were generally positive in this period, and the US viewed Ukraine primarily through the lens of nuclear weapons. The US and Russia agreed that Ukraine was obligated to surrender its nuclear weapons. Ukrainian leaders, faced with Russia's unwillingness to embrace Ukraine's sovereignty and its veiled threats toward Ukraine, demurred, seeking to use the weapons to gain some measure of security, preferably a US security guarantee (for a detailed discussion of the nuclear weapons issue, see Pifer, 2011). At the September 1993 Massandra summit, Russia cut off gas supplies to Ukraine in order to force Ukraine to surrender its nuclear weapons and control of the Sevastopol naval base. This was the first of many instances of overt coercion using Ukraine's dependence on Russian energy. Kravchuk initially capitulated, and then backtracked in the face of widespread domestic opposition. Eventually a deal was negotiated in January 1994 in which, in exchange for Ukraine's denuclearization, both Russia and the US appeared to recognize Ukraine's sovereignty. The nuclear deal opened the door for Ukraine to join NATO's Partnership for Peace the following month, much to Russia's concern. This was a significant victory for Ukraine, but the nuclear disagreement had delayed serious discussions with the US for nearly three crucial years when US-Russian relations were deteriorating and when Ukraine desperately needed economic help. At the same time that Ukraine's nuclear weapons hampered normalization of relations with both Russia and the US, Ukraine's domestic political and economic situation delayed any fundamental reorientation of the country.

Throughout this period, there were competing beliefs in Ukraine concerning the effects of separating its economy from Russia. Some looked at the exploitation Ukraine had experienced under the Soviet Union and assumed that the Ukrainian

economy would thrive when freed from the Soviet Union. Others were less optimistic, focusing on the difficulty of separating Ukraine from a Soviet economy with which it was highly integrated. Experience quickly revealed that while Ukraine's economy was interdependent with those of Russia and the other post-Soviet states, that interdependence was highly asymmetric. Russia depended on Ukraine for foodstuffs, but the global agricultural market had considerable overcapacity, and others were eager to sell to Russia. In contrast, Ukraine was dependent on Russia for energy, and there were no easy alternate supplies. Ukraine had one of the most energy intensive economies in the world, and its heavy industry was built on the assumption of heavily subsidized energy. Even if alternate supplies could be found, paying market prices would make much of Ukraine's output economically uncompetitive. As a result, maintaining access to Russian energy supplies and paying for them has been a significant and consistent economic and foreign policy challenge (D'Anieri, 1999a, Chapter 4).

In contrast to most of the countries to its west, and even in contrast to Russia in the early 1990s, Ukraine rejected rapid economic change. The "national-democratic" camp, based in western Ukraine and generally viewed as "pro-Western," tended toward an economic nationalism which was somewhat skeptical of free markets and very skeptical of free trade (especially with Russia). The leftists based in eastern Ukraine opposed both the free market and free trade, as did most heavy industrialists. Thus, while there was an intense disagreement about whether the country should face eastward or westward, there was consensus on avoiding rapid privatization or other market reforms and Ukraine experienced very high inflation through 1993 and 1994 (D'Anieri et al., 1999). Much of Ukraine's economy was privatized spontaneously beyond any legal framework or coherent plan for fairness or efficiency. Those empowered and enriched by a gray-zone economy worked to preserve that situation, further stifling economic and political reform.

The lack of reform meant that while Kravchuk's policy of separating Ukraine's economy from Russia's caused severe disruption to established relationships, it did not lead to reform of the economy or to significantly closer economic ties with the West. This lack of economic reform severely undermined the declared goal of reorienting the country economically toward the West. Russian firms were far more comfortable operating in Ukraine's shadowy economy than were Western firms, who often found themselves frustrated and deprived of their investments. The Russian government raised no substantive complaints about the business climate or pace of reform. In contrast, Western governments, and the EU in particular, saw Ukraine's non-reform as a major barrier to further collaboration.

2.2. The Kuchma era

Leonid Kuchma was elected President in mid-1994 on a platform of reconnecting Ukraine with Russia. Relying heavily on support in Eastern Ukraine, he argued that separating Ukraine's economy from Russia had been needlessly destructive. As President, however, he surprised everyone by adopting a much more independent and pro-Western foreign policy than anticipated. He extended Kravchuk's policy of close interaction with NATO and the US, and adamantly rejected any form of political or economic integration with Russia or the CIS. But while Kuchma sought to align Ukraine with the West in foreign policy, he was neither willing nor able to do so in terms of domestic reform (Garnett, 1999). Neither Kuchma nor the parliament had much interest in economic reform. Nor did Kuchma pursue the political reforms, such as judicial reform or civilian control of the military, that were of primary interest in the West. Kuchma desired to join the West in geopolitical terms, but not in terms of the institutions of economic and political liberalism. However, that was not possible. European Union and NATO policy toward Eastern Europe showed that the line between domestic politics and foreign policy has been erased: only those countries that transformed themselves to resemble free market liberal democracies would be welcomed into Western institutions. For its part, the EU never gave Ukraine the incentive it gave countries to the west, the promise of a clear path to membership if such transformation were undertaken. The result was that neither Kuchma's pro-Western geopolitical inclination nor his resistance to Russia's embrace had any significant or lasting effect.

Kuchma achieved a significant victory in May 1997 when Ukraine and Russia signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership (known colloquially as the "big treaty"). The treaty was important for Ukraine because Russia finally officially recognized Ukraine's sovereignty, including sovereignty over the city of Sevastopol, home of the Black Sea Fleet. Russia was granted a lease over its base there, and was allowed to buy a substantial portion of the fleet itself. While serving Russia's needs in practical terms, it established that Ukraine had sovereignty over the territory and assets. The signing of the "big treaty" brought to a successful close Ukraine's period of formation. It closed the questions of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Ukraine's de facto independence and relationship with Russia and the West, however, remained very much in question, and the period since 1997 has seen the same issues raised over and over again.

By 1999, when Kuchma stood for reelection, his domestic political base had shifted from east to west. Kuchma won over 90 percent of the vote in western oblasts where in 1994 he had won less than 10 percent. His embrace of NATO and strong stand on independence from Russia had won him considerable support in the West. However, as long as Ukraine's domestic reform stagnated, the prospects for being accepted in Europe were limited. Western enthusiasm for Kuchma, always limited, frayed more in response to the tactics he applied in the election campaign, and turned decisively for the worse early in Kuchma's second term. His efforts to control the parliament led to a series of clearly illegal steps, and coercion of the opposition increased. The murder of the journalist Georgiy Gongadze in 2000 was, for many in the West and inside Ukraine, a clear sign that the nature of Kuchma's regime had changed; and this was confirmed when recordings made in Kuchma's office implicated him in the murder and in other misdeeds. The 2002 parliamentary elections saw further efforts on the part of Kuchma's team to restrict political competition in the country.

Ukraine continued an overtly pro-European and pro-NATO foreign policy, but tension between Ukraine's professed foreign policy priorities and the government's domestic behavior increased. Emblematic of this tension was the series of agreements negotiated between Ukraine and various Western actors, including the EU, NATO, and the US government. Each of these agreements contained specific commitments by the Ukrainian side on matters such as economic reform, military reform, and business climate. Time after time, review sessions would find that the Ukrainian side had not met its obligations. Since neither side wanted to see the relationship sour, the result was generally that new agreements were devised, with new commitments, despite little optimism by Western partners that anything substantive would result and little urgency by the Ukrainian side to produce tangible results.

Western governments were pleased when Kuchma appointed Viktor Yushchenko Prime Minister in 1999 and then frustrated when Kuchma fired him in 2001. Ukrainian officials seemed to be utterly unrealistic about what was required to actually make progress on integration, while Western officials viewed Ukraine with a mixture of incomprehension and contempt. In 2001, following the implication of Kuchma in Gongadze's death, Ukraine had to rebuff an effort led by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe to eject Ukraine from the Council (Kubicek, 2007, 8). In the US government, a few of the most anti-Russian officials pushed hard for early Ukrainian membership in NATO, further misleading Ukrainians about the real possibilities. The final straw for the US came in 2002 when, as the US was preparing to invade Iraq, it emerged that Ukraine had sold Kolchuga anti-aircraft systems to Iraq in violation of the UN arms embargo. The episode is instructive, in that it was not a fundamental clash of interests or goals that soured relations, but rather an opportunistic arms deal fostered by Ukraine's domestic corruption.

The nadir in Ukraine's relations with the West was reached when Kuchma was asked not to attend the Prague NATO summit in December 2002. He showed up anyhow, with the bizarre result that the leaders were seated according to their countries' names in French, rather than English, to prevent Kuchma from sitting next to Tony Blair of the UK and only one seat away from George Bush of the US. Instead, "Ukraine" was at the end of the row, with only "Turquie" on one side, and a safe distance from "Etats-Unis d'Amérique" and the "Royaume Uni" (New York Times, November 23, 2002). Ukraine performed penance by supplying a token contingent of forces for the occupation of Iraq, but by early 2004, the US and EU were openly hoping that Kuchma would be succeeded by the reformist and pro-Western former Prime Minister, Viktor Yushchenko.

While the Western role in fomenting the Orange revolution has been exaggerated (for the conventional view that Western governments and organizations played an important role, see McFaul, 2007), and the role of Ukraine's own fissiparous elite has been underestimated, the effect on Ukraine's foreign policy was potentially dramatic. After 13 years of missed opportunities and after the complete breakdown of relations in the final year of the Kuchma's rule, western governments and the new "Orange" government seemed primed to collaborate as partners to transform Ukraine into a Western-facing liberal democracy. Not only was the West eager to embrace the new government, widely viewed as democratic and heroic, but Russia had been discredited by its transparent and clumsy effort to influence the election's outcome.

These hopes were short-lived. Rather than presenting a clear path to membership, the EU offered a new indeterminate "Action Plan" in 2005 (Kubicek, 2007, 2). Meanwhile, the leaders of the Orange revolution immediately fell out with one another, undermining the adoption of significant reforms. Once again, Ukraine's domestic politics contradicted its professed plans to join the West. Yushchenko's fear of Tymoshenko and his desire to limit her power led him to ally with his former adversary, Viktor Yanukovych, who became Prime Minister in 2006 with Yushchenko's support. Western observers were perplexed and dismayed, and the opportunity created by the Orange Revolution was lost.

Viktor Yanukovych's election as President in 2010 was widely viewed as signaling the final defeat of the Orange revolution and the recovery of Russia's position in Ukraine. After his election, Yanukovych immediately travelled to Moscow. Domestically, Yanukovych's moves to consolidate his power shifted Ukraine to a more Russian model of politics. Internationally, his signing of an extended lease on the Sevastopol naval base indicated a willingness to placate Russia on an issue of high symbolic importance to both Russian elites and Ukrainian nationalists. Yanukovych's policy was more pro-Russian than that of any Ukrainian leader since independence. Perhaps for the first time since the 1997 "big treaty," one could question whether Ukraine would be completely independent of Russia or whether it would once again become a "little brother."

3. External sources of Ukrainian foreign policy

What are the sources of Ukrainian foreign policy? In spite of the wide range of commentary and analysis of Ukraine's foreign policy since 1991, there have been few systematic attempts to explain why Ukraine does what it does by applying data to competing hypotheses. Only in the past few years is a younger generation of scholars applying foreign policy analysis to Ukraine in a systematic way (Kravets, 2011). Part of the reason for this is that scholars have not clearly identified dependent variables that would provide a large enough number of cases to yield meaningful analysis. Part of the reason is that analysts have been more focused on commenting on the policy challenges than on analyzing the sources of policy.

This paper focuses on what one might think of as the wide part of the funnel of foreign policy causality (Rosenau, 1966). It highlights the broad factors that channel foreign policy in certain directions while making other choices less likely. It does not focus on variation at the level of decision-makers (see Kravets, 2012), but rather on the consistency of constraints which those policy makers feel. To the extent that these circumstantial constraints are tight, variation at the decision-making level will have less effect on foreign policy outcomes. The main argument in this paper is that international and domestic constraints are relatively tight and have been relatively steady over time, at least since 1997. Thus while we see considerable variation in leaders' aims, and considerable vacillation on specific policy choices, the outcomes have remained within a relatively narrow range.

Economically, politically, and militarily, Ukraine's foreign policy environment has created an apparent choice between the West and Russia. Would Ukraine choose to be reintegrated in some form with Russia, or would it become part of the new West that was expanding to include many of the post-communist states? It was clear where Ukraine was wanted more: Russia put immense pressure on Ukraine to rejoin the fold, while the West was often uninterested in Ukraine and expected Ukraine to surmount high hurdles to earn a conversation about integration. In Ukraine, however, interest was greater in the West. Even many of those in Ukraine who sought to preserve close relations with Russia were leery of Russia's intentions. Moreover, most agreed that there is more economic potential in integration with Western economies. Ukraine finds that neither of its main potential partners is willing to cooperate on terms that Ukraine can readily accept. Russia insists on limiting Ukraine's autonomy by cooperating through institutions that Russia leads, and on limiting Ukraine's relations with the West. The West insists on domestic economic and political reforms that Ukrainian governments have been unwilling or unable to implement.

3.1. *Russia's interest in Ukraine*

What does Russia want from Ukraine? Initially, completing Ukraine's denuclearization was a high priority. Beyond that, Russia has four broad goals. First, and most important, Russia seeks to prevent Ukraine from becoming an adversary. Every country seeks to avoid having hostile actors on its borders, and Russia, given its history of cataclysmic invasion, makes this an especially high priority. In practical terms, this means that Russia seeks above all to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and basing NATO troops on its soil. Second, Russia wants Ukraine and others to recognize Russia's leading role in the region, symbolically as well as practically. Also symbolically, Russia wants Ukraine to recognize a historical connection and present "kinship" between the Russian and Ukrainian peoples. Russia's "creation myth" is based in Kyiv, and the notion that Ukraine and Russia are not really two distinct nationalities is important to Russians' conception of "Russian-ness" (Pelenski, 1992). Third, Russia wants Ukraine to be a trade partner, a place to invest, and a bridge to the economies of Western Europe. Fourth, Russia seeks to prevent Ukraine from undermining Russia's authoritarian political system. Russia's support of authoritarian leaders in Ukraine has been based in part on the perception that those leaders themselves were more pro-Russian, but also on the fear that successful democracy in Ukraine will undermine the legitimacy of Russia's own system.

These goals were captured by Putin's statement in 2005 that "The greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century was the dissolution of the Soviet Union" (quoted in Glucksmann, 2008, 13). While much has been made of the "Putin Doctrine," these basic goals were shared by Yeltsin as well, and the "Russian Monroe Doctrine," outlined by Andranik Migranyan in 1992, asserted the same idea: "the entire geopolitical space of the former Soviet Union is the sphere of vital interests of the Russian Federation" (Migranyan, 1994; MacFarlane, 1998). This view of Russian foreign policy interests is widely shared among the Russian society and elite (Tsygankov, 2011, 29).

Combined with Russian power, Russian aims create significant challenges for Ukrainian foreign policy. Ukraine cannot pursue close relations with NATO without encountering strong counterpressure from Russia (as well as the pressure Russia puts on existing NATO members to keep Ukraine at a distance). Russia has been less strident regarding Ukrainian relations with the European Union. The EU is a political and economic organization, rather than a security organization; the EU lacks NATO's historic role of opposition to the Soviet Union; and the EU does not include the US. However, because Ukraine cannot join free trade agreements with both Russia and the EU, Russia has to oppose tight Ukrainian integration with the EU in practice even if does not in principle.

3.2. *Western disinterest in Ukraine*

Whereas Russia has a list of things it wants from Ukraine, and many Ukrainian leaders would prefer that Russia were less interested, the opposite is true regarding the West. Ukraine has much that it wants from the West, and has been disappointed at the West's general lack of interest. The West's most significant goal, denuclearization, was achieved in 1996. Some Western analysts, concentrated in the US and in central Europe, hope that Ukraine, by being strong and independent of Russia, will provide a check on Russian imperial ambitions and perhaps help transform Russia domestically (Brzezinski, 1994, 80). As a former US official wrote in 2002, "Ukraine's independent status and location are key to the permanent demise of the Soviet Union" (Shea, 2002, 58).

In general, however, Ukraine has been a low priority in the West. From the very beginning of the post-communist period, the European Union viewed Ukraine as one of the "Newly Independent States," not as one of the Central and East European states (which included the Baltic former members of the Soviet Union). As Solonenko points out, the eventual borders of the expanded EU after 2007 essentially match the division in categories devised 15 years earlier (Solonenko, 2009, 712). For the European Union, the post-communist period has been dominated by the questions of admitting new states, and because Ukraine has never been taken seriously as a candidate, it has been a low priority. To the extent that the EU looked beyond the prospective member states, it tended to focus heavily on its relationship with Russia.

Pro-Western Ukrainians were frustrated by the vicious circle in which Ukraine apparently found itself: without more serious reforms by Ukraine, the EU was unwilling to talk seriously about a path toward membership, but without a clear path to membership, Ukraine's elites would not make the sacrifices needed to enact the required reforms. Other potential members to the West received explicit assurances in advance, fostering the domestic consensus that drove reform forward. Ukrainian elites complained of a double standard. Pro-Western Ukrainians were also frustrated that in its relations with Russia, the EU was much less concerned with normative issues, focusing instead on the interests of EU member states,

especially as they relate to energy supplies (Solonenko, 2009, 715). Germany, in particular, has assiduously pursued good relations with Russia while opposing closer EU and NATO ties with Ukraine (Rettman, 2008).

European leaders have been much less enthusiastic about Ukraine as a possible member than about the countries to Ukraine's west. Moreover, much of Europe sees Ukraine as the source of threats from which they want to isolate themselves, including migrants, drugs, weapons, trafficked women, and organized crime in general (Aslund, 2003, 107). By making serious reform in Ukraine a prerequisite to deeper collaboration, European leaders were able to put the onus for change on Ukraine. Many European elites appear to have calculated that this would prevent them from having to offer more meaningful steps, and Ukraine has obliged by avoiding most of the reforms the EU has requested (European Commission, 2011).

The 2004 Orange Revolution opened a new window of opportunity for Ukraine. While Europe was eager to help Yushchenko, his focus on defeating Yuliya Tymoshenko rather than on advancing reform caused enthusiasm to flag quickly. Viktor Yanukovych's election as President in 2010 was widely viewed as signaling the failure of the Orange revolution and the recovery of Russia's position in Ukraine. It appears that the EU's expansion is coming to an end, and that the window of opportunity has closed with Ukraine on the outside.

4. Internal regional divisions and Ukrainian foreign policy

Ukraine's contested national identity, about which much has been written, has proven a major obstacle to arriving at the kind of unified foreign policy that Ukraine's external circumstances seem to require (Wilson, 1997; Kuzio, 1998). To simplify, Ukrainians are divided about whether their country is (or should try to be) essentially "European" or "Eurasian," or whether Ukraine's identity is inherently mixed. To a large extent, this identity cleavage overlaps a number of related cleavages — of historical experience, language, ethnicity, and region. Ultimately, regional differences seem to be the fundamental driver of these cleavages (Barrington, 1997). To a lesser extent, the identity cleavage correlates with preferences for Ukraine's political and economic system. The Russophone eastern Ukrainians who tend to favor close relations with Russia also tend to prefer a more statist economy and have been more supportive of authoritarian government. However, the view that western Ukraine is more oriented to the free market and less corrupt is exaggerated: western nationalists have supported statist policies internally and protection externally, and there is no evidence that corruption is lower in western Ukraine than in the east.

The most significant effect of Ukraine's regional division on foreign policy is that there has been no consensus on what the aims of foreign policy are. There is no shared vision of what Ukraine's place in the world *ought* to be. The problem is not just that domestic divisions undermine unity, but that Ukraine's foreign policy is viewed as being a fundamental component of national identity. Ukrainians debate whether the country is more closely tied to Russia or the West, and foreign policy will, in many respects answer the question (Shulman, 2002). Foreign policy is therefore contested as an issue of identity, Ukraine's least tractable political cleavage.

These national identity differences have had very concrete consequences for Ukraine's foreign policy, and in particular on relations with the European Union. Ukrainians have lamented that Ukraine was not offered a clear path to EU membership, a path that in other post-communist countries to have catalyzed the political consensus needed to make difficult domestic changes (Kubicek, 2003; Solonenko, 2009). At the same time, however, Ukraine has never demonstrated the depth and breadth of commitment to joining Europe and adopting European values shown by the states to its west that successfully joined the EU. The earliest "new" members, Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary, as well as the Baltic states, made it clear to everyone what their goals were, and what sacrifices they were willing to make. Equally telling is the case of Slovakia, where the government of Vladimir Mečiar, which looked quite similar to that of Ukraine, was voted out in large part, because Slovaks understood that a different domestic path was essential to keeping the path to Europe open (Krause, 2003, 69). In Ukraine, this kind of commitment is shared by only a portion of the population and of the political elite. Similarly, public opinion polling in Ukraine has consistently showed that only a minority of Ukrainians support NATO membership (New York Times, June 16, 2008), meaning that a move toward membership would have to be enacted by the leadership over the objection of most Ukrainians.

At the same time, only a small minority in Ukraine supports moving the country decisively into Russia's orbit (Kuzio, 1998). The eastern Ukrainian Russophone population does not support a reintegration with Russia or surrender of Ukraine's independence as much as it opposes a decisive break with Russia that would disrupt important economic and cultural ties. To the extent that close ties with the West have been associated with a decisive turn away from Russia, there has been little support in eastern Ukraine. Most Ukrainians would prefer a situation in which Ukraine has strong ties with both the West and Russia, but it is not clear how compatible those goals are, or whether Ukrainians are willing to make the sacrifices needed to achieve either goal. In sum, Ukraine's "muddle way" (Arel, 1998) represents a democratic compromise in that there is no more decisive policy that would command the support of a majority of Ukrainians.

5. The weak Ukrainian state

A distinct force for immobility in Ukrainian foreign policy has been the weakness of the Ukrainian state (D'Anieri, 1999a, Chapter 8; D'Anieri, 1999b). This weakness results partly from national identity differences, which have made it much harder to elect a national government with a strong domestic mandate of any sort. But it is more broadly a function of a weak state that is unable to implement any sort of serious policy initiative. Ukraine's state has varied in its degree of authoritarianism and its orientation to the West or to Russia, but it has consistently been unable to adopt or implement decisive strategies needed

to pursue important domestic or foreign policy strategies. Two issues illustrate this: Ukraine's dependence on Russian energy and its efforts to implement agreements made with NATO and the EU.

Ukraine's dependence on Russian sources of energy has been a major problem both for its domestic economy and for its foreign policy. Economically, Ukraine's energy intensive economy was devastated by the removal of the subsidies that characterized the Soviet system. In foreign policy, Russia's use of positive and negative incentives, from continued subsidies to sudden embargoes at the height of winter, have severely constrained Ukraine's foreign policy (these issues are dealt with at some length in [D'Anieri, 1999a](#) and [Balmaceda, 2008](#)). To minimize its vulnerability, Ukraine would need to introduce significant market reforms in the energy sector. The existing system of non-transparent monopolies and subsidies has yielded major inefficiencies. Moreover, the central role of state and quasi-state actors in the market means that the Ukrainian government remains a key player. This facilitates Russia's ability to use energy as a lever to coerce the government on a whole range of issues.

Various reforms have been proposed over the years, but the system remains highly opaque. There are clear political reasons for this. First, any reforms that meant higher prices to households would be immensely unpopular, even if they increased overall efficiency and transparency. Second, and probably more important, the existing system yields huge opportunities for rent-seeking. Illicit revenues in the Ukrainian energy sector have been estimated in the billions of dollars per year. Therefore, rather than try to change the system, the dominant political motivation has been to gain control of the system and the rents it generates. Considerable scholarly attention has been focused on the "resource curse," in which states with resource riches undermine democracy, in part by providing strong motivation for "state capture" ([Fish, 2005](#), Chap. 5; [Collier, 2007](#), Chap. 3; [Smith, 2004](#)). Ukraine is not a significant energy producer, but it is Europe's largest energy transit country. Thus, after Viktor Yushchenko became President of Ukraine in 2004, his administration seemed as focused on capturing control of important economic assets as it did on reforming the economy or strengthening governmental transparency. Yushchenko's team engaged in many of the same kind of non-market based energy arrangements with Russia that had enriched previous leaders. His erstwhile partner, Prime Minister Yuliya Tymoshenko, was one of his competitors in the struggle to control the energy business.

The result is that the inefficiency of Ukraine's markets and dependence on Russian energy have endured. Ukraine remains highly vulnerable to Russian pressure on energy in three ways. First, and most obviously, the national interest could be directly undermined if Russia cuts supplies. Second, and related, political leaders could see their popularity and electoral prospects undermined by Russian decisions related to energy, providing a more selfish incentive to meet Russian demands. Russian supply cuts in 2009 were viewed by many as a reminder to politicians and voters alike that Russia had significant influence over Ukraine's energy market, and that Ukrainians should support pro-Russian politicians. Finally, and less obviously, many Ukrainian elites have powerful personal financial incentives to see the trade with Russia unchanged. To the extent that the system is creating millionaires and billionaires among Ukrainian leaders, Russia in effect has a massive ability to bribe or extort the Ukrainian leadership.

If Ukrainian leaders have strong incentives to maintain energy relationships with Russia that undermine Ukraine's economy and autonomy, they have had different incentives to maintain practices that hamper deeper integration with Western institutions. The practices that Western institutions object to have important economic and political benefits to Ukrainian leaders and businesses, and there is powerful incentive to maintain the status quo.

In the case of NATO, a series of agreements was signed beginning in 1994, in which Ukraine committed to a range of military reforms, including expanding civilian control of the military. Even the most symbolic change, appointing a civilian Minister of Defense, took some time to implement, but deeper reforms, including improving transparency in procurement, developing a non-commissioned officer corps, and moving toward a professional military, stalled. Those changes that took on entrenched interests in Ukraine — and especially those which influenced economic arrangements — were least likely to be implemented.

The same pattern has emerged in relations with the European Union. In May 2011, the European Union released a major assessment of its New Neighborhood Policy with evaluations of each partner country's progress. The report on Ukraine identified several areas of progress but pointed to many important areas in which progress was deemed insufficient: "Economic reforms did not extend to all areas.... Ukraine has experienced a deterioration of respect for fundamental freedoms.... A comprehensive reform of the judiciary and fight against corruption remain key challenges.... It is important to ensure that the process of Constitutional reform is transparent and inclusive" ([European Commission, 2011](#), 3).

One interpretation is that the Ukrainian state, represented by those at the top of the government who signed the agreements, was unable to prevail politically over the entrenched interests that opposed reform. A different interpretation is that the Ukrainian leaders had no interest in overturning existing arrangements that not only helped them retain and exercise power, but allowed them to collect a share of the rents generated by various activities. The result is the same: the predominance of private interests over those of the state severely constrained Ukraine from achieving goals that were widely pronounced and viewed by external analysts as important national goals.

Ukraine's domestic political and economic dynamics have curtailed its relations with Russia as well as with the West. When Leonid Kuchma was elected President in 1994, and again when Viktor Yanukovych was elected in 2010, there were widespread expectations of a rapid move toward economic integration. Kuchma steadfastly rejected any institutionalized free trade agreement or integration. Yanukovych, while making several important concessions to the Russian (most notably on the Black Sea Fleet), has so far rebuffed Russia's plans to bring Ukraine into the "single economic space" that includes Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine. Yanukovych sought a solution that would allow deeper integration with Russia without precluding an

association agreement with the EU (RFE/RL, 2011). Just as reform on Western terms required changing domestic arrangements that provided significant rent-seeking opportunities, a free trade agreement with Russia would create winners and losers within Ukraine. The general belief is that such an agreement would empower Russian oligarchs at the expense of their Ukrainian counterparts. Moreover, since unfree trade creates many opportunities for smuggling and corruption, a variety of actors have the incentive to oppose free trade. Overall, in the domestic politics of free trade in Ukraine, protectionist forces have predominated (Pavliuk, 2001, 67). Free trade advocates are more likely to promote free trade with the European Union than with Russia, since there is likely greater opportunity in the West (Financial Times, September 21, 2007). Companies controlled by Rinat Akhmetov, Ukraine's wealthiest oligarch, have been especially active in acquisitions in the EU. Akhmetov and others like him probably have fewer opportunities in Russia, where political factors and corruption would prevent them from making the kind of deals they could potentially make in Europe. Thus far, however, a pro-EU lobby strong enough to push domestic reform has not emerged in Ukraine.

6. International and domestic weakness combined

Ukraine is weak both internationally and domestically. Internationally, it is weaker than its main interlocutors, Russia, the EU, and the US (Kapitonenko, 2010, 435). Domestically, the state is heavily penetrated, if not completely captured, by special interests. It would appear that this dual weakness would lead to a completely ineffective foreign policy, and perhaps to complete domination from the outside. Yet that has not happened, for two reasons. First, both domestically and internationally, the forces to which Ukraine is subject push it in different directions, and tend to offset one another. Second, paradoxically, Ukraine's weak state provides some inadvertent but effective resistance against external domination.

Because Ukraine's external partners have goals that are almost directly contradictory to one another, Ukraine has been able to resist pressure from any of them. To the extent that Ukraine has a coherent strategy of occupying a middle place between Europe and Russia, the so-called "multi-vector" policy, this strategy is successful. Neither Russia nor the West can pressure Ukraine too hard on any particular issue, because both sides understand that Ukraine has other potential options for international support. The importance of this tension was evident in the early post-Soviet years, when the US and Russia were in basic agreement on Ukraine policy, focusing on denuclearization and willing to use economic coercion to get it. When both Russia and the US pushed in the same direction, Ukraine found itself compelled to comply. In 2012, it seems unlikely that Russia, the EU, and the US will join forces on Ukraine in the foreseeable future.

Domestically, Ukraine's national identity politics and regional division also create a tug-of-war that has induced stability in its foreign policy. Both "pro-Russian" and "pro-Western" forces have feared that their opponents' electoral triumphs would lead to a fundamental reordering of foreign policies, but the offending policies have been much more symbolic than real. Despite his rhetoric, Viktor Yushchenko did not move the country decisively toward the West, pursuing arrangements in the energy sector similar to those of his predecessor. Despite running in 1994 on a pro-Russian platform, Leonid Kuchma did not move the country decisively toward Russia, and despite running in 1999 on a pro-NATO platform, he did not move the country decisively westward. Viktor Yanukovych has caused immense fear that he would move the country toward Russia and would overcome domestic opposition through authoritarian measures. So far, however, while he is much less openly hostile to Russia than his predecessor, he has also defended Ukraine's autonomy on issues such as the proposed free trade area. As long as elections matter in Ukraine, there will be powerful domestic as well as international incentives to hew to a middle course.

Paradoxically, Ukraine's weak state creates another means of resisting external pressure. In order for Ukraine as a whole to be effectively coerced, the government needs to submit to external pressure, and then it needs to bring the country along with it. In Ukraine's case, this second step has rarely been possible. Only agreements that do not require the state to reform itself or to change societal behavior can be implemented. Thus various energy agreements with Russia, and economic/political agreements with the EU, NATO, and the US, have been meaningless in practice.

Put differently, Ukraine's state weakness provides a strength in international bargaining. As Robert Putnam pointed out in his research on international negotiations, in "two-level games," the constraints created by domestic politics can be used as a source of power in international negotiations, because they increase the credibility of one's refusal to make further concessions (Putnam, 1988). It is not clear that Ukrainian leaders have been able to use this "power" consistently in negotiations, but Ukraine has frequently been unable to implement its more significant commitments to both the West and Russia, meaning that its biggest concessions are often watered down. Russia has been frustrated with the siphoning of gas intended for Western Europe from pipelines transiting Ukraine, while Ukrainian officials either deny the siphoning is taking place or profess to have no control over it. When Leonid Kravchuk agreed to major concessions to Russia at the Massandra summit in 1993, the parliament quickly undid them.

For Ukraine, however, this power of passive resistance cannot be very reassuring. It is useful for only one thing: maintaining the status quo. Since the status quo does not, in general, favor Ukraine and is likely to deteriorate over time, state weakness does not provide a viable foreign or domestic strategy. It does, however, help explain why Ukraine is somewhat less easily coerced than its weak international position would imply.

7. Prospects for the future

The problem for Ukraine is that its passivity leaves it at the mercy of other actors. Russia has continuously been able to create problems for Ukraine by coercing it in various ways. Similarly, Western countries have been able to deny Ukraine much

of the access and legitimacy it seeks. Ukraine's foreign policy immobility leaves it incapable of developing, let alone implementing, a strategy that would actually improve its situation. If circumstances change in a way that requires a decisive response, Ukraine will likely fail to provide one.

What might change this situation? Ukraine's foreign policy stability is based on balance between Russia and the West, balance between eastern and western Ukraine, and balance among Ukraine's political forces. The erosion of any of these balances could undermine Ukraine's position. Ukraine's east–west division seems least likely of the three to change significantly. Ukraine's regional differences are deeply rooted in history, and contemporary politics appears to be reinforcing them. Moreover, because the regional difference is a societal difference, it is much less subject to government policy. The salience of this factor, however, is based in part on Ukraine remaining at least partly democratic, although even in authoritarian societies, governments feel constrained by public opinion.

The balance among Ukraine's political forces is much more subject to change. In Ukrainian politics, power tends to concentrate rather than disperse. In other words, politicians and economic actors often tend to "bandwagon" — joining with those in power to gain spoils or to avoid punishment rather than "balancing" — opposing those in power in order to prevent them from permanently dominating the system. Since Viktor Yanukovich's election as President in early 2010, the tendency toward concentration of power has been pronounced, most visibly in the defection of various opposition politicians to Yanukovich's side to provide the majority needed to control parliament. In this situation, Yanukovich was able to extend Russia's lease on the Sevastopol naval base, which would likely have been impossible in previous years.

There have, however, been some instances in which Ukrainian elites have moved to balance against a leader that was becoming exceedingly powerful. The leak of tapes implicating Leonid Kuchma in the murder of the journalist Georgiy Gongadze prevented Kuchma from enacting the provisions of a referendum that extended his powers in 2000 (D'Anieri, 2007, 93–94). Elite support for the 2004 Orange Revolution was likely based in part on the fear that Yanukovich and the Donbas clan he led were becoming too powerful. As of mid-2011, however, there are few signs that anyone in Ukraine has both the power and will to oppose a further consolidation of Yanukovich's power (Lange, 2010).

An unbalancing of the international forces to which Ukraine is subject is also possible. The overall distribution of power between Russia, the EU, and the US is unlikely to change drastically. However, the interest that the three sides devote to Ukraine is subject to considerable change. To the extent that some EU members seek to cultivate closer ties with Russia, especially regarding energy markets, they might be willing to sacrifice their support for Ukraine.

The larger threat for Ukraine is that the EU and US lose interest, leaving Ukraine with no viable counterforce to Russian coercion. The term "Ukraine fatigue" has been used in the West for several years (Kuzio, 2003, 12; Wilson, 2007), and other concerns continue to draw Western attention away from Ukraine. In the US, the long-term shift of attention toward terrorism as an issue and toward Asia as a region has reduced attention on Ukraine. Economic and budgetary woes further erode US attention on international affairs and capacity to shape change. Europe is grappling with both domestic and Union-level economic crises. For Russia, in contrast, Ukraine has been and continues to be a high priority, and this appears very unlikely to change.

8. Conclusion

Ukrainian foreign policy has exhibited a great deal of continuity, despite the fact that few inside or outside the country are satisfied with the status quo. This apparent paradox points to the role of structural constraints in limiting the options available to policy makers. Ukraine experiences international and domestic imperatives that propel it in different directions, and the weakness of its state further contributes to foreign policy immobility. The internal balance of forces may give way to the domination of Yanukovich, and the external balance may erode due to decreasing attention from the West. At the same time, the state's weakness and Ukraine's regional division will continue to limit policy makers' ability to affect change.

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